

Métis Nation

Member for Cochrane—Superior (Mr. Penner). I think all Canadians can look to the Métis heritage with pride, recognizing in it the strength and vision which characterized the mixture of Indian bloodlines with those of our early European settlers and which has continued right through to this day.

The Métis sense of identity is very strong. It contributes in a major way to the more general Canadian identity. The fact that Louis Riel was a firm believer in the merits of joining Confederation, and that he worked prodigiously to bring what became Manitoba into the union, was a source of pride for the Métis a century ago, as I am sure it continues to be right to this day. I think there can be no question of the importance of his support in giving direction and inspiration to the various documents which the delegates of the provisional Government carried to Ottawa to negotiate with Canada. Among those documents was the list of rights which, in many ways, was a forerunner of the Bill of Rights and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms with which we are so familiar today. Therefore, I sympathize with the Hon. Member for Cochrane—Superior in terms of the resolutions contained in his motion. The first resolution states that the House:

—acknowledge the significant contributions of the Métis people to the development of the West and the creation of Canada;

The third resolution states that the House:

—celebrate with the Métis their unique culture and heritage;

Let us take these two points and recognize the unique role which the Métis played in the history of Canada. In so doing we must also consider the role played by many other people in the history and development of Canada. It is true that prior to Confederation the Métis people around the Red River settlement had a unique colony. However, there were other people with them—French and English people, as well as a group of Scottish people who had come across the north Atlantic, into Hudson Bay, to Churchill and down to the Red River settlement. Thus there were many people who contributed in a very unique way to the building of the West and to the creation of the western provinces.

In that sense we must acknowledge all of these different people. Yes, the Métis had a unique role; but so did the many others who followed them. I am reminded of those who followed once the railway was in place, as well as the many other people from the Ukraine who made a unique contribution to the West. They, too, played a unique role. The riding of Kitchener which I represent has, in fact, an older role in terms of people coming to it. The Métis events about which we are talking were carried on from the 1860s through to 1885. The role about which I speak in my riding goes back to the time of the United Empire Loyalists. Some of the German people of whom I speak worked with the British in the United States. Once the revolutionary war was over, these German people came up into Ontario and into the area known as Kitchener—Waterloo. They were here 100 years prior to the events surrounding Louis Riel. Historically speaking, that is almost 200 years compared with just a little over 100 years for the others.

It is also important to recognize that although the Métis had their unique contribution to make, these German-speaking people brought to Canada many industrious people who built various industries across Canada. They contributed a unique flavour to the Kitchener—Waterloo area. There is no question of their importance to that area. I should also note that they are the third largest cultural or heritage group in Canada following the English and the French. In that sense, we should recognize their unique contribution to Canada. I can sympathize with the Hon. Member who wants us to see the unique contribution these people have made and to celebrate their culture with them. I think we should celebrate the many cultures that make up Canada. They all make up this country and the people of Canada.

● (1740)

I have great difficulty, however, with part two of the resolution which reads as follows:

2. recognize Louis David Riel as the founder of Manitoba and a father of Confederation—

To recognize Louis David Riel as the founder of Manitoba is simply to recognize what happened in history. In fact, he is the founder of Manitoba. He formed a provisional Government with the Métis people in the Red River settlement when there was no official territorial Government from Ottawa. He filled the vacuum with his provisional Government. That provisional Government then instituted order in the territory of Manitoba around the sight of present-day Winnipeg. In that sense, it is correct to recognize the role of Louis David Riel and to say that he was the founder of Manitoba.

In fact, the federal Government recognized in 1869, in the creation of Manitoba itself, the role of Louis Riel. The Province of Manitoba has recognized the unique role played by Louis David Riel with statues of him which are in place on the grounds of the Legislative Assembly. In that sense, there is no question that he was the founder of Manitoba, and that is something for which we must recognize him.

The resolution goes on to say that we should also recognize Louis David Riel as a Father of Confederation. I have some difficulty with that. First we must look at who are the Fathers of Confederation as they appear in our history books. We think of those 34 delegates who met together at three conferences beginning in Charlottetown in 1864, continuing with longer meetings in Quebec City, and finally with meetings in London, England. As a result of those meetings, the BNA Act was brought together and Canada was then formed out of the five colonies that existed prior to that time. Those are the people we traditionally accept as our Fathers of Confederation.

Mr. Hovdebo: What about Smallwood?

Mr. Reimer: An Hon. Member has asked about Smallwood. Some people have said that when Newfoundland was brought into Confederation in 1949, Joey Smallwood became the only living Father of Confederation. In a sense, we can accept him