

Louis Riel

• (1020)

People have forgotten that Riel and his people were publicly commended for their patriotic actions by Adams G. Archibald, Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba and the Northwest Territories.

[*Translation*]

After negotiating Manitoba's entry into Confederation, Riel was elected three times to the House of Commons. This was pointed out earlier by the minister, but I think it is worth repeating that Riel was elected three times as member of this House.

In 1884, as you will know, the Métis people asked Riel to form a provisional government that would claim and renegotiate the rights they thought they had obtained from the Parliament of Canada in preceding years. Unfortunately those rights existed only on paper. The Canadian government at the time, and I say this without rancour, ignored the crisis involving Métis and aboriginal people in the Northwest Territories. And, as you know, the Canadian government sent troops to crush the rebellion.

Interestingly Riel gave himself up to the authorities. Later, when they decided what to do with him, he was accused of treason.

According to many experts, Riel was falsely charged, convicted and executed for high treason on November 16, 1885 by the Canadian government. Riel paid with his life for the fact that he headed a political movement that struggled to maintain the rights and freedoms of the Métis people.

[*English*]

This House should also know that the Constitution Act of 1982 recognizes and affirms the existing aboriginal treaty rights of the Métis people. Clearly I think we would agree that this would not have been done unless there had been some historic reality for the recognition.

Since the death of Louis Riel, the Métis people have honoured his memory on a regular basis. They have attempted in every possible way to bring about the implementation of those previously agreed rights.

[*Translation*]

I am pleased to support the conclusion of this resolution:

(1) That this House recognize the unique and historic role of Louis Riel as a founder of Manitoba and his contribution in the development of Confederation; and

(2) That this House support by its actions the true attainment, both in principle and practice, of the constitutional rights of the Métis people.

[*English*]

Having served as a member of the Special Joint Committee on a Renewed Canada, there is some concern right now by the Métis people as to how we can respond to their legitimate concerns and rights. This is a great opportunity to do exactly that.

Acceptance of this resolution would be an invaluable contribution made by us to realize and concretize that the Métis people and Louis Riel had made immense contribution to this country.

Let me terminate very quickly by adding the following. This House of Commons in this period, most of us would agree, of constitutional and political instability is a great opportunity to correct the historical record, to acknowledge the contribution of Louis Riel and his people to Canada, to recognize Louis Riel not only as the founder of Manitoba but clearly, if he was a founder of Manitoba and Manitoba is part of Canada, as a Father of Confederation.

There have been precedents where people have been falsely accused and where we have been able to go back and correct those wrongs. In a sense, we are doing that today.

If Louis Riel's trial were taking place today, if he and his people were to be judged by his peers and by our leading historians, Louis Riel would in all probability not be judged guilty as he was over 100 years ago.

[*Translation*]

In the spirit of justice, and at a time of great instability in this country, I urge the House to take one more step: Let us recognize Louis Riel, not only as the founder of the province of Manitoba but also as one of the Fathers of Confederation.

[*English*]

It is time to redress the injury to Louis Riel's name and to his people. I would say that all this House needs to do is to take one more step forward.

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, as a member from western Canada and a representative of a large