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## MP's Riel letter draws backlash from Metis

Mia Rabson, Winnipeg Free Press: Friday, February 19, 2010

Local News 

Louis Riel seen here in a handout photo. The dispute is arising just days after Manitobans celebrated the man who is considered by many to be the province's founding father with a relatively new February holiday named after him.

**Photo Credit:** Dominion Institute, Handout

OTTAWA — An Alberta MP's vilification of Louis Riel has led to discord with some of his Conservative colleagues, as two Manitoba MPs said Friday that Peter Goldring wasn't speaking for them or their party when he condemned the controversial Metis leader in a December newsletter.

The dispute is arising just days after Manitobans celebrated the man who is considered by many to be the province's founding father with a relatively new February holiday named after him.

Goldring, the MP for Edmonton-East, penned a four-page missive on Riel in December.

The newsletter says Riel was a "villain who caused 80 to die" and called attempts to exonerate him akin to condoning anarchy.

"Riel clearly chose to lead; he also clearly chose to incite uprisings that caused many to die," wrote Goldring. "As the leader of these uprisings, Riel is responsible for each and every death occurring as a consequence of his actions."

The newsletter appears to be a reaction to a private member's bill introduced in November by Winnipeg New Democrat MP Pat Martin to exonerate Riel and erect a monument to him on Parliament Hill.

The newsletter recently came to light and has drawn a backlash.

Manitoba Conservative MPs Shelly Glover and Rod Bruinooge, both Metis, said that while Goldring is entitled to his opinion, they don't agree with him nor does their party.

Bruinooge said he told Goldring the newsletter was "not very helpful to the Metis people."

"I feel Louis Riel was very horribly treated," said Bruinooge. "I don't see his hanging as an example of good justice."

Glover said she spoke to Goldring on Thursday night to find out not only why he'd pen such a piece, but why he didn't give her and other Manitoba Tory MPs a heads-up.

"Let's just say we agree to disagree on the facts of history," Glover said.

"It's very unfortunate he doesn't understand the true accomplishments of Louis Riel."

Riel was at the helm of two resistance movements against the government of Canada, the Red River Rebellion of 1869-70 and North-West Rebellion of 1885.

He negotiated the terms under which Manitoba would eventually enter Confederation. His role in the North-West Rebellion led to his arrest and execution.

Glover said the Conservative party stands behind her in regards to Riel's place in Canadian history, and that Goldring's views are his alone.

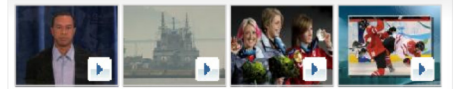
"We absolutely refute his claim Louis Riel was a villain," she said.

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"This not a Conservative Party statement. This is someone who was speaking only as an individual."

The Prime Minister's Office backed up Glover and Bruinooge.

"This document is absolutely not, in any way, an initiative of our government or our party," said PMO spokesman Dimitri Soudas in an e-mailed statement.

"This is a personal initiative of MP Goldring which we strongly disapprove of. Louis Riel is a historical and controversial figure. But he played an important role in the development of Canada and in the protection of the rights and culture of the Metis and francophones in Canada."

Goldring didn't respond to a request for an interview Friday. The newsletter is no longer available on his website.

The Liberals called on the Conservative party Friday to apologize to Canada's Metis Nation for "attacking their heritage through a smear campaign against the legacy of Metis leader and Manitoba founder Louis Riel."

Manitoba Metis Federation President David Chartrand wrote to Harper on Feb. 9 to complain about Goldring's writings. Chartrand said he hasn't yet heard back from Harper directly but he feels certain from hearing Glover's words, the Conservatives are not standing by Goldring.

"We're in a new era for the Metis people," said Chartrand.

Opposition politicians also demanded an apology from Goldring for the newsletter.

Martin called Goldring "reckless and irresponsible."

But Martin's bill isn't sitting well with Chartrand, Glover or Bruinooge.

Glover said she doesn't like some of the language in the bill. Chartrand and Bruinooge said pardoning Riel isn't the way to ensure his role in Canadian and Manitoba history is properly acknowledged.

Bruinooge said if Metis leaders don't agree on how to deal with Riel's conviction, Martin should stay out of it.

"I don't think a non-Metis politician has any business getting into this," said Bruinooge.

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