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Reprint from Volume 19 Number 23

November 15, 2007

Editorial: Bully Tactics

We've now had a couple of weeks of a dysfunctional House of Commons. Starting with the motion to adopt the Throne Speech, the minority Conservative government has made every issue a vote of confidence, and dared the combined opposition to defeat it. Mr Harper is a bully, leading a party of bullies.

The Liberal party, apparently unwilling to fight the election that would result, has chosen to oppose the actions of the government, but not to vote against it. The Bloc and the NDP have voted against the government, but without the Liberals, cannot defeat the Conservatives.

There has been much wailing and gnashing of teeth about how long this farce can continue before either the Liberals or the Conservatives lose all credibility with Canadians. The pundits are mistaken. It is parliament, and, indeed, the idea of government that loses credibility, and all four parties are to blame.

Mr Harper's Conservatives are to blame because they have chosen politics over government: politics of the most poisonous kind. Mr Dion's Liberals are to blame because they appear unwilling to engage the nation on the fundamental issue that Mr Harper's behaviour raises: the destruction of responsible government. Mr Layton's NDP is to blame because it expects to gain power without taking any responsibility for the carnage. Mr Duceppe's Bloc party is to blame because it expects to gain support in Quebec from damage to Canada.

All four parties have put their own political gains ahead of the nation. All four leaders have demonstrated incompetence and irresponsibility. All four must share the blame for the damage that is done each succeeding day to Canada's democracy.

At a time when Canada's future as a nation depends on leaders who will stand up for meaningful, intelligent, representative and effective government, we have these four.

Now is the time for the Liberals to call Mr Harper's bluff, and to vote against the government. Now is the time for an election. It matters not what the government chooses to make the issue. Because the real issue is Mr Harper's bullying of parliament. It must be stopped as soon as possible. And if either the Bloc or the NDP chooses to support the government, it will cost them dearly.

We would like to think that an election would be focused on the broad issues we face as a nation: our environment, our world responsibilities, energy policy, our social safety net, health care, education, immigration, and, inevitably, our relationship with the US. We would like to see political platforms that present voters with well thought out alternatives, clearly expressed.

Today's political campaigns emphasize 'leadership.' Leaders, some claim, are individuals who 'deliver.' But it is what is delivered that is important, not the mere exercise of apparent decisiveness.

Our political leaders are delivering politics, not government. Negative campaigns focus on fear and mutual demonization. A recent campaign mocked a rival as being 'not a leader.' More a criticism of style rather than an assessment of substance, this petty vilification revealed more about its author than about the object of his mockery.

Fear marks the final failure of leadership. The apathetic, the ignorant, and the fearful want, deserve, and will accept the leadership of bullies. The intelligent, the caring, and the confident seek the leadership of the inspired, and will recognize it whatever its style.

In a world of apathy, winning an election seems to demand hubris. But leading a nation requires humility. It is a rare and privileged nation that will elect humility; a rare leader who will eschew hubris for the good of the nation. ✍

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'This article was published (November 15, 2007) in 'Gulf Islands, Island Tides'. 'Island Tides' is an independent, regional newspaper distributing 15,000-20,000 copies in the Southern Strait of Georgia from Tsawwassen to Victoria, BC.'

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