

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**

[English]

**ABORIGINAL RIGHTS****REPRESENTATION OF METIS PEOPLE AT CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE**

**Mr. Stan Schellenberger (Wetaskiwin):** Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Justice. According to the terms of the Constitution the Prime Minister has a clear responsibility to invite representatives of the aboriginal people, the Indian, Inuit, and Metis, to the conference table to discuss area of aboriginal definition which affect them. The Metis people feel this has not been done. As a result, the Metis People from the Provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba have joined together and now represent 80 per cent of the Metis people. They want the right to represent the Metis people at the Conference table.

Is the Minister prepared to deal with the difficulty which has arisen regarding seats at the conference and the problems which result from the injunction application being filed in the courts this afternoon which, if successful, could stop the conference from being held? Will he deal with this matter before that happens in order that the conference can start in a mood of harmony?

**Hon. Mark MacGuigan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada):** Madam Speaker, I am somewhat limited in what I can say on this matter because it is in court today and I will have to be very careful in my comments. However, I think I can tell the House what is already to some extent generally appreciated, that at the first of the preliminary conferences which I chaired, where provincial Ministers met with aboriginal leaders—

**Mr. Nielsen:** And the leader of the Territories.

**Mr. MacGuigan:** Yes, and the leaders of the Territories were also present as my hon. friend suggests. The native Council of Canada allowed the western Metis representatives to hold one of their two seats. It was, I think, everyone's understanding at that point that that arrangement would continue. On the eve of the second such conference which I chaired, the NCC changed its point of view and excluded the various Metis representatives from the table. This precipitated a crisis which began at that conference itself.

Our role, Madam Speaker, is primarily that of mediator between the various groups involved. We have been trying to use our good offices in that role to facilitate some form of agreement.

**ROLE OF GOVERNMENT**

**Mr. Stan Schellenberger (Wetaskiwin):** Madam Speaker, the problem we see, as a result, is that the federal Government is becoming a mediator instead of dealing with this problem well in advance of the last couple of weeks. Will the Minister of Justice shoulder his responsibility now, because the Government has not shouldered its responsibility in the last year, and guarantee the two seats to the Metis people? This is all they

are asking for in order to represent themselves, as declared in the Constitution. In that way we can start this conference, which is so important to these people, in harmony.

**Hon. Mark MacGuigan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada):** Madam Speaker, the way in which my hon. friend phrased the question was quite unfair, perhaps because of facts of which he is not aware. In fact some of the spokesmen for native people have been taking the position that this group of prairie Metis should not be represented at the constitutional conference. That is the reason why we have had to take on this role of mediation. It is true that the invitations to the constitutional conference next week are extended by the Prime Minister, and he acted on that responsibility some time ago when he invited representatives of the Native Council of Canada to have two representatives at the table, but on the general understanding at that time that one of those seats would be held by representatives of the prairie Metis.

That is the situation in which we now find ourselves, which we have been trying to mediate, and I can assure the House we will certainly assume the responsibilities we have in this matter.

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**ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE****HUNGER STRIKE BY PRESIDENT OF CANADIAN FARM SURVIVAL ASSOCIATION**

**Mr. G. M. Gurbin (Bruce-Grey):** Madam Speaker, my question is also for the Minister of Justice. He will be aware that the President of the Canadian Farm Survival Association has been arrested and in fact is in jail now and on a hunger strike. This is in response to the situation which occurred in southwestern Ontario which resulted in a penny auction being conducted similar to what we saw in the 1930s. The Minister will know that this situation exists as a result of farm foreclosures, increasing farm bankruptcies, and lack of Government action.

● (1420)

Does the Minister agree with the action taken by the bank and by the law in arresting this farmer? If he does agree, does he feel that the other 400 farmers involved in the penny auction should also be arrested? Would he make a commitment, with the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Agriculture, to deal with this matter so that we will not have to face the same problem in future?

**Hon. Mark MacGuigan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada):** Madam Speaker, if I understand the matter that my hon. friend is referring to, charges have been laid and are before the courts. The provincial authorities are responsible for enforcing the law, so I do not think it would be appropriate for me to make any comment on this situation at this time.