

*Louis Riel*

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (St. Boniface):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and a privilege to rise in the House today to speak before an audience that in addition to a large number of members of our three main political parties also includes leaders of the Métis people and a number of their representatives.

I appreciate this resolution by the government. I feel the government has taken a major step forward, but although it is a very important step, I would like to see the government take one more step, be it more modest. Let me explain.

[*English*]

The government has identified a number of important points related to Louis Riel's contribution to Canada, and I am pleased with that. I simply want to add a bit, perhaps build upon the statement that has already been provided.

We have the opportunity as a Parliament to recognize the historic role of Louis Riel as a founder of Manitoba. I am delighted that we are in the process of doing that.

[*Translation*]

It is an honour for me particularly, as the member for the federal electoral district of St. Boniface. As you know, Louis Riel's family home is in my riding. The parish of St. Vital where he had some very close ties is in the same riding. He was buried in St. Boniface, near the cathedral, and the Red River, which is part of my riding, was a major meeting place for the Métis people.

Although Canadians know their country well, I am afraid that they do not know it well enough. They do not know enough about the story of Louis Riel and the Métis people.

The minister mentioned earlier that Métis leaders in the Red River colony in the Northwest Territories and Rupert's Land had taken appropriate democratic action

to protect their traditional rights and their property. People tend to forget this is what motivated Riel to act.

In 1869, Louis Riel drew up a list of rights protecting all settlers living in the Northwest Territories. We should remember that at the time the population was about 12,000. There were about 6,000 French speaking Métis, 4,000 English speaking Métis, and 2,000 other Canadians, although they had yet to become a part of Canada. These people were a major presence in that province.

We must not forget that the transfer of land, this huge land grant, was conditional on the list of rights being accepted by the Parliament of Canada. And it was accepted. In fact, as a direct result of the approval of the list of rights in 1870, the Parliament of Canada passed the Manitoba Act.

[*English*]

As a result, all lands draining into the Hudson Bay were transferred to Canada on July 15, 1870. As well, the lands contained in the northwestern territories, which now form the major part of Canada, were added. That is a massive addition to our country.

I want to recognize as well that Manitoba was the first western province to join Confederation.

We must remember as well a very unique contribution is the fact that this list of rights that was provided by Louis Riel not only for his people but for all peoples in that area at that time came well over 100 years before our own Charter of Rights and Freedoms. There are many, many similarities between both documents.

[*Translation*]

The name Manitoba was submitted by Riel and selected by the Parliament of Canada as the name of the new province. The name Manitoba is a native expression which means "the spirit who speaks". Many informed sources have affirmed that Louis Riel is a founder of Manitoba.

[*English*]

I want to recognize as well that in 1871, during the American Fenian threat, Louis Riel organized the Métis people to protect the border of Canada against this invasion that could have changed the whole course of Canadian history. This is often forgotten.