

# METIS SOCIETY OF SASKATCHEWAN

## EDUCATIONAL STUDY

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SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN

### THE METIS PEOPLE AND THEIR PROBLEMS July 5th.1974.

Government authorities are demanding that the Metis Society of Saskatchewan has to solve its internal problems, that is to decide who is the new executive and new president. This is a strange demand in view of the fact that the membership has just decided very convincingly on a new executive. The Metis Society held its annual meeting in Prince Albert on July 2nd, which was legal and valid in every way. The membership elected a new executive in the proper constitutional way. Simply because Jim Sinclair was ousted as president should not pose a question of dilemma to the governments.

I was present at the Annual Meeting in Prince Albert and know that there were no constitutional irregularities during the meeting and election. In the first place the meeting was called by Jim Sinclair. Written notices were sent out to Metis Locals on May 14 which is in accordance to the constitution that states only "enough notice be given to each local". Adequate notice was given.

However, approximately two weeks previous to July 2nd, rumours were circulated that the annual meeting may be postponed to a later date. At no time was the annual meeting date officially cancelled. It is true that Jim Sinclair stated publicly that the meeting was postponed; the reason being that the MSS had no funds to pay the expenses of the delegates because the government was withholding the grant of \$220,000.

In the meantime, the other two members of the executive, Alex McDougall, vice-president, and Ray Hamilton, Secretary decided that the annual meeting should proceed as scheduled. According to the MSS constitution it is the Executive that makes the decision on the annual meeting. They informed as many Locals as possible by phone that the meeting was on. Most of the Metis Locals understood that the meeting was being held, were fully aware of the circumstances relating to internal problems of the MSS. They would attend at their own expense.

The procedures for calling the annual meeting and notifying the delegates adhered to the by-laws of the constitution. In fact, Jim Sinclair changed his mind, and stated publicly that the annual meeting would proceed as originally planned. Saskatoon CFQC-TV carried this newscast on June 30th. news. The camp-in on the Legislative grounds was being cancelled to attend the meeting.

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Basically, the annually meeting followed the rules of parliamentary procedure, in spite of the many serious interruptions. Registration of delegates took place in the morning, until noon. Officially, delegates from thirty-five (35) Metis Locals registered. Several other delegates arrived and attempted to register. However, these delegates were intimidated and misled by Jim Sinclair and his supporters, thus frightened off from registering as official delegates, thereby losing their voting rights. It is reliability reported by several persons that fifteen (15) Metis Locals attended the meeting, but failed to register and vote because of the fear generated by Jim Sinclair and his group. This was indeed a serious infringement upon the democratic rights of the Metis masses. This principle of tyranny which appears to be characteristic of Sinclair's rule has become intolerable as well as frightening to the Metis people of Saskatchewan.

There is no provision in the Metis Society constitution or Societies Act which states that a specific number or percentage of Locals or delegates must be present at an annual meeting in order to constitute a legal meeting. Hence, 37 Locals are quite sufficient for the purpose of holding an annual meeting. Hence, this aspect of the meeting was entirely legal. Since Sinclair and his group were determined that the meeting had to be cancelled, postponed or prevented in some way, they created considerable disorder. However, since many delegates had travelled long distances at their own expenses they were equally determined that the meeting should continue. A motion was made that the meeting should be held, and the registered delegates would vote by secret ballot on this motion.

During the voting, the ballot box was seized by a member of the Sinclair group, reportedly to be Larry LaFontaine in which he attempted to take away the ballot box, or destroy the ballots. Fortunately, the ballot box was recovered immediately without any destruction of ballots. Apparently the Sinclair crowd felt that they would lose the motion, and the meeting would continue. Therefore, they resorted to violent and criminal action in an attempt to stop the people from voting. This matter is being investigated with regard to legal action. The result of the voting was:

In Favour of Continuing the Meeting and Election

YES: 114 (These figures could be subject  
NO: 9 to minor corrections)

Following the announcement of the balloting, Jim Sinclair made a speech to the audience, claiming that the meeting was illegal. In conclusion he stated that he was withdrawing from the meeting and asked the delegates to follow him out of the meeting. In this way he hoped to create havoc, or have it result in an illegal

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meeting. Very few persons followed Sinclair out of the hall. In fact not all of his supporters followed him out. Consequently, he came back into the meeting very shortly. For the next short period, a heated discussion took place between the two factions over contentious issues and persons. Although there was considerable disregard for order, many interruptions, and much shouting, the chairman kept a basic order to the meeting, and maintained a structure and procedure throughout the entire meeting. Although at times, rowdiness prevailed, the meeting and election was entirely legal and constitutional, in terms of parliamentary procedure.

