

Métis Nation

as the only living Father of Confederation, but with regard to Louis Riel, I have some other difficulties.

I taught Canadian history at Forest Heights Collegiate High School in Kitchener. When teaching what Louis Riel did and what we recognize him for, I tried to let my students know first exactly what happened. Once we knew exactly what the facts were, we could then debate those facts and their significance.

There is no question that Louis Riel formed a provisional Government in 1869 and was responsible for the formation of Manitoba. However, he also did some other things. Louis Riel chose to take the law into his own hands and to execute Thomas Scott. Thomas Scott was not a model citizen. There was nothing to commend him in that way. However, there was nothing he did to deserve death. In fact, one of the representatives of Louis Riel's church begged him not to execute Scott because he did not deserve to die. Louis Riel replied that he had to execute Scott to assert his authority, and so he shot him. I have some difficulty supporting someone like that as a Father of Confederation.

There is no question that Louis Riel assisted the Métis and Indians in the 1885 uprising in the territory of Saskatchewan. He had a very positive role in that, but chose to attack the constituted authority of the day, the Northwest Mounted Police. That led to the deaths of settlers, Indians, Métis, and some soldiers. In that sense, I have great difficulty accepting someone as a Father of Confederation who attacked that very Confederation itself.

When the authorities had to deal with that situation and determine whether he was innocent or guilty of a crime, he was judged to be guilty of treason and was therefore executed. I have great difficulty saying that that is a person who should be accepted as a Father of Confederation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Prud'homme (Saint-Denis): Mr. Speaker, we often hear Hon. Members start their remarks in this way: "I had not intended to take part in this debate". In fact, I had not intended to do so. But having heard what several Hon. Members had to say, I thought that we would put the matter to a vote. We have heard one NDP Member and four PC Members. It is clear that once again, we shall not come to a vote.

There is one thing that I have seldom been able to understand, Mr. Speaker, and it is the fact that each time we have had to deal with Riel over the past 23 years, an atmosphere of mystery had suddenly set upon the House. Hon. Members are ill at ease. They do not want to speak against him, but they do not want either to recognize what Riel has really been for Canada.

[*English*]

My hon. colleague from Kitchener, who is a former teacher, said that he has some difficulty recognizing Louis Riel as a Father of Confederation or as a founder of Manitoba. The Hon. Member said that he taught his students to find out

exactly what happened and then to debate the significance of it, and that is very fair. The significance is always the same.

If today we were to reject everyone who built a country whose past was not the type my colleague would like to support, many countries would not exist. I will not mention now some countries in the Middle East, but I may at the end of my remarks.

The Hon. Member for Edmonton—Strathcona (Mr. Kilgour) spoke of the great Liberal Leader of the day who asked: "Why was Louis Riel hanged? He was hanged because he was condemned to hang". He was condemned to be hanged because he was found guilty of an action that was against the welfare of the Métis, and some people did take action against the welfare of the Métis.

Louis Riel started out very well. He started out by saying that his people were ready to build a new province. That was legal and he did it properly. However, why did he end up the way he did? Why does my colleague and many others have so much difficulty accepting Louis Riel? It is because at the very end of his life, he was hanged.

We must look at why Louis Riel was hanged. Do we not see many tragedies occurring around the world today? Everybody is talking about terrorism. How many people rise in the House of Commons or the Congress of the United States to try to go to the roots of any of the problems of today? Why would we not do the same today and try to go to the real root of the Riel question? We should not look at the very end of his life but at the beginning.

There were injustices and the Métis yelled to the good conscience of the Canadian people that they were the subject of injustices. Did enough people listen to their concerns? No. Therefore, they went from that step to another. Do we not see the same thing in the world today? People begin by expressing acceptable views, to which no one listens. Then they start throwing rocks, and no one listens. Then they start using violence, and no one listens. Then the killing starts. Perhaps I am taking a lot of time today to reflect upon what we should really do.

[*Translation*]

My colleague the Hon. Member for Jonquière says that there are several others. He is right.

● (1750)

[*English*]

My friend from Jonquière said that there were many others in British Columbia and Saskatchewan. That was also said by Mr. Smallwood. We all agree, but the subject matter we are discussing today is that of Louis Riel.

[*Translation*]

We should not try to draw a red herring. The subject matter of today's debate is Louis Riel. Over the past 20 years, Métis people have been trying to have Louis Riel's contribution recognized. In the House, it has never been possible to come to