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**Canada**

**THE SOCIAL ORIGINS OF HEROISM:  
LOUIS RIEL IN ENGLISH CANADIAN CULTURE**

**BY**

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Why is someone thought of as a hero or admired for what he or she has done? What qualities does an individual have that warrants such admiration? How does the social sphere the person acts within affect the type of hero which is eventually produced?

The effect heroes have upon our lives is something which has yet to be fully understood. Certainly there has been much written of a hero's exploits, personal characteristics, and what effect they have had on specific groups. However, there appears to be no compelling understanding of the type of situation or circumstances that must be present to create a hero, or what social processes affect the essential qualities of being a hero. It is important to understand what types of events lead to the formation of heroes, and how society reacts to those who become imbued with qualities of heroism.

Because this study principally focuses on the exploits of a Canadian historical figure, it is acknowledged that the qualities determining Louis Riel's heroism are culturally based, and may differ from other cultures' ideas of what constitute heroic qualities. The Métis observed traits in Riel which prompted many to follow and support his ideas and actions. The traits the Métis found admirable, may not be universally accepted as heroic in cultures which place emphasis on distinctly different values. To study what brings about the formation of a particular hero and his or her social justification, we must first determine what makes a hero heroic. That is, what actions does a hero usually undertake and what qualities are usually displayed? Delineating these elements will enable us to better understand how a person can become appealing as a heroic figure. Once the elements of heroism are

determined, the study of this particular individual will be undertaken.

The purpose of this thesis is to review what has been written about heroes and heroism and to use an actual figure from history, to probe the nature of the heroic character. Such an analysis will provide an understanding of the situational environment which produced a person of heroic importance. This analysis will include the physical environment, the cultural and social milieu which helped to influence the person's development as a hero, as well as the supporting and opposing role played by others in the subject's passage into the realm of the heroic. The actions of groups opposed to the hero must be studied to produce a complete understanding of the influence of heroism on society.

### **1.1 Louis Riel as a Heroic Figure**

This thesis will explore the Métis leader Louis Riel from the perspective of English Canadian culture. The study will span the century and a quarter between 1869 and the present, in which Riel has come to be respected by English Canadian culture. This undertaking will attempt to provide insight into the social processes that assist in the formation of a hero.

The heroic individual may best be understood by way of a study of a unique individual case; by the exploration of the historical particulars, we may begin to understand the underlying social dynamics of the interrelationship between hero and his or her society. By using what is known about heroism, this thesis will first review the qualities which are said to define heroism. Second, it will demonstrate that Riel had these qualities by reviewing

the biographical literature on his exploits. Third, it will examine the apparent shift which has occurred in the attitude of English Canadians toward Riel. It is hoped that this section will uncover the factors which lead to heroic consideration by society. A concluding section charts the changes in English Canadian cultural attitudes toward Louis Riel and presents the findings from this particular analysis of heroism.

The sources of data to be used in the biographic analysis and the newspaper scan will centre primarily around English Canadian literature. The reason for concentrating on English Canadian literature and not incorporating French-Canadian works into this study is because the French-Canadian literature has been fairly consistent in its treatment of Riel over the last 125 years. That treatment has been, for the most part, one of sympathy and support for Riel and the cause he embraced. It is the English Canadian literature, along with the thinking of English Canadians in general, that I believe has changed greatly over the past century. This change in perception has allowed English Canadians to embrace Riel as hero. It is the nature of that change, that has seen Riel go from villain to hero, that is significant to this study.

Other mediums of expression such as sculpture and the performing arts (e.g. Riel's statue on the Manitoba Legislative grounds, the Canadian Opera Company's production of *Riel*, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's made for television movie on Riel) also have a place in the discussion of Riel's heroism. The public reaction to these mediums of expression will be touched upon, although a thorough examination of each work will not be attempted here.

Much has been written about Louis Riel, both for and against his promotion to the status of hero. The purpose of this study is not to determine whether he is truly deserving of

heroic consideration, but more narrowly to ponder why he has come to be considered heroic by groups which originally did not hold this view of him.

There have been several interesting works written on the evolution of Louis Riel's persona in English literature. Works such as "Images of Louis Riel in Contemporary School Text Books" by Claude Rocan; "Reflections of the Image of Louis Riel a Century After", by Desmond Morton; and "Riel in Canadian Drama", by Chris Johnson, found in *Images of Louis Riel in Canadian Culture* (Hathorn and Holland, 1992); "The Myth of Louis Riel", by Douglas Owran; and "Rieliana and the Structure of Canadian History" by Donald Swainson found in *Louis Riel* (Bowsfield, 1988) provide insight into the manner in which Riel's image has developed over the course of history. These sources supply a background from which to begin a study of the changing perception in English literature towards Riel. It is hoped that an understanding of the changing perceptions of Louis Riel in English literature will contribute to a more thorough understanding of the creation of the hero.

In a much broader perspective, we can see that the study of Riel may shed light on how and why groups in society create a hero, and how and why other groups go to lengths to deny the veracity of such claims. This study will only focus on one specific hero. What is learned from it will not in all probability apply to all heroic situations, but it should move us towards a socio-historical understanding of the process of creating a hero and the social context within which heroism is embedded.

In examining Louis Riel as a case study in heroism, it has become apparent that there is some connection between the role of heroism and social phenomena like power relationships, knowledge, nationalism (group identity needs), autonomy, territoriality (and



materialism), as well as the charismatic qualities of the individual himself. In determining what social processes bring about the "hero" in this particular instance, we must look at how these phenomena are involved in the creation and development of the hero.

In a study such as this, it is important that both Louis Riel and the social processes associated with hero formation should be seen as interrelated. That is, the person should be seen as contributing to the circumstances of the moment in history, not just as part of some immutable social process. The personal attributes displayed by the subject are not merely used as an explanation for his reaction to happenings around him, but also have an impact on those events.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study is a content analysis of heroism using literature on heroism, biographical and historical works pertaining to Louis Riel, and English Canadian news publications. The collection of data on heroic phenomenon is anticipated to provide a basis for an understanding of the dynamics of heroism within our society. The body of this work is organized into three main sections.

The first section, entitled *The Sociology of Heroism*, provides a sociologically informed understanding of the idea of heroism along with an analysis of the qualities that are said to comprise it. It is also a literature review of the theoretical discussions on heroism by North American and European social science authors. This first section will seek to establish what a hero must actually do, and what qualities he or she must possess.

