

DALTON CAMP: Leadership Sadly Lacking at a Critical Time

The Star Leadership sadly lacking at critical time Winston Churchill once famously said that "jaw jaw is better than war war," by which he meant it is better to exhaust the potential benefits of conciliation or negotiation before resorting to violence. Tuning in to the debate in the House of Commons on Monday (Sept 17, 2001), almost all the jaw jaw I heard was about war war. It seemed to me honourable members were more bellicose even than were their predecessors in the generation that did, in fact, go to war some 60 years ago.

The Leader of the Opposition distinguished himself, I thought, in instructing the House on the shortest route to the battlefield and providing wisdom as to the appropriate requirements for a suitable arsenal.

The Prime Minister demonstrated once more his sympathy and eternal fealty for the United States, with the slight caveat that Canada would not be hurried into the trenches without proper consultation and a decent time to review its martial assets.

This reminded me, as one who recalls the nation's call to arms in 1939, that it took almost three years after we declared war before our troops could get into it. Indeed, this protracted delay was the despair of many parlour warriors. Those who await the opportunity to cheer on the troops from their TV viewing rooms in this new war should take comfort in the knowledge that a war on the Afghans could easily last as long as or longer than the war against the Vietnamese, even if Canadians are obliged to join it.

As for the discussion itself, the relevant parties debated each other in a spirited dispute over which of them was the most ready-aye-ready to fight, or the most supportive of President George W. Bush, or the most incandescent in their outrage against the cowardly suicidal attack. It struck me that someone should have called in an army recruiter to sign up the lot of them for induction into the infantry regiment of their choice.

A singular exception to much of this dispiriting prattle was the voice of the NDP leader, Alexa McDonough, whose unique contribution was to speak for Canada and give lonely representation to the universal need to contain the resolution of this grievous episode to something short of a bloody, mindless war. Her speech displeased the militants who man the word processors at my morning paper, but, to paraphrase Falstaff, he jests who never heard a shot fired in anger.

Indeed, out of all this death and devastation, after the smoke has cleared, we should look closely at the chinless face of the new "economic world order," the face of modern free enterprise capitalism. Consider, for example, the twin jewels of the new order - privatization and deregulation. It is inarguably proven that these two scourges of the public interest destroyed the airline industry through an ethos of greed and a fixed, reckless disregard for public safety.

In its lust for profit, the airline industry sacrificed human comfort, human health and human life. Neither its pilots, passengers or the general public mattered a damn; the only interest to the airline industry was in profits for its shareholders and its executives. It hired cheap, risked high and pocketed the difference. Does anyone know an editorial board, or any of their hire, who have spoken the shameful truth? The truth of this bankrupt industry that is now pleading for a \$40 billion government handout to cover its losses from the avails of avarice, greed, privatization and deregulation.

The industry was broke before disaster struck. The smoke from the World Trade Center cannot cover its incompetence. But, in the interest of the fuller truth, it should be said it only took what the politicians handed it.

One of the problems of going to war with the present lot in power is the awesome lack of leadership, knowledge and skill now so urgently needed to get the world through this crisis. It can't be done, unhappily, by delivering up the bin Ladens - "dead or alive" - because they are in inexhaustible supply, born into an ethos and culture in which martyrs are treasured far above statesmen.

If we recall the two great leaders of the Western world in the last world war - Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt - each of them was disliked and mistrusted by the political and economic establishment of wealth and privilege. But both were trusted by the common folk in both countries and both spoke as mandated voices of their people. Finally, both Churchill and Roosevelt had a sense of history and a knowledge of the wider world.

The clamorous voices of American special interests are almost as loud as the prayers - God save the stock exchange, the airlines, the oil businesses - all of whom have instant access to the Bush administration and all of whom feel richly entitled to special consideration.

In one of his early radio addresses to the American people, and on the eve of war, I recall hearing Roosevelt saying, "No one shall be allowed to pluck the feathers of the American eagle in order to feather his own nest." One listens in vain for such a voice.

The trouble with the debate in the Commons lies in its willingness to plunge Canada into a war whose cause it does not have even a rudimentary knowledge, in alliance with a government for whom it has only a desperate, uncritical need to please.

While I have no doubt President Bush now speaks for a great majority of Americans, I suspect only a precious few members of the Canadian House of Commons spoke for Canada last Monday.

"Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts."

- sign over Albert Einstein's desk at Princeton

"The constitution of Canada does not belong either to Parliament, or to the Legislatures; it belongs to the country and it is there that the citizens of the country will find the protection of the rights to which they are entitled" Supreme Court of Canada A.G. of Nova Scotia and A.G. of Canada, S.C.R. 1951 pp 32.

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