

Métis Nation

Clause 5 stated that:

All properties, rights and privileges enjoyed by the people of the province, up to the date of entering into Confederation, be respected and that the arrangement and confirmation of all customs, usages, and privileges be left exclusively to the local legislature.

Clause 16 requested that:

The English and French languages be common in the legislature and in the courts and that all public documents as well as acts of the legislature be published in both languages.

A new Clause 7 appeared in the third draft of the list of rights carried to Ottawa by the official delegates.

[Translation]

That the schools be separated and that the school funds be divided among the various religious denominations, at the *pro rata* of their respective populations.

● (1730)

[English]

So we can see from these clauses just what a strong and enduring influence Riel, as head of the provisional Government, had on the unfolding of Canadian constitutional history. This is a matter which surely cannot be disputed. The proof lies in these documents from over a century ago.

I would now like to turn to the final point raised in the Hon. Member's motion, that is, the matter of self-government and a land base for the Métis people. Historically, Métis communities developed initially along the French fur trade routes to the Great Lakes. With the decline of the fur trade many Métis immigrated to the Red River area in Manitoba. Some went further west to Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. Of course, others remained in Quebec and the maritime provinces. This early Métis settlement pattern continues today in that the Métis population resides predominantly in our western provinces. It is also primarily in the West that Métis aspirations for self-government and a land base have developed.

The federal Government has a strong and continuing interest in the Métis people. This has been manifested in a number of ways. First, the federal Government has an interest in improving the socio-economic situation of the Métis. In fact, this concern which extends to all aboriginal peoples has been a prime motivating factor for current special initiatives from which Métis benefit. These initiatives include the Rural and Native Housing Program, the Native Economic Development Program, as well as special measures under the agricultural and rural development agreements.

Second, the federal Government has demonstrated its concern and support for the Métis as one of Canada's aboriginal peoples. I note that formal recognition of the Métis as one of Canada's aboriginal peoples came about with passage of the Constitution Act, 1982. Subsequently, representatives of Métis people, together with Indian and Inuit leaders, have been invited to participate in First Ministers' Conferences on aboriginal constitutional matters and associated multilateral

discussions with the federal, provincial and territorial Governments. The purpose of these discussions is to identify and define aboriginal rights for possible entrenchment in our Constitution.

Since the initial First Ministers' Conference on aboriginal constitutional matters, which was convened in 1983, a wide range of issues has been addressed, issues which are central to aboriginal peoples' concerns and aspirations about their rightful place in Canadian society now and in the years ahead. As Members of the House will know, the matter of self-government for Canada's aboriginal peoples, including the Métis, has been a major agenda item in the ongoing aboriginal constitutional process.

In this regard, I note that the federal Government has played an important role in addressing the Métis and other aboriginal peoples' aspirations for self-government. At the April 1985 First Ministers' Conference, the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) tabled a proposed political accord which provided for constitutional recognition of a right of aboriginal peoples to self-government, which right would be set out and come into force through agreements between Governments and aboriginal peoples. Furthermore, Governments would be committed to entering into negotiations with aboriginal communities aimed at concluding the appropriate agreements.

Unfortunately, this federal proposal did not achieve a sufficient consensus for the proposed constitutional amendment to proceed. However, self-government will clearly continue to be an important item for discussion during preparations leading up to the next First Ministers' Conference to be held before April, 1987 and the deliberations at the conference. This is why the federal Government agreed to participate in self-government negotiations which are initiated by the provinces and aboriginal associations. In this process the federal Government will continue to work with Métis, other aboriginal leaders and other Governments with a view to developing constitutional provisions for self-government that are acceptable to all Canadians. Similarly, the federal Government will continue to work with the provinces and Métis to improve their socio-economic circumstances and opportunities within Canadian society.

This is the situation in which we find ourselves with regard to the fourth point of the Hon. Member's motion. The Government is very clearly and deeply involved in the constitutional matter.

From what I have said Hon. Members will see that while I am sympathetic to many aspects of the motion, I have some concerns about other aspects, as I indicated earlier.

In concluding my remarks I would like to congratulate the Hon. Member for Cochrane—Superior (Mr. Penner) on his motion which displays a great sensitivity to the history and aspirations of the Métis people.

Mr. John Reimer (Kitchener): Mr. Speaker, I would like to add my views to those already expressed by my colleagues in regard to the motion before us in the name of the Hon.