The second section, *English Literature - Biographical Examination of Riel*, presents a predominately English Canadian biography of Riel's life from his birth in St. Boniface in 1844 to his execution for treason in Regina in 1885. This section principally uses data available from personal accounts and secondary sources published locally and nationally by English Canadian authors who refer to Louis Riel, the 1869 Red River Uprising, the 1885 Northwest Rebellion<sup>1</sup>, and which also comment on the historical and social significance of

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<sup>1</sup> For this thesis, the Metis and Aboriginal actions against the Canadian Government in 1885 will primarily be referred to as the Northwest Rebellion, although terms such as the "Northwest Resistance", and "The Second Metis Uprising" have also been used to describe this event. The term "Northwest Rebellion" is typically used by English Canadian writers and thus will also be cited extensively in this work.

this particular period in Canadian history. This second section will provide a general understanding of the heroic qualities which Riel was thought to embody. This section is designed primarily to establish the context for the third part of the thesis, the investigation into the changing perceptions and attitudes in English Canadian culture towards Louis Riel.

Since this study will use literature principally from English Canada, it is to be expected that opinions originating in the mid-to-late 1800's will be predominately antagonistic to Riel's position. There appears to be a fairly accurate account of what occurred during this period in Canadian history from a variety of sources, although most of these are written in the latter half of the twentieth century. The observation that most English Canadian biographies on Riel have been written in the latter half of the twentieth century will be discussed in the third section, *English Literature Review of Louis Riel in Selected Canadian Newspapers*. Analysis of this information is intended to provide a clearer understanding of the complexities involved in the creation of a hero, and why this process is inherently social. In addition, this third section is intended to illustrate the events or circumstances that have taken Riel from a villain to a generally admired individual by English Canadian society.

After scrutinizing the various information sources available over the more than one-hundred years since Riel's death, it has been decided that the most fruitful means of noting societal changes in attitudes is through the study of newspaper articles, editorials, and letters to the editor on the subject. The third section traces the changes in the perception of Riel in English Canadian society as seen through the pages of some of its newspapers.

Four specific newspapers have been selected primarily because they were prominent sources of information during Louis Riel's lifetime, and continue to publish today. They are:

*Toronto Globe (& Mail)*  
*Ottawa Citizen*  
*Montreal Gazette*  
*Winnipeg (Manitoba) Free Press*

The *Toronto Globe* was chosen because during the 1870's and 1880's it was the dominant English Canadian newspaper. The *Ottawa Citizen*, being printed in the nations capital provided insight into the federal government's activities. The *Montreal Gazette* supplied an English Canadian view from a predominantly French-speaking province. The *Winnipeg (Manitoba) Free Press* was selected to provide insights on those most affected by the 1870 uprising and closest to the events occurring in the Northwest in 1885. Riel's local prominence at Red River also pointed toward using this newspaper.

These newspapers are representative of the relatively large number of English Canadian publications that date back to the 1870's, and most of their past issues are accessible through microfilm at the University of Manitoba libraries and the Manitoba Provincial Archives. Other daily newspapers, such as the *Winnipeg Tribune* are also cited, but these newspapers have not been systematically scanned for articles on Riel. Data from these other sources have been obtained primarily from files containing newspaper clippings viewed at the University of Manitoba library and the Manitoba Provincial Archives.

The time required to review every edition of these daily publications between 1869 and 1992 was concluded to be extremely time consuming . Consequently, it was decided that a scanning of daily newspapers from clusters of years between 1869 and the present

would expedite the collecting of data. The following groupings have been identified for analysis: 1869-1885; 1909-1939; 1950-1970; and 1979-1992. The first grouping (1869 to 1885) was selected because in this period Riel achieved national notoriety by being a central figure in the 1870 and 1885 Métis and Aboriginal uprisings. Since very little on Riel was known to have been published in the early 1900's by English Canadian authors, the second grouping of dates (1909 to 1939) was somewhat arbitrary. The third grouping (1950 to 1970) was thought to be a very interesting period for the emergence of differing English Canadian views on Riel, as much of the biographies published, and plays written and performed on Riel came from this period. The final grouping (1979 to 1992) provides the most recent developments in the Riel saga, as it pertains to English Canadian culture.

Each grouping of dates has been scanned to uncover references to Louis Riel, and the Red River and Northwest Rebellions. These newspapers have been perused for anything mentioning Riel's name and note made of whether articles were sympathetic, negative, or neutral in their tone.

The focus on English Canadian literature is due to the apparent negative attitude towards Riel within English Canadian culture for the first 60 to 70 years after 1870, and then a gradual softening of opinion. The search for an understanding to this shift toward embracing Riel as a hero provides the impetus for this section.

At present, there still are varying opinions about Louis Riel's historical and political significance, and his heroic stature. Through the course of time the heroic status of a figure can be in flux. Comprehending the reasons for such change is crucial to understanding the reversal in English Canadian society's evaluation of Riel over the past century.

### **3.0 THE SOCIOLOGY OF HEROISM**

The following section is a focused review of relevant literature on the subject of heroism. The purpose of this analysis is to elucidate the principal components that have been said to constitute heroic status.

These components consist primarily of four main heroic qualities; bravery, responsibility, great accomplishment, and charisma. These four qualities are derived from what other analysts have seen as typical of heroic behaviour and as the hallmark characteristics of the person considered to be heroic. They are discussed individually in section 3.2.

#### **3.1 Understanding Heroism**

Throughout history different characteristics have been stressed in the heroes of various cultures. As will become clear in what follows, there have been differing social conceptions of what characteristics are necessary or important to become heroic.

Ernest Becker stresses that heroism is relative to the culture in which it exists. That is, differing cultures do not have to emphasize the same qualities in order to produce a heroic individual. What makes a person heroic is dependent upon what qualities are important to the culture at that time.

In *Escape from Evil*, Becker examines the historical changes which have occurred to the meaning of heroism. His examination is based on the premise that "...societies are

standardized systems of death denial; they give formulas for heroic transcendence. History can then be looked at as a succession of immortality ideologies."<sup>2</sup> Becker goes on to provide a summary of his history of heroic transcendence.

