

Alleged Lack of Government Leadership

oppose the government in those decisions. The trouble is that we do not know what to support, because they make no decisions. That is the burden of the letter which the minister of national defence sent to the Prime Minister when he resigned. He said, "The time has come. The 'planes are with the squadrons; the missiles are on the stations. Now is the time to decide whether or not you are going to carry out your obligations". Therefore we have said that the time has come when Canada, committed to these obligations, should honour her word until those obligations are changed—and that is not going to be such an easy job now.

Mr. Speaker, one result of indecision and contradiction in this field of national defence has been to baffle not only our own people but our friends, especially our friends in the United States, with whom this government made these arrangements for the integration of our continental defence; not the previous government.

Mr. Green: Oh, yes, you did.

Mr. Pearson: That is not true. I heard the hon. gentleman say that.

Mr. Green: Oh, yes, you did.

Mr. Pearson: That is not true. It was this government which made the NORAD arrangement. Let this government either follow through on that arrangement or change it.

Mr. Green: Mr. Speaker, could I ask the Leader of the Opposition a question? Does he deny that his government had all the arrangements made for NORAD before it went out of office?

Mr. Pearson: I absolutely and categorically deny it, and I defy the hon. gentleman to prove otherwise.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

An hon. Member: Is there any other question?

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, it perhaps has no immediate relevance to my argument, but I should like to point out to the hon. gentleman, who has interrupted me twice, that this matter of an integrated continental air defence arose before the election of 1957. The records will show this. It was submitted to the defence committee of the previous cabinet before the election, and the prime minister of that day, who was a man of both responsibility and decision, said, "This is far too important a matter, even if we wished to accept these recommendations, to discuss before an election. We will not even consider them until after the election".

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

[Mr. Pearson.]

Mr. Pearson: The minister of national defence made the recommendations. The government did not even consider them. Then after the election—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pearson: There was no consideration given to this matter. Let not the record be falsified by this kind of intervention. Then, Mr. Speaker, after the election there was a cabinet meeting in July, 1957, when this very important joint arrangement was accepted with a minimum of discussion by the present government and it has been in effect ever since. That is the fact and that is the record. If the government wishes to improve its relations with the United States in these matters, let the government tell our friends across the border what they are going to do and what they are not going to do.

Of course, everybody knows—and this has been repeated by hon. members from all parts of the house—it is the first responsibility of a Canadian government to protect the interests of Canada. That is what they are chosen for. Governments used to be able to protect the interests of Canada without continuously quarrelling with our friends. The present government seems to have a genius for getting into trouble with our friends, our best friends.

Now, Mr. Speaker, perhaps we could ask the government whether they intend to manufacture an issue for an election out of the unfortunate and most regrettable faux pas made in Washington, a move for which the secretary of state of the United States apologized, while he claimed that the facts he stated were right. He has invited the government of Canada, if any of the facts were wrong, to correct the facts. Perhaps we will be told in this debate whether any of the facts have been corrected. The indecision of this government, its refusal to make the decisions required for defence, and then seeking spurious excuses to justify its bungling, are responsible for a lot of the trouble the government gets itself into in its relations with other countries. I beg the government on this occasion not to make a political football out of this particular, unhappy incident, and I beg the Prime Minister to remember his own words of September 7, 1957, at Dartmouth college, Hanover, when he said:

The whole measure of warm friendship which has long existed between the United States and Canada, and the parallel interest of the two countries, enables us to speak to each other with a measure of forthrightness which is permitted to very few countries in the world.

This is the Prime Minister:

The candour with which we can communicate with each other strengthens our understanding of