

● (1500)

### LOUIS RIEL

RECOGNITION OF HIS UNIQUE AND HISTORIC ROLE AS  
FOUNDER OF MANITOBA AND CONTRIBUTOR TO DEVELOPMENT  
OF CONFEDERATION

**Hon. Duff Roblin**, for Hon. Senator Murray, pursuant to notice of earlier this day, moved:

That the Senate take note that the Métis people of Rupert's Land and the North Western Territory, through democratic structures and procedures, took effective steps to maintain order and protect the lives, rights and property of the people of the Red River;

That the Senate take note that, in 1870, under the leadership of Louis Riel, the Métis of the Red River adopted a List of Rights;

That the Senate take note that, based on the List of Rights, Louis Riel negotiated the terms for the admission of Rupert's Land and the North Western Territory into the Dominion of Canada;

That the Senate take note that these terms for admission form part of the *Manitoba Act*;

That the Senate take note that, after negotiating Manitoba's entry into Confederation, Louis Riel was thrice elected to the House of Commons;

That the Senate take note that, until his death in 1885, Louis Riel led the movement which fought for the maintenance of the rights and freedoms of the Métis people;

That the Senate take note that the *Constitution Act, 1982*, recognizes and affirms the existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the Métis;

That the Senate take note that since the death of Louis Riel, the Métis people have honoured his memory and continued his purposes in their honourable striving for the implementation of those rights;

That the Senate recognize the unique and historic role of Louis Riel as a founder of Manitoba and his contribution in the development of Confederation; and

That the Senate support by its actions the true attainment, both in principle and in practice, of the constitutional rights of the Métis people.

He said: I move that the resolution previously read to the House in connection with Louis Riel now be debated.

In my capacity as a third generation citizen of the province of Manitoba, and in view of my territorial designation as the senator from Red River, I ask this house to approve a resolution of reconciliation and recognition with respect to Louis Riel, one of the giant figures in the history of my province, and with respect to his people, the Métis people of Western Canada.

In this present time of national introspection, it seems to me both a propitious and a favourable event, and that the circum-

stances are welcome that such a motion should be discussed in the Parliament of Canada, and certainly in this chamber.

One hundred and twenty-three years ago, in 1867, on the eve of the purchase of the territory of Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company by the new Dominion of Canada, the Red River settlement was a lonely frontier community described by some as a settlement on the eastern shore of an immense prairie ocean. It was isolated in the centre of North America with no good communications to the rest of this continent. In that place lived some 12,000 people, almost half of them Métis of French and Indian origin, almost half of them Scotch or English mixed blood, with perhaps several hundred people of either Indian or white backgrounds. In the harsh environment, this small community fought to survive on a dying Buffalo hunt, on the remnants of the fur trade, and on the precarious basis of a primitive agriculture.

In 1869, prior to any consultation with it, as far as I am aware, this small community was confronted with the takeover of their community by Canadian powers, which were largely unknown to them. After 200 years, the old order of the Hudson's Bay Company as the rulers of Rupert's Land was coming to an end and was being replaced by a new order from Canada, that itself being a new creation among the nations of the world.

The Red River people themselves were divided by race, language, and religion. This division could add nothing to the harmony or consensus that was so badly needed in the situation with which they were faced. Yet, local rights and local customs demanded respect, and local consent was an essential condition to sound policy.

It was the man Louis Riel who, not without opposition, spoke for the people. It was Louis Riel who articulated the demands of the plainsmen and the settlers. It was Louis Riel who organized a provisional government which had majority support in the community, and who led this small people, as the representatives of Canada approached the Red River from the east.

Louis Riel's role and part in these proceedings was a dominant one. He was the President of the short-lived provisional government to which I have referred. His was a strong voice in laying down the provisions of the *Manitoba Act* of 1970 that the Red River people could accept. Indeed, through him, the very name of "Manitoba" was attached to this new geographical province that was being created.

Yet, in this constructive process, by the perversity of human affairs, a Métis drumhead court martial decreed the death before a firing squad of a rash Canadian dissident named Thomas Scott. That tragic event in 1870 cast its malign shadow, not only on the province itself but right across the political spectrum of the new Canada of those days.

However, that tragedy was itself quite overshadowed by an even more calamitous decision that was taken some 15 years later when Louis Riel was tried and hanged in Regina in 1885 on the charge of treason. This act was one whose consequences