Winston Churchill Society of Michigan

Meeting of September 26, 2014

The Winston Churchill Society of Michigan held a dinner meeting on Friday September 26, 2014. The principal speaker was David Roll partner in Steptoe & Johnson, LLC in Washington D. C. More importantly for our Churchill Society purposes he is the author of “The Hopkins Touch - Harry Hopkins and the Forging of the Alliance to Defeat Hitler.”

Dick Marsh opened the meeting with a tribute, including a standing moment of silence, to Mary Soames.

In his book Roll writes that Hopkins was the linchpin in FDR's relationships with Churchill and Stalin and spoke with an authority second only to the president's. He was his closest friend and advisor. He lived in the White House. He was a sickly man. His appearance belied his influence. Winston Churchill recounts his first meeting with Hopkins: “Thus I met Harry Hopkins, that extraordinary man, who played, and was to play, a sometime decisive part in the whole movement of the war. His was a soul that flamed out of a frail and failing body. He was a crumbling lighthouse from which there shone the beams that led great fleets to harbor.” Just before returning to the U. S. to report to President Roosevelt Hopkins famously said to Churchill: "I suppose you wish to know what I am going to say to President Roosevelt on my return.” He would, he said, be quoting a verse from the Bible "Whither thou goest, I will go and where thou lodgest I will lodge, thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." Hopkins paused then added quietly "Even to the end." Churchill wept; the American emissary’s words, wrote one of those present, ‘seemed like a rope thrown to a drowning man’.

David Roll’s book also describes Hopkins’ very interesting life, including his three marriages and background in social work. He concluded his talk by referring to Harry Hopkins gift of touch, of connecting and bonding with the leaders, Churchill and Stalin. (For more one can view David Roll talking about his book on You Tube at the Pritzker Military Museum & Library.)

Dick Marsh had viewed the recent PBS series "The Roosevelts" and he described many examples of the similarities in the careers and personalities of Theodore Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. He concluded with Alice Roosevelt Longworth's remark about her famous father: "He wanted to be the bride at every wedding; the corpse at every funeral; and the baby at every christening" adding that so did Winston Churchill.

Bob Pettengill described a recently announced “Churchill Project” at Hillsdale College. The project consists of several undertakings including an endowed faculty chair, online courses, scholarships, conferences and continuing the publication of the official biography and completing the remaining six document volumes. Sir Martin Gilbert, who is in declining health, has turned over this project to Dr. Larry Arnn, Hillsdale College president and has bequeathed his personal papers to the college. They will be archived in the Mossey Library and made available for research by students, faculty and historians. For all of this Hillsdale College has established a target endowment of $9,000,000.

There was good attendance at this meeting due to the advance billing of the speaker David Roll and his topic and also the promise of an excellent meal at Barton Hills Country Club in Ann Arbor. Dessert was chocolate mousse martini with fresh berries. We think Winston would have pronounced this as a pudding with a “theme”. Unfortunately for some and for Winston if he were here the post-prandial cigar has gone the way of the Dodo bird.

Richard Marsh, President