

Hero of the North West
Louis Riel's Place in History

by

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Transcribed by David Morin

To we Canadians a truthful picture of the life of Louis Riel will serve yet another important purpose: to help smash the mesh of falsifications that has "officially" been woven around the name of one (sic) of the finest sons of our country a man who not only shall yet be enshrined as one of the founders of Canadian democracy but will take his place among the great heroes of all lands Lincoln Robespierre Garibaldi and Kosciuszko and the thousand names from Spartacus who led the slave in ancient Rome to Ernest Thaelmann who rotted in a Nazi dungeon who have risen to lead humanity forward on the road to progress and freedom

It is only within the past few years as the new militant democracy is rising to its feet that Louis Riel Louis Joseph Papineau and William Lyon Mackenzie have been snatched from the oblivion to which reaction had resolved to sentence them

It is the fashion of Tory "historian" to repeat the slanders of the reactionaries of that day against the pioneers of the Great North West Too often even in Canadian history books they are represented as savages superstitious and criminal blocking the advance of civilization of the West

That is not so plain and simple folk they were but they stand in the light of history head and shoulders above their oppressors and persecutors Indeed the wonder is that in the wilderness that was Western Canada the isolated and small groups of settlers could rise to the station where their ideals vibrated the tune with the late thoughts and strivings of progressive mankind of the day

The savages were those who represented the Hudson (sic) Bay Co who practically annihilated the Selkirk settlement of an earlier day who dealt with Indians in a manner which had nothing to boast in comparison with the slave drivers of the deep South and which held the Metis and other settlers in the grip of the monopolies for generations

Fought For Unity

It was the Metis and other settlers who fought for generations against this tyranny breaking through the tyranny of the "Company" It was the father of Louis Riel who led the settlers to the occupation of the courthouse at Fort Gary (Winnipeg) freeing the men who had been seized for daring to trade with others than the Co

The Metis and other settlers in the Nor'West did not block the road to Canadian (sic) or civilization They fought the Hudson's Bay Co which was barring that road They themselves pressed for unity with the other provinces in a Canadian nation Time and again they sent that message to the eastern provinces

They rose in arms when (sic) the men at the head of the new Confederation paying the Hudson (sic) Bay Co out of the public purse and granting it trading privileges (sic) for relinquishing the prairies to Canada sought to annex the Nor'West as they would a conquered land

The settlers demanded unity with Canada on a democratic basis. They wanted provincial rights such as other provinces enjoyed. They wanted representation in the federal parliament. These "savages" asked for such provisions as would enable them to build roads and schools.

Instead their petitions were ignored. Even before the transfer from the Hudson (sic) Bay Co was affected a military force and an appointed governor were dispatched to establish arbitrary rule over the people. So they set up their own democratic provisional government, established their own law and order, guarded their liberty with arms in hand, and negotiated as free men for unity in the Confederation.

No lies, no spouting of hatred, can besmirch the name of Riel or the history of the Nor'West rebellions. The fact is that their rights were conceded in the formation of the province of Manitoba in 1870 and while the second rebellion was smashed the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan nevertheless were later formed on generally the same lines. Riel is a thousand times vindicated by history.

In Louis Riel, Canada and the prairie provinces in particular have a glorious tradition of democracy, and if the west has even breathed deeply (sic) of militant democratic sentiment it has come by it honestly – Louis Riel stood at the cradle of its birth.

There is a slander spread at the time to inveigle (sic) volunteers from the east to crush the settlers and assiduously dissimulated since that the Metis sought to keep Western Canada a wilderness (sic) to bar (sic) the road to settlement of the west.

History gives the lie to this

It was the warring fur traders who smashed the Scottish settlements organized by Lord Selkirk. It was the Hudson (sic) Bay Co which "proved" that the prairies were unfit for cultivation "on the best of scientific authority" so as to prevent any settlement. The Nor'Westers" (sic) asked for deeds to the lands they were cultivating. It was their land which they and their fathers had wrested from the wilderness. They rose in arms when surveyors began to ignore their rights to that land and they had good reason to do so. If the protection of home and property lies at the basis of British democracy, these people of the Nor'West lived up to the full the best of that tradition.

Cheating the settlers

The fact is that they were given every reason to suppose that the rulers of Central Canada intended to dispossess (sic) them of their lands. History gives striking confirmation that this was so. Even after deeds to their land in Manitoba were grudgingly granted after the first (Red River Rebellion) the Metis were cheated of those lands and forced to seek their livelihood further west, along the banks of the Sas (sic) The Saskatchewan

rebellion was a continuation further west of the struggle earlier fought out on the Red River. The demands were the same with only one addition.

To former democratic demands there was added one to the effect that the land should not be either bought out [sic] or cheated out that it should ever remain in the possession of the farmers! Here is a democratic demand which the farmers of the West dispossessed by the mortgage company and banks can understand as well as Louis Riel and his followers understood it almost 40 yrs ago.

For Free Settlement Fighting for possession of their own land the settlers traditionally fought for the free settlement of the West. This was one of the points on which they battled the Hudson (sic) Bay Co before Confederation. It was one of the points on which they fought the eastern interests after Confederation. Sir J. A. Macdonald and the Tory clique in power at Confederation did not proceed to open (sic) the prairies for colonization. It is a matter of record that Ontario's youngsters who joined the punitive expedition against Riel in the hope of securing farms in the west were in most cases forced to cross the line into the United States after their victory because land was for sale at a high price and not for settlement.

Macdonald declared that we would make the West pay the costs of railway construction. This was the policy his government carried out. The Hudson (sic) Bay, the C. P. R., the government of the day parcelled out the lands among themselves and held them for sale. It took a whole generation until the advent of the Laurier regime for the home steading (sic) and settlement of the prairies to be realized.

Riel's Dream

And today when hundreds of thousands (sic) of people throughout the world are refugees from their homelands it would be worthwhile to recall the dream which Louis Riel had in his day to open the western prairies to settlement by the oppressed and harried of all nations Poles and Germans Jews and French and all who suffered (sic) tyranny in the lands of their Fathers.

That was the dream of Louis Riel. The west to day is to a very great deal a picture of that dream come true with most nationalities under the sun represented in its population. Riel would have cheered the arrival of these (sic) refugees. The democratic west which had given so much to Canadian social progress in the past and which today stands to the fore in the march along trails hardly blazed as yet by humanity to a future glorious beyond the drama of men will emblazon the name of Louis Riel on its banners.