

### *Métis Nation*

In central Canada, FRENCH CANADIAN NATIONALISM was strengthened and Honoré Mercier came to power in Quebec in 1886.

History does seem to belong to those who win the battles. Fortunately, we in the West are becoming more understanding. Let me refer to a book entitled *Strange Empire* written by Joseph Kinsey Howard in 1951. This book treats Riel, the Métis and the Prairies with enormous empathy. The preface of the book states:

This is the first book in English that describes the origin of the Métis, that unique people of mixed white and red blood, and there is only one work in French that describes it. It is the first book that traces in any detail the development of the great annual buffalo hunt which was the centre of Métis life or that deals more than perfunctorily with the fascinating lore of the Red River cart.

By the way, Mr. Speaker, in the days that Red River carts were used on the Prairies, they could be heard from a distance of two miles. The preface continues:

And it is the first book that has ever told for American readers the story of the two Métis rebellions that were so dramatic a menace to Canadian union and lighted such a strange hope of American expansion in Canadian territory.

To my knowledge, this book, written in 1951, is the first book that described Louis Riel fairly. Ironically, it was written by an American from Montana.

I suggest that every Canadian should read *The Opening of the Canadian West* by Douglas Hill. It essentially describes Louis Riel as a hero rather than a criminal. Finally, I would like to refer to a book entitled *Manitoba: A History* written by William Morton. He is one of the best known historians in Canada in the 20th Century, and is certainly the best known and best loved historian in the Province of Manitoba. I want to quote the following passage from page 138 of *Manitoba: A History* on Riel.

—he was destroyed by the very force which had raised him to power, the military organization of the Métis. His frantic, often admirable, efforts amid the menace of the Canadian risings, the intrigues of the Americans, the divisions and instability of his own people, to shift the basis of power from the military organization to the civil authority of a provisional government had ended in unmitigated tragedy.

The shooting of Scott was a blunder, so much a blunder that it is difficult to believe a man of Riel's quality could have committed it except under the compulsion of the guards' exasperation and the threat of an Indian rising fomented by Schultz.

I believe Schultz is one of the scoundrels in this story, although my colleague from Brandon—Souris points out that he later became Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba. Morton continues:

It was, unhappily, worse than a blunder—it was unnecessary. The Provisional Government had been accepted and peace was returning to Red River. Schultz was actually in flight and the Indians were quiet.

He goes on to state:

For Riel thereafter there was to be no peace in the Northwest he loved, no peace anywhere but the forlorn peace of exile and the final peace of the gibbet at Regina.

I believe my colleague, the Hon. Member for Brandon—Souris (Mr. Clark), who is an historian, will agree that all people from Manitoba and the Prairies know that Louis Riel is the first genuine hero of our region.

I want to cite a passage on Louis Riel that appears in *Canadian Quotations* by Robert Hamilton. Edward Blake, the Leader of the Liberal Party of the day, stated it better than anyone, I believe. I agree with him fully. He stated:

Had there been no neglect there would have been no rebellion. If no rebellion, then no arrest. If no arrest, then no trial. If no trial, then no condemnation. If no condemnation, then no execution. They therefore who are responsible for the first are responsible for every link in that fatal chain.

If all of us knew more about Louis Riel, I think all of us would know about a great man who was all too briefly with us.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Jonquière):** Mr. Speaker, I am glad the Hon. Member for Cochrane—Superior (Mr. Penner) presented his motion, because it gives us an opportunity to recall a particularly important page in the history of Canada. There is no doubt that Louis Riel had an enormous impact on the development of this country, and the motion before the House deals implicitly and explicitly with the role he played in the birth of our Canadian nation.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, I imagine all Canadians will agree that the Métis have made a vital contribution towards opening up the West and the creation of our country. If we go back to the origins of this people in Canada, we have to go back to the first French-Canadian and English-Canadian settlements and the Indians who were living on the same land. In fact, the paternal ancestors of the Métis were French sailors who came to Canada in 1534 with Jacques Cartier and, a century later, with Champlain. We also find the two great trading companies upon their arrival in the North-West of what is now known as Canada, and I am referring to the Hudson's Bay Company for the English and the *Compagnie du Nord-Ouest* for the French. On the maternal side, the Métis trace their ancestry to the Indian women who also lived in these Western territories. I think I should point out that the Métis of French origin and those of English origin soon established a climate of friendship and harmony, perhaps because of the solidarity that is the inevitable result of a hard pioneer life. Interestingly, when Louis Riel became the President of a provisional government that was set up to fill the vacuum left by the withdrawal of the Hudson's Bay Company, until the advent of a Canadian government, he enjoyed the support of Métis of all origins.

The Métis have made a valuable contribution to this country, a contribution that is partly connected with their way of life, in other words, their understanding of the ecology of a vast region, their knowledge of hunting and fishing and their ability to survive and prosper in the most inclement climate.

The Métis settled in carefully selected sites, gradually occupying rich lands along the Red, Assiniboine and Seine Rivers. Given the slowness of communications at the time, it was only natural that the Métis should voice concern about the negative impact which a new political regime and the massive influx of immigrants might have on their way of life and their lands. No wonder a dispute broke out in the North-West and Louis Riel became their leader.

Many things have been said and written about Louis Riel, and I am sure a number of Canadians would get to appreciate the man if only they would go to the trouble of reading a few books on his life, whether authored by sympathizers, foes, or impartial historians.