For primitive man, who practised the ritual renewal of nature, each person could be a cosmic hero of a quite definite kind: he could contribute with his powers and observances to the replenishment of cosmic life. Gradually, as societies became more complex and differentiated into classes, cosmic heroism became the property of divine kings and the military, who were charged with the renew of nature and the protection of the group by means of their own special powers. And so the situation developed where men could only be heroic by following orders. Men had given the mandate of power and expiation to their leader-heroes, and so salvation had to be mediated to them by these figures. ...With the rise of money coinage one could be a money hero and privately protect himself and his offspring by the accumulation of visible gold-power. With Christianity something new came into the world: heroism of renunciation of this world and the satisfaction of this life, which is why the pagans thought Christianity was crazy. ...Buddhism did the same thing even more extremely, denying all possible worlds. In modern times, with the Enlightenment, began again a new paganism of the exploitation and enjoyment of earthly life, partly as a reaction against the Christian renunciation of the world. Now a new type of productive and scientific hero came into to prominence, and we are still living this today.<sup>3</sup>

In his history Becker portrays heroic qualities as being tied to the development of society; from small, primitive tribes to the complexity of today's "global village". This view of heroism may provide insight into why different cultures stress qualities other than those espoused by Western culture. Perhaps those other cultures have not developed in the same way as the West, or maybe they have advanced beyond our own culture's "immortality ideology". Other authors have a more focused view of heroism than Becker, in that they

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<sup>2</sup> Ernest Becker, *Escape from Evil*,(New York: The Free Press, 1975) p. 153-154.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.154.

concentrate on the Western conceptions of heroic behaviour.

Thomas Carlyle views persons who have achieved something significant as being worthy of heroic recognition. He approaches the subject from the point of view describing the hero as assuming many different occupations or positions in society; the mythical hero/adventurer, the prophet, the poet, the priest, the man of letters, and the political leader. Carlyle's approach takes the form of a study of "great men" and what makes them great, rather than an in depth analysis of what universal elements they display that sets them apart from the "ordinary man".

Eric Bentley, like Carlyle, emphasizes accomplishments of an individual. However, he also includes charisma in his analysis, which he derives from the leadership role heroes often play. In *A Century of Hero-Worship*, Bentley focuses on heroic vitalism in the work of Carlyle and Nietzsche, among others.

Heroic vitalism is a faith, a dynamic Weltanschauung. In the details of application it adapts itself to the need of the moment. Its roots are in despair, therefore it despises all optimistic systems. But it respects the fact and the masters of fact, and thereby surpasses pessimism. Its roots are in evolutionism and therefore aloof from the static thought of the eighteenth century. But it is less a science of biology than a religion of metabiology, a religion of Dionysian life and energy. Its roots are in the deep sense of individuality which has been growing since the Renaissance. But it assails the idea of human equality, and issues a warning against the belief that the crew should control the captain.<sup>4</sup>

This type of heroism is displayed most often in charismatic heroes or heroines, such as the Joan of Arc, Hitler, Castro, and John F. Kennedy; the "take charge" type of person who tries to project his or her will into everything that is done.

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<sup>4</sup> Eric Bentley, *A Century of Hero Worship*, second edition, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 239.



Becker states that by looking back to early society, we can see that the cultures of those groups were "codified hero- systems", where members gave their allegiance to the group, and in turn received a set of instructions for heroic transcendence, which was a denial of human finality, death.

Seth L. Schein's analysis of heroism leans towards the bravery and accomplishments of the individual. In *The Mortal Hero* he writes of heroism in Greek mythology, specifically in Homer's *Iliad*. Here heroism was bestowed upon those who went into battle and either killed others for some higher good, or valiantly died in the process.

To be sure, in the course of the *Iliad*, Achilles comes to question and contradict the validity of the normative social value system. This disillusionment enhances Achilles' tragedy and constitutes part of Homer's critical exploration of the nature and condition of heroism and of human life. Nevertheless, for Achilles and everyone else in the poem, there is no real alternative. Life is lived and death is died according to this code of values; to be fully human - that is, to be a hero - means to kill or be killed for honour and glory.<sup>5</sup>

Becker imparts a sociological explanation for the battling hero described by Schein. Becker refers to the dual organization of tribal society (moiety), which produces a symbolic other to compete against. This binary division of the group allows humans to impart life to one another through ritual. That is, an individual can produce a feeling of self-worth only through interaction with others, and by creating this worth, one gives meaning to life and pushes the eventuality of death off to the side. Becker refers to this type of human behaviour as "agonistic rituals", which are "...the agreement by each society on the ways it will allow

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<sup>5</sup> Seth L. Schein, *The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 71.

people to establish their own sense of value."<sup>6</sup>

It is through superior performance that individuals prove their worth to the rest of society. Becker also notes that we, as humans, have progressed from a small-scale (but highly cohesive) society to a more complex (but greatly divisive) society. Part of the reason for this change is the transition the human psyche has undergone, from wanting 'to be' someone morally, to appearing to be someone through accumulation of material gains. This understanding of the human need for ways to provide self-worth, and the difference between small-scale and modern societies in their type of agonism, may point to the need for heroism based on the enactment of superior moral action, rather than the productivity and scientific achievement values Becker states dominate our present society.

Competition can produce heroic acts, if the individual or group triumphs over a formidable opponent. The reward for success is glory and honour from the group to which one belongs. Success over another person, machine or natural force is what produces glory and honour for an individual from the group with whom he or she is affiliated. It is important to stress that this success must be seen as being legitimate by the group. In order for the success to be considered legitimate, superiority has to be shown over others initially perceived to be equal to or greater than those who eventually emerge victorious.

Superiority or dominance over those perceived to be weaker or less able makes the victor appear as a bully, or often not even worth the trouble of recognition for the act committed (e.g. proving one's strength is greater than that of a small child is not judged as

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<sup>6</sup> Ernest Becker, *The Structure of Evil: an Essay on the Unification of the Science of Man*, (New York: G.Braziller, 1968) p. 231.

being successful in any potentially heroic sense, unless one is also a small child and competing at the same level). One's superiority must be over a worthy opponent to be considered legitimate.

Ideally, to produce heroes which emphasize society's cohesiveness, the basis of one's superiority over another must be achieved on moral grounds. The emphasis on productivity and science in our own society, may contribute to society's lack of moral cohesiveness. Those seeking greater productivity may place less emphasis on the moral codes of conduct, in order to maximize returns. Science replaces "beliefs" the society once held for the purpose of being, and replaces them with "fact" with no moral blueprint for human behaviour.