The chairman called for nominations for president of the Metis Society of Saskatchewan. I was nominated, but I declined. Ray Hamilton was nominated. The chairman called three times for further nominations and gave sufficient time for other nominations. No other persons were nominated although Jim Sinclair and his supporters were present in the hall at the time. They had every opportunity to nominate Sinclair. Ray Hamilton won the position of president by acclamation. The other three positions of the executive were filled in the same manner, through acclamation. Alex McDougall was elected Vice President; Maurice Aubichon was elected Treasurer; and Arnold Dufour was elected Secretary. With regard to Regional Directors (Councillors) a motion was passed that each of the seven Regions elect a new Director (Councillor) through a general meeting in their own region.

In every way, the Metis Society annual meeting of July 2nd at Prince Albert was legal, constitutional, democratic and responsible. It was adequately represented by legally chosen delegates from their own Locals. The voting at the meeting and the procedures utilized were conducted according to parliamentary procedures. The meeting was fully constitutional in every respect. Therefore, I fail to understand why government officials are continuing to demand that the Metis membership must first settle their internal organizational problems before the new executive will be officially recognized. No annual meeting could be more legal and final than the July 2nd. one.

I fail to understand what the government officials are questioning about the election of the new executive, or more precisely why they are questioning the election. Such refusals and denials did not arise from past annual meetings. What is different this year? If they expected indecisions and confusions resulting from the meeting, then why did they not have a representative present? I asked for a representative from the Attorney General's Department

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to attend the meeting and give his professional decision on the results. This invitation was turned down. Why is the decision of this annual meeting denied, whereas in past years everything was totally accepted and unchallenged? Are there some extenuating circumstances of a political nature involving the governments with the past executive of the Metis Society?

The internal struggle of the Metis Society is not brand new to the government authorities. Last March 22nd. I made a formal complaint to Mr. E. Tchorzweski, the Provincial Secretary explaining the irregularities and violations of the Metis Society against the Societies Act. I asked that the necessary action be taken to correct these abuses. Although I had catalogued a list of grievances and offences of Sinclair and his group against the Metis people, the Provincial Secretary made it clear that he would not interfere with Sinclair's corrupt administration. In his reply, Tchorzweski stated, "I have considered the matter, and, ...am not prepared to take any action against the Society at this time. ...Under the Act, the internal affairs and the governing of the Society are matters to be determined by the membership."

Last Friday, July 5th. the new Executive met with the Honorable Mr. MacMurchy. His position was similar. "Mr. MacMurchy reiterated his stand that it is up to the Metis Society to solve its internal problems." On July 2nd. we solved our internal political problems. As an united group of organized Metis people we elected a new Executive. But, in spite of solving our internal problems, government officials seemed determined to perpetuate these problems. Mr. MacMurchy continues to recognize Jim Sinclair as a possible President of the Metis Society. In a democratic society no further proof can be given than a secret ballot that renders a decision final and precise. In this denial, the NDP government is showing that the Metis people are being refused their political rights to administer their organization in a democratic way.

Simply because the past president and his small group of supporters continue to make an outcry because the Metis people have unanimously rejected them as leaders is surely not sufficient justification for government authorities to entertain 'has been' leaders. In reality, Mr. MacMurchy is saying to the new Executive and those people who supported them that our votes are either corrupt or irrelevant or both.

For a more complete picture of the troubles of the Metis Society it is necessary to go back a few months in order to get

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a better understanding of what has been happening among the Metis people, the Sinclair administration and the governments at Regina and Ottawa. Internal trouble started at the first Council meeting in August, 1973. The major argument took place between the two groups over decentralization. A motion was passed that the programs of the Metis Society, its programs, staff and government grants would be decentralized, Autonomous authority would now be placed in Regional and Local Metis Boards.

Jim Sinclair fought bitterly against this new plan of decentralization as it would seriously reduce his power and control over the finances. From his arguments at the meeting, it was clearly shown that Sinclair had no interest in trying to improve the lot of the rank and file native people. He went so far as to take a racist position, when he stated that "... he felt that our people were not ready."; that is, to administer their own programs and funds. He indicated clearly that he intended to rule in an absolute way, which he had done in previous years. Particularly, he kept control of the hiring and firing of the staff. Council members who opposed him were quickly 'bought-off'. That is, they were given a job by the Metis Society. This meant that Sinclair became their boss who had control over their salary, job, working conditions, and all the fringe benefits that go with 'rip-offs'. Sinclair violated the constitution by allowing unauthorized persons to attend council meetings, make decisions and vote. Of course, they were his employees, thus strong supporters of him. Sinclair used the constitution when it was to his advantage, but violated it when it obstructed his plans.

