

*Louis Riel*

• (1010)

I rise today to introduce a motion to recognize the role of a Canadian who made a major contribution to the development of Canada as we know it. In this process the Parliament of Canada can take an important step toward recognizing the major role played by the Canadian Métis people historically and today and help them generate pride in their history, in their heroes, and in their country.

I will not attempt to review Louis Riel's entire life and career. That would take much longer than the time available here. It is unnecessary in view of the fact that more has been written about Riel than possibly any other Canadian figure. I do wish, however, to take this opportunity to express my admiration for his devotion to the interests of the Métis people of Canada.

*[Translation]*

The courage, determination and ingenuity he showed as a young man in leading the Red River community through a troubled time in its history and in resolving a very difficult situation are indeed remarkable. I think it is safe to say that for Riel, returning to the Red River Settlement after several years' absence during which he pursued his studies in Montreal, the thought of becoming involved in a heated political debate was indeed far from his mind.

What he found upon returning, however, was a community which was deeply worried about its future as part of the new Dominion of Canada. The Métis people, who formed the majority in the Red River community, looked to him for leadership, as someone who was articulate, educated, bilingual and knowledgeable in the ways of the country which was preparing to annex their territory.

Louis Riel, this young man barely into his twenties, answered the call for help. He worked closely with the members of the community and with them succeeded in defining and articulating their concerns and objectives. Showing a remarkable respect for democratic procedures, he actively sought to achieve broad consensus for these objectives by organizing public meetings to discuss the demands they would submit to the Canadian government. Riel's success in uniting most of the Red River Settlement behind these initiatives was a major achieve-

ment. His failure to win unanimous support was simply a reflection of the deep divisions that existed in the community at that time.

*[English]*

In the end, Riel's accomplishments in what historians call the Red River resistance were numerous and they were significant. He had an important role in ensuring that Manitoba entered Confederation with provincial status instead of as part of the Northwest Territories, and that religious and language guarantees were incorporated in the Manitoba Act.

The issuing of land grants for Métis to respond to Métis concerns about the need for land for themselves and for future generations was also a part of the legacy of Louis Riel.

Fifteen years later, Riel was again involved in a movement to defend the interests of the Métis people along the banks of the Saskatchewan River. Sadly these events ended in tragedy and controversy. But who could fail to be struck by Riel's deep devotion to his people and his willingness to pay the ultimate price of his life to help his people.

It is now time to recognize the very important and constructive role Louis Riel played in defending the interests of the Métis people and of contributing to the political development of the west and of Canada.

For years Louis Riel's life and death reminded Canadians of the divisions which exist in our society. Recollections of the events with which Louis Riel was involved brought to the surface tensions between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians, between francophones and anglophones, and between western Canadians and central Canadians.

However we must now build on the positive, not the negative dimensions of this experience. The long overdue recognition by this House of Louis Riel's important role in shaping Canada as we know it today is an indication that we have matured as a nation. It is a demonstration that we see in our common history a source of strength, not of weakness.

As one Canadian, one western Canadian, I am proud to have a role in providing an opportunity for that recognition to take place in this House of Commons.