Thus far, there are three points we find which define heroism or heroic acts. They are;

- 1) Success over another
- 2) The success must be seen as being over a competent adversary
- 3) The reason for battling the competent adversary must be noble (be significant or important to the groups well being in terms of upholding values such as human life)

Others see heroes as being a creation of an individual working within the larger cultural framework, where even though the person is actively promoting his or her own ends, the person is also enveloped by a dense social web of obligation that directs and limits personal endeavour.

Hegel's view on heroism stressed the quality of responsibility. Although other qualities may be present in a hero, Hegel judged responsibility to be the key ingredient in defining heroism. Hegel, saw the 'Idea', which is the reasoning behind the shaping of the collective order of society, as directing all the individual's interests. In discussing how the

state functions through the actions of the persons within it, Strauss and Cropsey give this account of Hegel.

The state comes to light as both a final result and a precondition. It is a result of the action of individuals and of the play of the passions but, once constituted, its structure appears as first and primary while its genesis is interpreted as a merely empirical and external fact. "The state is a final result in which the fact that it finds its origins in the operation of individuals disappears." That these individuals - whether one means by this the mass of men pursuing their particular interests or the great men who perform heroic actions - are unconsciously the instruments of a plan which transcends them and often directly contradicts their conscious objectives, that the action of irrational forces constructs an architectonic edifice which is the image of external reason, is what is meant by the "cunning of reason" which demonstrates the rationality of history.<sup>7</sup>

Keeping this in mind, Hegel states that the heroic element is born in...

...the free embodiment of individuality..., in which the validity of the ethical principal derives its support from individuals, and only from individuals, men who make for themselves a great place in the arena of life through the activity of exceptional volitional power and the inherent greatness and effectiveness of their character.<sup>8</sup>

After a state (or society) is created, if an individual strives for greatness, greatness can only be attained by pursuing what the person perceives as virtuous and also having society judge his actions as virtuous. If this occurs, then the individual is considered heroic. Within the state one only attains heroism through socially accepted methods.

In Hegel's view those who seek greatness take responsibility for all their actions, and all that follows from them, even if they are not in control of them, or could not foresee them

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<sup>7</sup> Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, editors, *History of Political Philosophy* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963) p. 688.

<sup>8</sup> Georg Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, Translated, with notes by F.P.B. Osmaston (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1975) p. 248.

happening at the moment they committed the act. These types of heroes rely "...upon personal resources and initiative."<sup>9</sup>

The responsibility this type of hero takes goes beyond what he may have consciously known at the time he commits various acts. It is heroic for such persons to claim responsibility for the results of their actions and to suffer the consequences of those acts, such as Oedipus did. Hegel states, "Without knowing it he [Oedipus] commits an act of shame."<sup>10</sup> He does not justify or diminish his responsibility by pleading ignorance, and although he does at one point place partial blame on Apollo, in the end he holds himself accountable for all his actions. He accepts the morality of his time and applies these standards to his own situation, when others may have spared him punishment. Rather than waiting for chastisement and censure from others or possibly their negation of his responsibility, he inflicts a punishment upon himself that he feels will satisfy his own guilt of not being able to follow his society's moral of 'honouring thy father and mother'. What makes this heroic figure stand out is that he judged himself by society's moral standard even when others may not have seen fit to do so. Rather than waiting to see if punishment would come to him, he judged and punished himself.

Adults have the capacity to reflect on their deeds using the moral codes they have internalized from the group they belong to and evaluate their actions as being good or bad from the perspective of the group. The heroic person Hegel speaks of holds himself

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

accountable to the group. When his actions are reviewed either by himself through introspection, or from the group's perspective, this individual does not evade what is morally his responsibility. Others less heroic might seek to evade responsibility by use of technicalities or escape clauses which may relieve them of complete legal liability. Those who are truly heroic do not seek to separate moral obligations from legal obligations. They display an elevated sense of conscience which identifies 'right' and 'wrong' only in terms of a moral code of conduct. Hegel also differentiates between institutionalized forms of action and heroic acts, with the former being when a person "...is merely acting within the bounds already marked out for him by legislative enactments in the social order as the sphere of his responsibilities."<sup>11</sup> Heroic acts are not legislated into society's code of behaviour.

Along with a moral code of behaviour, Hegel makes reference to two other motives of the heroic character; national pride and kinship ties. These attributes contribute to or have some bearing on heroic acts.

For Hegel, heroes (or 'ethical virtuosi' as he terms them) exist where there is a lack of ethical order. The heroes' actions advance ethical institutions which in turn further realize the 'Idea' or reasons for society progressing the way it does. The person does not downplay the moral values of the group (or society). Rather, he or she amplifies those meaningful values with a technique distinctive from that which is normally followed by the rest of the group. In so doing, the hero has progressed the development of the 'Idea' within society.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 259.

Based on the analysis provided by Hegel on heroism, we can discern additional concepts to add to our understanding of what it means to be heroic.

- 4) There must be some sort of individuality perceived by others; the person must act by his own volition, by his own desire, not be coerced or forced into the act by others.
- 5) The person committing the act must take full and complete responsibility for the ramifications for such acts.
- 6) There must be some sort of self-judgement of one's actions using the referent group's moral code.
- 7) Heroic motives should stem from one of the following categories, national pride, moral codes of behaviour and kinship ties. Things like greed and personal pleasure as motivation are seen as disqualifying one from heroic status.

These seven features of heroism can act as a sensitizing guide when searching for heroic content in the lives of actual persons.

The final aspect of heroism is found in Max Weber's study of charisma. According to Weber, heroes often display charismatic authority. Specifically, he remarks;

Charisma knows only inner determination and inner restraint. The holder of charisma seizes the task that is adequate for him and demands obedience and a following by virtue of his mission.<sup>12</sup>

The charismatic leader's disciples follow because they feel it is their duty to do so, not because of some sort of legal or political obligation. As well, the leader who possesses charismatic authority may have persons whom he holds close, and discusses intimately the details of his "mission". The following are a series of Weber's statements about charismatic leadership which cannot be paraphrased any more succinctly.

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<sup>12</sup> Max Weber, *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building: Selected Papers*, Edited and with an introduction by S.N. Eisenstadt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) p. 20.

In general, charisma rejects all rational economic conduct.

In the case of charismatic warrior heroes, booty represents one of the ends as well as the material means of the mission.