Although the motion to decentralize programs, funds and staff passed at the council meeting, Sinclair refused to allow it to be put into practice. He retained absolute power over all the employees. Each monthly council meeting became more of a farce. By December, Sinclair was running the Metis Society as a despot. Most of the staff had been hired under a system of patronage, nepotism and personal loyalty to the president. They worked in the form of "goon squad" operations. They travelled as groups to meetings that Sinclair attended. They took part in such meetings, so as to disrupt them. Employees who would not actively support and campaign for Sinclair were fired when finances ran low in March. Quite naturally, these ex-employees worked actively against Jim Sinclair, and helped to get Ray Hamilton elected as president on July 2nd. They were more alarmed about the Hitlerism that was developing in the Metis Society of Sask. than in personal revenge against Sinclair.

At the Council meeting in December I presented to the council members the information about the misspending of government funds by Jim Sinclair and Jim Durocher, the treasurer. This included

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the holiday to Mexico, the down payment on his house and the purchase of a \$20,000 mobile unit for Sinclair's private use. In addition, Jim Durocher had spent \$1716.00 for private flying lessons from government funds. However, the council members quickly attacked me for raising the issue of misuse of public funds. They supported Sinclair in his irregularities of handling funds. That was the first threat made on my life.

The internal struggle broke into public view when Metis people staged a sit-in at the Metis Society offices in Regina on December 4, and 5th. against Jim Sinclair, his administration and the misspending of government grants. I attended the sit-in. Those present agreed that criminal charges should be laid against Sinclair. The major reason being that such misuse of funds gave specific evidence of an offence that was easily determined. The Regina City Police and the Prosecutor were given a statement of the facts. It was at this time that the representative of the Secretary of State, Stan Shanks stated it was official policy that the Federal Government gave these grants of money to the Metis Society and that Mr. Sinclair had the right to spend the money in any way that he wished, which included holidays to Mexico and purchases of houses.

As a result of the Metis Society office sit-in, Sinclair and his supporters <sup>attempted</sup> to counter the publicity and its effects by sitting-in at the Legislative Buildings. This was the first of the wave of sit-ins staged by Metis Society workers throughout the province. These sit-ins never had popular support from the local people. It was always the same professional 'sitters' from the Metis Society. Their high salaries and extravagant expenses were always paid for in such activity. It was obvious that the most of the media exaggerated these protests against the NDP government. It served their Liberal cause. In much the same way the Waffle used the Metis Society; including having three of their members (whites) on the payroll of the Metis Society.

Before the government suspended funds to the MSS, Sinclair used buses and planes to bring supporters to the protests. These were not the social and economic issues concerning the Metis masses. On genuine civil rights issues, the Metis Society opposed their own people. In the discrimination issue at the Baldwin Hotel, the Metis Society workers fought against the rank and file native people who took their struggle to the streets. In fact, certain Metis Society officials collaborated with the Baldwin management.

Over the last few months, the Metis Society staff has become more offensive and brutal among their own people. This was shown clearly at an area meeting in North Battleford where most of the Locals of the West Central area attended. Sinclair and his workers

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attended this meeting although it had nothing to do with many of them. They harassed the Metis people by vulgar speeches, shouting, insulting individuals, haggling over trivialities and intimidation. At the end of a three hour session, the Metis people voted unanimously to expell Sinclair and his group, particularly Clarence Trotchie and his gang from Saskatoon. There was no doubt that the Metis people totally rejected Jim Sinclair, and that they supported the proposals our group advanced.

After six months of struggle with Sinclair's Metis Society, the Liberal Government at Ottawa, the NDP Government at Regina and the judicial system of Saskatchewan there still remains many unanswered questions. In fact, there seems to be some mysterious interlocking scheme that has vested interest in perpetuating Sinclair's oppressive rule. In the sense of dividing the native people of Sask. disorganizing them, retarding political awarenesss and silencing the masses of natives, Sinclair is effective. In the meantime the Trudeau and Blakney Governments look good, publicly by granting masses of money to the Metis people with no strings attached. This is the view that reaches the whites.

On December 4th. 1973 I wired Mr. H. Faulkner, Secretary of State who grants much of the money to the Metis Society about the serious misuse of funds by the president. The next day, I wrote to him. I was told that Mr. Faulkner called to his Ottawa office within a few days, Jim Sinclair, Jim Durocher, the treasurer, and Stan Shank the Secretary of State representative. Yet, I did not receive even an acknowledgement of letter until two months later. It is obvious where Mr. Faulkner places his priorities in relation to the Metis people of Saskatchewan. Likewise, Mr. Ted Bowerman was informed by myself and other dissatisfied Metis people of the irregularities of the MSS on many occassions. Yet, he did almost nothing to correct the situation. The Provincial Secretary was almost willing to protect Sinclair and his administration. The Masses of Metis people continued to ask why, over and over.

