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Don't want to hear Canadian guns on a solemn day

It used to amaze me how Native leadership was so easily taken in by government agendas, dollars, and even the language that is part and parcel of the party, the times, and the issues of the day.

From Trudeau's "participatory democracy" to today's use of "reconciliation and healing," one would think, the way our leadership tosses them around, that we had come up with those terms. One almost wants to scream: "For heaven's sake, can't you come up with something original?!"

Every single Native leader, regardless of the creativity and dreams that they have come to leadership with, has been caught in that government web. Of course they sometimes make noises that almost convince us that they are different, but in the end it is just the same old malarkey over and over again. If we are to be truly politically independent, then we must be independent of government money.

By that I mean political organizations such as the Métis National Council, the AFN, and their provincial affiliates should be financed by their membership, not by governments. That way they would be politically independent and, just as important, they would have to be accountable to their people.

They should also mind their own business and leave the running of the programs and institutions to the people who know what they are doing. After all, that is why we send our children to university, isn't it?

An example of what can happen when leaders don't mind their own business is the near destruction out of First Nations University. A more recent example is Back to Batoche Days and this year's theme of "reconciliation and healing," which is what my rant is about.

This year is the 125th anniversary of the Battle of Batoche, a very important year for Metis people in our country, and so Back to Batoche Days is something we all especially looked forward to. Imagine the surprise when many of us opened the Saskatoon StarPhoenix last week and read Robert Doucette's interview regarding this important event, in which he is quoted by the reporter as saying that "the festival wants representatives from all sides of the battle including descendants from the Winnipeg Rifles, Midland battalion, the North West Mounted Police, Boulton's Scouts and Metis soldiers that fought in the battle...The North West resistance is a significant event for all Canadians and celebrating its significance annually is not meant to divide Canadians but is a national celebration to bring them closer together."

Well, excuse me, but I thought our annual pilgrimage to Batoche each July is to honor and commemorate our fallen warriors, both Métis and Treaty. If we are to celebrate at all, it should be to celebrate our survival as invisible people living at the margins of our country. And this year –of all years – why would we want to celebrate

with Middleton's descendents, the loss of our lands, the death of our people, the hanging of our leader, and the exile of our warriors?

Reconciliation, a term appropriated by our government from South Africa to make us think that they are creating change, means to go back to the way it was – at least that is my understanding of the word (that is the dictionary definition but it means more than that in usage...it does mean two sides coming together to resolve a past difference or dispute; and they do it with good intent. This isn't reconciliation in that usage because we're the only ones at the table...the Province and Canada aren't reconciling with us and wouldn't feel there was anything to reconcile about other than to say, "so we're good now, right?" Reconciliation takes discussion, agreement, accommodation...we're not doing that).

Well, that is pretty darn scary. Go back to what? Are we going to pretend that all was wonderful before 1885? That the Manitoba resistance of 1870 didn't happen? That our relationship with the Canadian government was peaceful and honorable? Somebody had rocks in their head!

When governments in the past several years have commemorated those who fell during World War I and World War II, they did not invite former enemies. Inviting descendants of Middleton's men is like inviting General Sherman's family to Atlanta to commemorate the burning of the city during the American Civil War. Southerners would never do something like that and no would expect them to.

And about reconciliation, well, usually other parties have to think that something needs to be dealt with, and, realistically, non-Native Canadians just don't really care about Batoche, even if they know what it is about. It's just not on their radar.

The only people who would want this supposed reconciliation to happen are those white folks who want to appropriate Dumont or Riel or the Metis into their "cause"... "Look, you're oppressed just like me."

It seems to me that a reminder is needed for those leaders who endorse this kind of celebration and reconciliation. You were elected to get land, not to spend our few pitiful dollars making friends with Middleton's men.

I for one do not want to share this special year with the descendants of the men who killed my great-grandfathers and forced their descendants onto the road allowances.

That does not mean I am full of hate, bitterness or anger. It only means that I would like to honor and remember them at the gravesite on a quiet afternoon, with the sound of that beautiful wild wind, the growling of the distant thunders, and the smell of sage and sweetgrass in the air.

I do not want to hear bugles, marching feet, or the firing of Canadian guns on a day when I remember and honor my dead.