In order to do justice to their mission, the holders of charisma, the master as well as his disciples and followers, must stand outside the ties of this world, outside of routine occupations, as well as outside of routine obligations of family life.<sup>13</sup>

The charismatic leader gains and maintains authority solely by proving his strength in life. If he wants to be a prophet, he must perform miracles; if he wants to be a war lord, he must perform heroic deeds. Above all, however, his divine mission must 'prove' itself in that those who faithfully surrender to him must fare well. If they do not fare well, he is obviously not the master sent by the gods.<sup>14</sup>

There must also be existing in the charismatic leader's relationship to his followers, the ability to exploit the needs or desires of the followers. The charismatic amplifies the followers' wants and makes them more obsessed with achieving their desires. The followers are led to believe that it is only through the charismatic's instructions that they will be able to reach their objectives. Ernest Becker, mentions this point when he speaks of the Nazi Final Solution;

Buchenwald and Auschwitz were the result of one of the most massive mystifications of history, a religious use of man's fundamental motives and fears. Today we still gape in unbelief that such a holocaust was possible in our "civilized" world, refusing to see how true it was to man's nature and his ambitions to transcend that nature. Hitler's rise to power was based on his understanding of what people wanted and needed most of all, and so he promised them, above everything else, heroic victory

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<sup>13</sup> The mention of the master and disciples standing outside the routine obligations of family life appears to contradict Hegel's reference to kinship ties. However, a hero motivated by kinship ties and also considered a charismatic leader would not be restricted by family obligation. For example, avenging a relative's murder in a heroic manner has little to do with routine family obligations. Both properties can co-exist in the heroic individual.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 21-22.



over evil; he gave them the living possibility of ridding themselves temporarily of their real guilt.<sup>15</sup>

The idea of a Thousand Year Reich was created for the German people to realize the ultimate human goal (at least according to Becker) of transcendence over nature. The Final Solution was to be part of the means to attaining that end. Hitler, being a skilled charismatic leader, was able to convince much of the population of Germany that what they wanted was only to be obtained by the means he prescribed. Thus, it is up to the charismatic leader to understand what his followers want, and be able to verbalize those desires into concretely attainable goals, so as to mobilize them to act on command. While this is a rather negative example of charismatic manipulation, more constructive ones, like that of Martin Luther King Jr., still rely on taking people's common desires, making them aware of those desires, and providing a means of attaining them. It should also be noted that the means of attaining their goals must appear reasonable to the followers, and this 'appearance of reasonableness' is solely the responsibility of the charismatic. The leader becomes the finest example of what is expected of a follower. The charismatic's exemplary behaviour inspires the faithfulness and dedication of the followers to the mission. The following points on charismatic authority can be made.

- 1) The charismatic person has a mission, which he or she believes is virtuous;
- 2) The charismatic person demands obedience from disciples and followers, stressing the virtue of the 'mission'; this mission is a combination of the followers desires and the charismatic's means of their attaining it;
- 3) The disciples and followers feel a 'duty' to the charismatic person;

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<sup>15</sup> Ernest Becker, *Escape from Evil* (New York: The Free Press, 1975) p. 117.

- 4) The charismatic person must constantly display the power to do his or her will, otherwise charisma is lost;
- 5) The disciples and followers must benefit from the association with the charismatic, or the hold over them will be lost.

Considered in relation to heroism, charisma is a quality which can facilitate heroic acts. If one has charisma, there is a greater chance of one being considered heroic as well.

In summarizing the key points made on the sociology of heroism, the four heroic qualities mentioned initially, begin to emerge. The first three facts of heroism are:

- 1) success over another;
- 2) a competent adversary; and
- 3) a noble cause.

These three facts demonstrate the heroic qualities of bravery and great achievement. Carlyle, Bentley, and Schein use these facts to describe their heroes. The last four elements of heroism include:

- 4) the individual acting on his or her own volition;
- 5) the individual taking full and complete responsibility for his or her actions;
- 6) self-judgement by the individual on moral correctness of the actions; and
- 7) the need for motives for such actions arising from one of the following categories, national pride, moral codes of behaviour and kinship ties.

These four elements illustrate the heroic quality of responsibility. Hegel primarily uses this quality in his definition of heroism.

In addition, the five points derived from Max Weber's work on charisma provide more insight into what is required before this quality can be realized in the heroic individual.

These points consist of:

- 1) the need for a virtuous mission;
- 2) the demanded obedience from disciples and followers;
- 3) the duty felt by disciples and followers to the charismatic person;

- 4) the necessity of constantly proving one's power by performing one's will;
- 5) benefits being provided to followers and disciples from their association with the charismatic.

In addition, this study of heroism provides insight into the cultural relativity of heroic qualities, which leads to my assertion that an individual must display at the bare minimum, at least one of these qualities (bravery, great achievement, responsibility, or charisma), but not necessarily all of them, in order to be considered heroic. A discussion of the four qualities derived from the elements listed above follows.

### 3.2 Conventional Heroic Qualities

Based on the previous section's examination of heroism and charismatic behaviour, four heroic qualities have been distilled. Authors who have written on heroism have tended to stress one heroic quality more than any other. For Hegel, the consequences of taking responsibility for the act will in some way threaten to negatively affect one's current status or security. That is, there is risk involved in taking responsibility, and the hero does so fully conscious of that risk. Being heroically **responsible** incurs a certain amount of risk upon those who act this way. Thomas Carlyle's approach, as stated earlier places heroes into categories or hero types. His study of 'great men' and what makes them great focuses on the **great accomplishments** of these persons in their lifetime. Seth L. Schein states that heroism, specifically that of Greek Mythology, was obtained by going into battle and either killing others, or dying valiantly in the attempt. This description of heroism, uses the

concept of **bravery** as the defining element of what it means to be heroic. Max Weber's contribution to understanding the qualities that comprise heroism rests in his analysis of that which captivates others to follow a particular person. The heroic quality of **charisma** is central to how leaders attain greatness.

There are many others who give their explanation of what heroism is to them. For example, people like Ernest Becker, Eric Bentley, Frederick Nietzsche, Joseph Campbell and William James, all have their own perceptions, but in the end, they all can be reduced in some way to the four most common qualities a hero may display as heroic. These four characteristic qualities as alluded to in the above text, are Responsibility, Great Accomplishments, Bravery, and Charisma. It can therefore be concluded that in order to become a hero, a person must have at least one of these qualities. The more qualities one has, the closer one is to being considered the consummate hero. A person may be considered a hero because he or she possesses charisma, bravery, responsibility, or great accomplishment, or any combination of these four qualities.

