

Opinion

The deception and duplicity in denying Ontario Métis



Bill C-53, under the purview of Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Gary Anandasangaree, is about recognizing the internal self-government of the Métis Nation of Ontario related to our citizenship, elections, financial management, and child and family services, writes Margaret Froh. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Ontario Métis communities do not need the blessing of the current leadership of the Manitoba Métis Federation to exist anymore than the Cree in Alberta need the blessing of the Cree in Quebec to exist and govern themselves.

Margaret Froh

Opinion



An op-ed recently printed on these pages suggested Parliamentarians should ignore the facts of history, Canada's Constitution, and the conclusions of the Supreme Court of Canada regarding the existence of Métis communities in Ontario. Such ill-informed, false, and demeaning statements that Ontario Métis are "pretendians" or fraudsters necessitate a response.

Some conveniently ignore the reality that the first—and only—Supreme Court of Canada decision that confirmed the existence of a rights-bearing Métis community anywhere in Canada comes from Ontario. In 2003, a unani-

mous Supreme Court unequivocally held in *R. v. Powley*: "[m]embers of the Métis community in and around Sault Ste. Marie have an aboriginal right to hunt for food under s. 35."

The Sault Ste. Marie Métis community is located in north-central Ontario, 1,400 km from the Red River. The narrative that all Métis come from the Red River was rejected by the Supreme Court, which unanimously held: "given the vast territory of what is now Canada, we should not be surprised to find that different groups of Métis exhibit their own distinctive traits and traditions." Ontario Métis communities do not need the blessing of the current leadership of the Manitoba Métis Federation to exist anymore than the Cree in Alberta need the blessing of the Cree in Quebec to exist and govern themselves.

The Sault Ste. Marie Métis community was also not magically dropped from the sky, and it is not the only Métis community in all of Ontario. It was—and is—connected to other regional Métis communities located in northern Ontario or surrounding the Upper Great Lakes. More than 130 First Nation communities have been recognized in Ontario, yet seven Métis communities that have more than two centuries of history are brushed off as "pretendians."

Throughout the decade-long journey of *R. v. Powley* through the courts, no one alleged—as is being done today through drive-by statements—that Ontario Métis communities were "fake" or "pretendians." Based on the overwhelming evidence that was before the courts, no one could

make any such outrageous claim. However, in the age of social media, self-proclaimed "experts" attempt to hold themselves and their reports out as credible. They are not.

And it's worth noting that no one objected to the conclusions of the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples that further confirmed Ontario Métis communities existed. Ontario Métis were a part of the Métis Nation Accord in 1992, and were at the table in 1982 when Métis were included in Canada's Constitution. In 2015, the Ontario legislature unanimously passed the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) Secretariat Act, which recognizes the MNO's unique self-government. To suggest that Ontario Métis are now "self-indigenizing" is simply ridiculous and offensive.

In *R. v. Powley*, the Supreme Court directed governments to begin to negotiate with Métis communities, not just litigate against us. For two decades, *R. v. Powley* has been the legal precedent relied upon to establish and negotiate Métis rights in the prairies as well as the Northwest Territories. It is also the precedent relied upon to deny the existence of Métis rights in Quebec, the Maritimes, and other regions of Canada.

It is deceptive to claim Ontario has recognized "new" Métis communities. They are not new communities. They petitioned or took collective action when historic treaties were being negotiated with First Nations in the 1800s, but Métis were excluded. Just because Métis were historically ignored then does not make these communities less worthy of recognition today.

It is dangerous to mislead Parliamentarians and willfully ignore the conclusions and directions of the Supreme Court of Canada. Just as Parliamentarians can't choose to ignore the Supreme Court's recognition of First Nations and their treaty rights, they cannot ignore court decisions that recognize Métis rights. The rule of law doesn't work that way.

Bill C-53 does not address or adopt Ontario's recognition of various rights-bearing Métis communities. Instead, Bill C-53 is about recognizing the internal self-government of the MNO related to our citizenship, elections, financial management, and child and family services.

Bill C-53 is needed to finally address the historic injustice of the exclusion of our communities from recognition. If our communities were simply recognized when they asserted themselves—which they have continued to do over two centuries—no one would be claiming these are "new" or "fake" communities today. It is ironic that those who deride colonization do not understand its unique effects on the Métis.

Finally, Ontario Métis communities do not derive their harvesting rights, their right to be consulted, or their special relationship to the land from Bill C-53. These rights already exist independently from this legislation, and they aren't going anywhere. Bill C-53 simply recognizes what currently exists; namely, that the MNO is already a Métis government for its citizens. It is recognition long overdue.

Margaret Froh is the president of the Métis Nation of Ontario. *The Hill Times*

Comment

Time for Canadian soldiers to be untangled from foreign quagmires

Canada should cut its losses and end Operation Impact in Iraq ASAP, along with bringing home military trainers in Niger.

Scott Taylor

Inside Defence



OTTAWA—There were two news stories out last week which served as a reminder that Canada still has combat soldiers deployed to two global hotspots that rarely get mentioned in the media, namely Niger and Iraq.

On Jan. 3, the *Ottawa Citizen* headline read "Canadian Special Forces to remain in Niger, but details about role are unclear." Most Canadians can be forgiven if they were unaware that Canada has been deploying military training teams to Niger for more than a decade.

Questions should have been raised when the Niger military staged a coup last July to oust that country's democratically elected president.

The Niger officers who plotted that coup had been trained by American and Canadian military trainers, and had participated in the United States-led annual Flintlock exercises.

It took the U.S. State Department until October before it officially deemed the events in Niger to be a coup. Under U.S. law, such official recognition brings with it restrictions on the provision of military aid and training to that nation.

Canada did not concede until mid-December that what it continued to refer to as an "attempted coup" was in fact a successful "coup."

Given the timelines, the question begs just what exactly these Canadian soldiers have

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