was a pretty "rough trade," that MPs weren't paid, and that elections were "violent and expensive." Martin clearly admires Macdonald, but he also speculates that a breaking scandal involving a government contract to build a Kingston dry dock led to a series of fatal strokes in 1891. The charges were fantastic: a fictional businessman had "won" the contract for a corrupt contractor who predictably ran into a series of cost overruns that were billed back to the Department of Public Works. The whole thing stank and Macdonald knew it. He also knew that he couldn't survive politically. In a sense, he was lucky he died when he did because "there could be no come back for Old Tomorrow this time."

Martin's *homo politicus* is a more believable Macdonald than Creighton's *homo laurentianus*. Maybe Martin's Macdonald is a usable Macdonald after all, the Macdonald we need for a more cynical era when cozy relationships between politicians and businessmen are the norm, not the exception. Take my province, for example. Ignoring the advice of its civil service, the New Brunswick government flushed $70 million down the blow hole to prop up a collapsing business with Liberal connections, and yet not one member of the cabinet felt compelled to resign when faced with a damning auditor general's report. Martin's Macdonald reminds us that it has been always thus.

A TIME FOR REFLECTION, TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

BOB RAE was elected eleven times to the House of Commons and the Ontario legislature between 1978 and 2013. He was Ontario's 21st Premier from 1990 to 1995, and served as interim leader of the Liberal Party of Canada from 2011 to 2013.

He is working now as a lawyer, negotiator, mediator, and arbitrator, with a particular focus on first nations, aboriginal, and governance issues. He also teaches at the University of Toronto School of Governance and Public Policy, and is a widely respected writer and commentator.

An author of four books and many studies and reports, Bob Rae is a Privy Councillor, an Officer of the Order of Canada, a member of the Order of Ontario, and has numerous awards and honorary degrees from institutions in Canada and around the world.

The conundrum with any figure, contemporary or from our past, is to get past the stereotype, past the mystery, past the spin, and past the tendency to try to sum up in one or two words, this elusive thing we call character. With the celebration of Sir John A. Macdonald's 200th birthday, the commentary is full of both hagiography and diatribe. He deserves neither.

He was a man of his time, a man of unusual political gifts, and yet a man of weaknesses and limitations. He did not fully transcend the prejudices of his time, and at important times he personified them. He was an indispensable Father of Confederation. He turned a fragmented political party into the dominant political force in Canada for over fifty years. He survived scandal and defeat to stage a comeback that made him the preeminent political figure of the last quarter of the 19th century. He wielded power with a combination of charm and toughness, and took his vision of a country united from sea to sea and put it into action.

And yet the political skills that Macdonald possessed, and the powerful vision that allowed him to inspire so many, did not mean that he could transcend his

political base. Two issues, the hanging of Riel, and his active participation in the marginalization of the aboriginal peoples of Canada, exacerbated hatreds that were already deep, and perpetuated a legacy of division that is still with us today.

It is wrong for our historical memory to lose sight of either truth. We should not excuse his conduct, because there were those who took a different position, and pointed to another way. The argument that Macdonald "had no choice", or that he was simply reflecting the politics and mores of his time, is too simplistic. He had choices, and he more than any political figure gave full expression to the values of his generation. He shaped opinion as much as he was in turn shaped by it.

When the young lawyer from Kingston surveyed the political scene after the debacle of the Rebellion of 1837 and Lord Durham's visit and report, he would have seen the conservative forces in his own provinces in danger of retreating to the politics of reaction pure and simple. Macdonald did not have a high regard for the world of Reform, but he understood that Conservatism had to avoid the temptation of a frontal assault on the principle of parliamentary accountability. He was not a democrat, but he could read the public mood and the temper of the times.

Similarly, Macdonald's exposure to the politics of the United Canada created by Lord Durham quickly taught him that a respect between French and English had to become the hallmark of Canadian politics. He realized that the partnership created between Baldwin and Lafontaine had to find its counterpart in his own party, and while his base was firmly entrenched in Ontario, he knew he needed to go even further to create a winning majority.

He knew that partisanship was the key to his electoral success, but at the critical juncture in the country's life he also understood the limits of simply sticking to party and faction. While more than a tip of the hat has to go to George Brown, Macdonald swallowed deeply but knew that forming the Grand Coalition was an essential step in the creation of a wider federation.

All practitioners and observers of political life see the life force behind Macdonald's survival and return from political defeat and deep embarrassment. A lesser mortal would have slunk off the political stage feeling humiliated by the exposure of the infamous "send another ten thousand" telegram at the centre of the Pacific Scandal. But not Macdonald. His endurance was based on his resilience, and by his commitment to his own career and the success of his party. He knew defeat, but he knew there was nothing permanent in it. Politics was his vocation, his craft, and his calling. He felt it deeply, and so did his peers in assessing his practice of the art.

In one of Canada's most famous speeches, Sir Wilfrid Laurier summed up Macdonald's life in his House of Commons eulogy. He was, said Laurier (who could hardly be called a slouch in this department) a man who loved power, who knew how to attain it, and how to keep it. His charm and grace were coupled to a deeper sense of public purpose, and he applied his skills with a tenacity and resilience that made him, above all, the greatest political leader of his time.

And yet there are these two major flaws, the decision to hang Riel and to persist in an Indian policy that produced long-term, disastrous results. Macdonald could certainly have resisted the first decision, and there were many in his inner circle who urged him to do so. On the second, there were warnings of the consequences of a narrow vision on the triumph of the white majority, but again Macdonald chose to ignore them because he felt he had a winning hand, and did not fundamentally disagree with those who argued that the best aboriginal policy was to plan for the disappearance of a people's culture that had no prospect of survival in the modern world. The only way to make sure the children did not become savages was to remove them from a savage environment. Hence the residential schools. The only way to ensure stability and harmony in the population of the Prairies was to negotiate Treaties that would increase the jurisdiction of the Crown. The best way forward for a people doomed to inferiority was to create reserves and make-believe governments and trust in the full impact of industrialization to complete the job of extinction.

Using this language might seem harsh, but in reality these are words that Macdonald would have used himself and would also have heard around him. Alexander Morris, an Indian Commssioner and Treaty negotiator, warned his contemporaries that the interpretations being put on the Treaties were too narrow, and were being used in the wrong way. He was sidelined, and replaced by successors more compliant in understanding the real political will of the majority.

Was there another way? There was, but its voices and advocates in the non-aboriginal community were few and far between. Macdonald regarded them as moralistic and tiresome, and chose to ignore them.

The best that can be said is that Macdonald had, to borrow a phrase, a nation of willing accomplices in this journey to disaster for First Nations. He was not alone, and he was not the sole instigator.

Cromwell famously told his portrait artist to paint him "warts and all." We should do the same with Sir John A. He was a triumphant party politician who became, in the judgment of his peers and of most historians, a true statesman. But he had his faults and limitations, and it does not serve us well to ignore them, to minimize them, or to excuse them. Rather we should be using this moment of reflection to reflect on both the source of his greatness, and the consequences of the choices of his government and its successors. That is what truth and reconciliation is really all about.