Below are the definitions of the four qualities of heroic figures as derived from analysis of the previously mentioned literature.

1.     **BRAVERY**  
Apparent consciousness of risking one's own state of well being (life threatening) for others, or some 'greater' cause.
2.     **RESPONSIBILITY**  
To take action and accept the consequences of those acts, even though these acts may negatively affect one's own security, prestige, or state of grace.
3.     **GREAT ACCOMPLISHMENTS**  
To perform exemplary feats in at least one particular field.
4.     **CHARISMA**  
The ability to hold a group's attention focused on a particular goal, and lead them on the quest for that goal.

Using the above mentioned attributes, it is anticipated that a clearer understanding can be developed of the circumstances which produce the hero, and how and why society responds to those considered heroic. What has been produced thus far in the literature on heroes and heroism is either exemplified by descriptions of persons throughout history who were considered heroic, or in the most abstract sense, an idealized version of heroism without any actual analysis of the ideas in real-life figures. Consequently, the study of Louis Riel as a heroic figure may shed light on heroism as a social phenomenon.

#### **4.0 ENGLISH LITERATURE - BIOGRAPHICAL EXAMINATION OF RIEL**

This section primarily looks at English-Canadian biographical literature on Riel. These works were written principally by historians in the latter half of the 20th century, although most cite references from the 1870's and 1880's. The purpose of this section is to chronicle the life of Louis Riel using various English-Canadian authors. This description of events will serve as a reference to the following review of English Canadian newspapers.

##### **4.1 Background on Riel 1844-1868**

Louis Riel was born October 22, 1844, in St. Boniface, the son of a part-time miller, trades person and respected member of the community. Riel's father, Louis Riel Sr. fought the Hudson's Bay Company by leading the Métis in vocalizing their opposition to the monopoly the company had over the trading of furs. Riel Sr. directed the Métis to stand up against what he and others felt were unfair restrictions on their trade of furs with persons or groups other than the Hudson's Bay Company. As a result of the pressure Louis Riel Sr. and other's placed on the Hudson's Bay Company in the late 1840's, the Métis gained more freedom in trading furs for personal gain.<sup>16</sup> From what is known of him today, Louis Riel himself would also seem to have had these qualities of leadership and determination displayed by his father, as he was to follow in his father's footsteps of standing up for the

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Charlebois, *The life of Louis Riel*, (Toronto: NC Press Ltd., 1975), p. 14-18.

rights he felt were "owed" to his people.

By most historical accounts, Louis Riel was considered a well educated man. Riel was initially taught at home by his mother Julie Riel. His formal education began at the home of Bishop Tache in St.Boniface, where he was taught by members of the organization known today as the Grey Nuns. In 1854, Riel was chosen as one of several boys to study Latin in a newly constructed school near Fort Garry, whose ultimate aim was to develop well educated men to enter the priesthood. Riel was taught there by three Christian Brothers who had come from Canada that same year. After four years of study, he and three other boys were sponsored by a wealthy Quebec family, the Masson's of Terrebonne, to attend college in Quebec.<sup>17</sup> In the fall of 1858 Louis Riel began studies at the Seminaire de St. Sulpice in Montreal. This institution was designed to act as a preparation into priesthood, however, less than one-half of the students actually became priests. Many graduates went into professions or private business rather than a religious calling.<sup>18</sup>

Riel himself spent six years at the college, but left with only six months remaining in the seminary course. The reasons for his departure are not completely clear. He did have doubts about his desire to become a priest and also experienced personal grief upon hearing of his father's death earlier that year (1864). Both Stanley and Flanagan state that Riel was

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<sup>17</sup> George F.G. Stanley, *Louis Riel*. (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1963; reprint ed., Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1965) p. 20-21.

<sup>18</sup> William McCartney Davidson, *Louis Riel 1844-1885*. (Calgary: Albertan Publishing Company, 1955) p. 16

actually asked to leave the Seminary program, as a result of continued infractions of the house rules, such as not attending classes. This action was brought on by Riel's behaviour which was reported to have been erratic and quite abnormal in relation to his occupational training.<sup>19</sup> After leaving the seminary, Riel worked for a short time as a law clerk and also in a wholesale house in Montreal.<sup>20</sup> During this time he became romantically involved with Marie Julie Guernon, the daughter of neighbours of Riel's aunt in Montreal. Riel and Guernon were engaged to be married on June 12th, 1866, but due to Marie's parent's protests against it, primarily because Riel was Métis, Marie and Louis broke off their engagement.<sup>21</sup> Soon afterward, Louis Riel left Montreal and headed West. He lived for a time in Chicago, it is believed with the Canadian poet Louis Frechette. Riel then moved on to St Paul Minnesota where he worked in a shop and supplemented his income by teaching.<sup>22</sup> Riel stayed in St.Paul until 1868, after which time he left for the family home in St. Boniface in July of that year.<sup>23</sup>

#### 4.1.1 Analysis

In this period in his life, Louis Riel demonstrated characteristics which were later to

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Flanagan, *Louis 'David' Riel: Prophet of the New World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979) p. 16; Stanley, *Louis Riel*, p. 30.

<sup>20</sup> Davidson, *Louis Riel 1844-1885*, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Stanley, *Louis Riel*, p.33.

<sup>22</sup> Charlebois, *The life of Louis Riel.*, p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> Stanley, *Louis Riel*, p. 34.



have a decisive effect on his behaviour in the two Métis uprisings. Which of these traits identify a heroic personality? To this point, no heroic qualities are obvious from the description of his life. Davidson points to the aspects of Riel's character early in life when he says;

He had become a sturdy, handsome young man of great seriousness. He was generous, courteous, with no pettiness or meanness, which accounted for his popularity; but showed a humourless, sensitive nature with more than ordinary egotism.<sup>24</sup>

Stanley indicates that Riel held certain qualities which made him appear stubborn at times.

There were other traits in Riel's character that did not win such unspoken praise: his pride, his quick temper, his inclination towards broodiness. He was too ready to argue with his teachers whenever he thought their orders unreasonable or arbitrary. Moreover, in arguments with his school fellows, he was not prepared to brook their contradictions.<sup>25</sup>

Riel's personality would seem to have been comprised of many qualities, both positive and negative in nature. None appear to indicate the potential for great heroism, at least not of the type mentioned in the previous analysis, which include bravery, responsibility, great accomplishment, often combined with a charismatic personality. Riel's life thus far shows little evidence that he would become an important figure in Canadian history. Perhaps the only real sign of the heroic characteristics mentioned above are his feelings of responsibility and his personal charm, which have been conveyed by some authors.