They were enraged about the misspending of government funds that were given in their names, but never benefitted them. The injustice of such 'criminality' was obvious and painful to them. The police, judicial system and government authorities have no hesitation about filling the jails with Metis people for minor traffic and liquor offences. The total amount of money that is spent on welfare for all the Metis people of Saskatchewan is relatively small compared to the \$3½ millions that pours into the coffers of the MSS offices.

Government Departments which grant funds to the Metis Society provides guidelines as to how that money is to be spent. These guidelines state very specifically how the money is to be budgetted.

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Guidelines are given at the beginning of each program. Yet, on Dec. 4th at the MSS sit-in, Stan Shank stated that the Secretary of State grants money to the Metis Society and Jim Sinclair is free to spend the money in whatever way he wishes. However, his boss, Mr. Faulkner stated in a letter to me that "...if the board (Metis Society) spent monies in areas disallowed under the department guidelines, the board could then be held collectively responsible for misuse of funds." Such contradictions within the same department. Both had political implications. On Dec. 4th, it was possible that Jim Sinclair may have faced a criminal charge if Stan Shank had not convinced the Prosecutor that Sinclair was allowed to spend the money any way he wished. On the other hand, Mr. Faulkner's statement helped to confuse the decision about what could be considered legal or illegal in terms of the misuse of government funds by Jim Sinclair.

Again Mr. Faulkner attempted to smooth-over the whole mess by explaining that he was going to have the financial books of the Metis Society audited which would show whether there had been any misuse of government funds. Six months later, Mr. Faulkner sent out auditors to examine the books and records. From my lengthy discussion with these auditors, they were primarily concerned with being able to justify the complaints about Sinclair's misspending that had become public knowledge. It seemed to me that their efforts were less of auditing and more of justifying Sinclair's expenditures being proper, or at the worst 'doubtful' expenditures. In any case, they would be able to prove that there was inadequate information to show that misuse of government of funds. I was assured that there would be an audited statement of the MSS's financial books available in the third week of June. The past treasurer of the MSS did not seem to have a copy of an audited statement for the Metis people at the annual meeting on July 2nd. In any case, he did not present one.

The judicial system's record in this case is even less impressive. After seven months of investigation and waiting, I phoned the Prosecutor and asked if a decision had been reached on the Metis Society case. He informed me that it was difficult to arrive at a decision in this case as there were wide political implications involved, and persons other than himself were involved in the final decision. The political implications were of the capital P; meaning party politics. I have a great deal of respect for this man's integrity and I am convinced he was speaking honestly. It is very understandable that this case would have serious political implications. How is it possible to circumvent politics in such a case? And what is so frightening that politics should be involved? At what point does it cease to be political and begin to be legal?

At the same time the Prosecutor stated that it was difficult to determine whether the actions were criminal or not because of the poor bookkeeping system. He stated that "...at no time



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was there accurate documentation of expenses." Further to this, he adds, "It would seem evident from the many months of sloppy practice that he had a right to have such expenses paid." In a discussion with the assistant from the Attorney General's office, he likewise claimed that there has been a serious lack by the Metis Society in keeping accounts and records of the government grants. He stated that there is a serious lack of accountability of the money the Metis Society receives. In fact, so serious that it makes it almost impossible to tell when the money has been spent properly or when it has been spent improperly.

At the same time that the judicial authorities are claiming that loose and inadequate bookkeeping by the Metis Society office is the reason that it is impossible to determine or prove criminal charges in the misspending of government grants the several government departments are claiming that the bookkeeping and auditing is entirely satisfactory. The various Federal Government Departments, namely Secretary of State, Health and Welfare, and CMHC have assured me in written statements as well as personal accounts from their Departments that the spending of the funds and the bookkeeping of its expenditures are efficient and in accordance to government standards and regulations. Likewise, the provincial government departments, DNS and HRDA have accepted the MSS' bookkeeping as entirely satisfactory. Hence, there is a serious contradiction between what the judicial authorities are saying and what the government authorities are claiming. They can not both be right.

Or could it be true that there are serious political implications surrounding this case which involves the vested interests of certain political parties or certain politicians at top ranking level? Obviously there are many questions that remain unanswered. One can only speculate as to the reasons for imposing such political hardships on the Metis people of Saskatchewan. Circumstances seem to point to the fact that the Metis Society situation is beyond a simple internal quarrel of an organization. Is it a problem of Aboriginal Rights claims within the government system? Has it become necessary for the advanced capitalist state to have an integrated civil war among its racially oppressed? In 1870 and 1885 the Metis people were made the scapegoats of a civil war between two ruling class forces. Surely they are not being prepared for such similar fate! It is time that the government authorities, politicians and judicial officials stopped playing games with the Metis people, and dealt with us honestly.

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