

Senator Olson: Honourable senators, that is interesting information, but that is the worst red herring I have ever heard of. I did not ask the honourable senator about that letter—although it is interesting to have, and he can fill in all the gaps he likes. I am asking him what he intends to do about trampling the rights of one MLA, Elijah Harper, who is getting in his way.

This has nothing to do with the Métis. Mr. Harper is a man who is defending the rights of his people and he has given the very best reasons for doing so. He is supported unanimously by the Council of Chiefs of Manitoba, I believe, who are 60 or so in number. The spokesman or the head of that organization is Chief Fontaine. The question I am asking the government leader is: Why is he attempting to transfer the blame for the mess that he has created in Manitoba to them when it is his own fault? That is the question. I would ask him to try to stick to that question, and forget about the red herring.

• (1440)

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, surely it is an insult to the—

Senator Olson: Please answer the question on the subject being raised.

Senator Murray: Surely it is an insult to the tens of thousands of Métis in the province of Manitoba—

Senator Olson: No, it is not. You are not getting away with that distortion!

Senator Murray:—for an honourable senator to describe their position as a red herring. They, as Mr. Dumont has reminded Mr. Harper, have an equal stake with other Aboriginal peoples in the consequences of the action Mr. Harper is taking. Our Constitution of 1982 identifies the Métis as among the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.

Having said that, let me repeat that we are not trying to trample on anyone's rights. I have referred to the fact that Mr. Harper, a single member of the legislative assembly in Manitoba, is, through a variety of procedural devices, preventing the Meech Lake Accord and its companion resolution from being debated by his fellow members of the legislature. He is thereby preventing public hearings from being held.

Senator Olson: He is exercising his right as a member of that chamber.

Senator Flynn: He is abusing the rules!

Senator Olson: He is using the rules!

Senator Frith: Senator Flynn knows about abusing rules!

Senator Flynn: You spoke on it.

Senator Murray: He is thereby seeking to prevent the members of the legislature of Manitoba from exercising the same privilege—and it is a privilege and a right—that members of all other legislatures in this country will have had; that is, the right and the privilege to vote on a constitutional amendment that is of immense importance to the future of Canada.

[Senator Murray.]

If the honourable senator is amazed by my comments yesterday, I am amazed by the crass political opportunism with which he disports himself in this chamber.

Senator Olson: I am amazed by the Leader of the Government's apparent inability to deal with the question. He is talking about something else. When I am asking about apples I do not want an answer about oranges, if you know the difference! Senator Flynn does not know the difference, because he has not followed the rules since he came here!

I should like to ask the Leader of the Government if he and his government, particularly the Prime Minister, are aware that the Aboriginal peoples, led by the chiefs in Manitoba, are unhappy with the contents of the Meech Lake Accord because it does not deal with their rights. They have said it often enough, and it has been conveyed to the government. Why in the name of common sense did you leave it so late when you knew the rules? If Meech Lake should fail, you will attempt to transfer the blame to them. Please try to deal with the question.

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, I should like to point out to the honourable senator that section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 contains the affirmation of Aboriginal and treaty rights.

Senator Olson: We are talking about Meech Lake.

Senator Roblin: Keep quiet, until you have heard the answer!

Senator Murray: I should like to draw to the honourable senator's attention the fact that the Aboriginal peoples had to fight bitterly with a government of which he was a member to get that recognition in the Constitution Act, 1982 and, indeed, had to overcome one attempt by the honourable senator and his colleagues to drop the provision that was there and renege on a commitment they had made.

Some Hon. Senators: Nay, nay!

Senator Olson: You are not getting away with this garbage!

Senator Murray: I should also like to advise the honourable senator that in the Constitution Act, 1982 there is an interpretive clause—section 25 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms—that concerns Aboriginal and treaty rights. The reason for the Meech Lake Accord—the Quebec Round—was to complete the unfinished business of 1982, the unfinished business being to get the signature of Quebec on the Canadian Constitution.

Senator Olson: And you have made a mess of it!

Senator Murray: The honourable senator, who was a member of a government that allowed that to happen—that is, the exclusion of Quebec—

Senator Olson: No, Premier Levesque was at the table. Stick to the truth.

Senator Murray: The honourable senator should have been sensitive to the need—