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<sup>24</sup> Davidson, *Louis Riel 1844-1885*, p. 19

<sup>25</sup> Stanley, *Louis Riel*, p. 28.

For example, Stanley states of Riel: "Almost everyone that knew him wrote of the charm of his appearance as well as that of his personality." In another passage, Riel is identified as having said to a friend of Madame Masson (Riel's benefactor in Montreal) that "...he hoped at some future date to be able to assist in settling his young brothers and sisters." Later on Stanley says this of Riel's decision to leave the seminary: "It would almost seem that he became completely obsessed with the weight of the new responsibilities as head of the family, and yielded to the nagging anxiety of what he would do with the rest of his life."<sup>26</sup>

Davidson writes of Riel's decision to leave the seminary;

He revered the sacred calling and had no sense of unfitness in himself or of a lack of ability. But he had a vision of his future as at the head of his own people who would become in time as numerous as the French speaking Canadians of Lower Canada; They were now visibly threatened by powerful enemies and he had a duty and an ambition to save them and foster their future civilization.

Davidson also mentions what he felt was Riel's reaction upon learning of the death of his father;

Under this despondency he was obliged to face practical problems of what next to do now that he was the head of the family in Red River as its oldest son and duty bound to assist his widowed mother.

Notwithstanding his responsibility to his family, he was more than ever convinced of his mission and bent upon serving it and began to make idealistic plans for defense and improvement of the lot of his people.<sup>27</sup>

These examples suggest at least some heroic potential. His solid educational background (greater than most Métis at the time) and his desire to make the Métis an

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 29-30.

<sup>27</sup> Davidson, *Louis Riel 1844-1885*, p. 19.

autonomous people with rights equal to the French and English in Canada provided the motivation for Riel's later activities.

#### **4.2 The Red River Rebellion 1869-1870**

The next stage of Riel's life, which began after he arrived back at Red River in 1868, was the one which elevated him to a figure, first of local prominence, then of national importance. The Canadian government was forced to take notice of the discontented Métis settlers and deal with their grievances.

During the late 1860's the Red River settlement was going through some economically hard times. Drought, grasshopper plagues, and the migration of bison into the American territories reduced not only on what there was to trade and sell, but also what there was to eat. Food shortages were not uncommon.<sup>28</sup>

The standard of living, for both the French and English half-breeds at Red River, did not increase during the period Riel was away from Red River between 1858 to 1868.

The biggest change occurred in the politics of the region, and was continuing to change after Riel arrived back from the East. To this point in time the region had been controlled by the Hudson's Bay Company, with its direction coming from England. The influx of Canadians from Ontario brought to the community a class of people bent on anglicizing the settlement, not just in language, but also in the community's way of life. Along with these immigrants came the first newspaper in the territories, called the *Nor'-Wester*. The *Nor'-Wester* often

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<sup>28</sup> Flanagan, *Louis 'David' Riel: Prophet of the New World*, p. 26; Stanley, *Louis Riel*, p. 53.

attacked Hudson's Bay Company policy, and questioned the authority of its governing power.<sup>29</sup>

Many of the Canadian immigrants along with some of the earlier settlers to the region openly showed support for Canadian annexation of Red River. The Métis made up about half of the population of the Red River settlement at the time. They were fearful that Canadian annexation would lead to an influx of English speaking immigrants who would squeeze the Métis off the land they presently used for hunting and trapping, and impose English-Canadian rules and regulations. Louis Riel and many other Métis felt that their way of life would be changed for the worse if Canada took control of the region and no provisions were enacted to protect Métis rights.

The fear of Canadian annexation turned out to be founded when it was learned that Hudson's Bay Company officials were engaged in formal discussions with the Canadian government on negotiating the transfer of territorial rights of the North West Territories (Rupert's Land) from England to Canada in the spring of 1869. As Stanley points out, the Métis had a right to fear this annexation. The government of Canada in taking over the territories was considering not giving democratic voting rights to the people of Red River, at least not initially, for the Canadian settlers there were outnumbered by the Métis and earlier Scottish settlers, and the Canadian government feared these non-Canadians would not easily go along with the dictates of the Federal government. Once enough Canadian settlers were brought in to override the 'original settlers' concerns, then a freely elected government

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<sup>29</sup> Charlebois, *The life of Louis Riel*, p. 28.

by the 'people' would be allowed.

This opinion was displayed in a private letter written by John Schultz, then editor of the *Nor'-Wester*, leader of the Canada First movement (a movement dedicated to the Canadian Annexation of the Northwest) and a member of the Ontario Orange Lodge, to the brother of William McDougall, the man chosen by John A. MacDonalld to be the first Lieutenant Governor of the Territory. In reference to the Canadian Government takeover of Rupert's Land, Schultz states;

The greatest danger from the Hudson Bay influence will be in giving the franchise to our people at once. Theoretically fair and even necessary it is fraught with the very great dangers till our people feel the change and we get an immigration of Canadians on Canadian principles. Our people will be satisfied with simply the local town and country self-government and to have no elective choice whatever over the necessary officers for these positions.<sup>30</sup>

A similar, though more ambiguous statement, was made in the *Nor'-Wester*, and it seemed to justify the Métis fears of the consequences of the Canadian annexation of their land. With these seeds of fear and mistrust planted in the minds of the Métis, it is not surprising that a resistance to the potential Canadian domination was organized. It is surprising, though, that the resistance took on such a formal organizational shape, owing largely to the ability and leadership qualities of certain members of the Métis community.

It was late 1869 when the land claims and sovereignty issue came to a head at Red River. The Canadian Government had sent a party of land surveyors into the area to map out the land in a fashion similar to the way it was done in Southern Ontario. In this way the preparation for further Canadian (i.e. Ontario) immigration was undertaken even before

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<sup>30</sup> Stanley, *Louis Riel*, p. 55.

official notice was given to the established settlers that they were now under Canadian government rule.<sup>31</sup>

Louis Riel at this time was not standing idly by and watching these events unfold. He was active in discussing the situation with the French Métis of the settlement, not only in private, but publicly as well. His oratorical skills, which he honed in school when pressing upon his teachers and schoolmates his opinions, showed that he had an ability to hold a crowd's interest, especially when the topic was of great concern to those in the audience.<sup>32</sup> With the takeover by Canadian authorities appearing imminent, he, along with other prominent Métis of the community formed a committee to voice concerns for their land and livelihood from the type of rule they felt the Canadian Government would impose.<sup>33</sup>

Louis Riel was secretary of this committee, though E.B. Osler states that the position of president of the committee was offered to Riel first. Riel declined the offer stating that his youth and inexperience in such matters would not allow him to fill the position adequately.<sup>34</sup> Davidson's and Stanley's work on Riel seems to substantiate this claim, and both go so far as to say that John Bruce, the man chosen to be the first president of this committee was vastly inferior to Riel in terms of education and leadership abilities, and was probably only chosen because Riel himself nominated Bruce for the position. It was

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<sup>31</sup> Hartwell Bowsfield, ed., *Louis Riel: Rebel of the Western Frontier or Victim of Politics and Prejudice?* (Toronto: The Copp Clark Publishing Company, 1969) p.34-35.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Stanley, *Louis Riel*, p. 58-59.

<sup>34</sup> E.B. Osler, *The Man Who Had to Hang: Louis Riel*, (Toronto: Longmans Green & Company, 1961) p. 27.

generally assumed that Bruce would only be a figurehead, with Riel being the genuine leader of the Métis committee.<sup>35</sup>

Joseph Kinsey Howard, in his book *Strange Empire*, also speaks of Riel's qualities as a leader and describes how the Métis viewed him.

Despite the almost worshipful regard in which Riel was held, however, he would never have been chosen to lead the movement (Bruce, a mild and almost illiterate but popular man, was merely a figurehead and soon resigned) had they not felt that his talents specially fitted him for the task. He would never have been selected to lead a war party. The Métis needed a statesman, a facile speaker and writer to present their case to their neighbours in Rupert's Land and to the foreign power which they had good reason to believe intended to subjugate them. Unquestionably they chose the best man they had; and they did not demur merely because the election had occurred on the eve of his twenty-fifth birthday. He was young to lead a "new nation", but the Métis, like the American colonists, respected youth.<sup>36</sup>

It would seem from this description that Louis Riel was the Métis' most charismatic leader. Being well versed in the politics of the Red River settlement and having a fair knowledge of the Canadian political system, was also an asset.

Louis Riel was now leader of the Métis at Red River, and though he had not yet accomplished any great feat, or risked his life in a brave fashion, he had shown a great desire to lead his people, to take on the 'responsibility' of becoming the spokesperson for their rights. In this way, Riel shows signs of becoming a hero, as he displays the trait of responsibility.

It was not until the Canadian Government's appointed representative was denied

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<sup>35</sup> Davidson, *Louis Riel: 1844-1885*, p.30; Stanley, *Louis Riel*, p. 61.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Kinsey Howard, *Strange Empire: A Narrative of the North*, (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1952; reprint ed., Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1974) p. 112-113.

entrance to the settlement, and a provisional government formed, that Riel began to exhibit heroic traits. He was considered by the Métis as the one person who could stand up to the external powers which were bearing down upon their settlement, powers which if gone unchecked would destroy the Métis' way of life, and force them off their land.

Stanley claims of the Métis' faith in Riel;

Slowly a Métis leader emerged, the eloquent, personable and energetic young Métis Louis Riel. Here, at last was a man who had the attributes of leadership, who could fill the shoes that Dease would have liked to fill. Politics must always be associated with a heroic name; just as religion must always be associated with a god. Only in this way do politics and religion cease to be purely abstract matters, and become concrete, comprehensible and humanized. Riel possessed a heroic name, for the memory of Louis' father and the shouts of *Le commerce est libre* had never been forgotten in the parishes along the Red River. Moreover, he was a devout man, of a mystical turn of mind. This too was an asset among a simple, deeply religious, unsophisticated people.<sup>37</sup>

Up until the end of 1869, very few, if any people living in Ontario had ever heard of Louis Riel or knew what he stood for. It was only when the Canadian Government was to take territorial control over Rupert's land from the Hudson's Bay Company that the name Riel was to become common print in the newspapers of Ontario and Quebec.

With the prevention of William McDougall from entering the territory and assuming his position of Lieutenant Governor, the Métis of Red River took the first step towards ensuring that their rights were recognized. The Métis committee which Riel unofficially led at the time, called the 'National Committee', advanced resolutions containing what they believed to be 'just' laws for the Red River settlement, and an organizational structure of leadership

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<sup>37</sup> Stanley, *Louis Riel*, p. 58.



in the form of a military force.<sup>38</sup> When McDougall was not allowed to proceed to Fort Garry and 'officially' take over from the Hudson's Bay Company rule, it was not merely a futile act employed by the Métis to only forestall the inevitable take over by the Canadian Government. Even though the Métis had no chance of stopping the Canadian take over by force of arms, this manoeuvre was an attempt to gain a guarantee for rights to the Métis people of Red River. Riel said that the National Committee would not allow the Canadian Government to rule without the committee members and those who they represent being consulted first. They (the committee) wanted a delegation from the settlement to negotiate with the Canadian Government the terms and conditions under which the Red River settlement would become part of Canada.<sup>39</sup>

The take over of (Upper) Fort Garry in early November of 1869 by a group of Métis under the leadership of Louis Riel and other members of the National Committee was the first step in the creation of a provisional government, in that it secured for itself a strategic stronghold from which to conduct its business. Riel wanted to obtain support for his actions and cause from the English speaking settlers of the area, so he and his Métis representatives held meetings with delegates from the English speaking parishes. The delegates conveyed their views on the feeling within their communities. These meetings were not a great success, however, all sides agreed upon a list of rights which Riel had drawn up, and which was to be presented to the Canadian Government. When the Canadian Government agreed

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 61-62.

<sup>39</sup> Charlebois, *The Life or Louis Riel*, p. 38.

to these rights, the region would join the rest of Canada. Other than this list of rights, Riel received little in the way of support for his Provisional Government concept among the English-speaking community at Red River.<sup>40</sup> The English settlers did not want a provisional government for their settlement. They considered this an act against the sovereignty of the Queen, as most were still loyal to the Monarchy.<sup>41</sup>

Since Riel could not obtain full support from the English speaking settlers, he undertook other actions to limit the threat to Métis' interests from pro-Canadian factions in the settlement. Riel and a large group of his men surrounded the store of John Schultz, the principal leader of the Canada First movement at Red River. Riel took Schultz and forty-eight armed Canadian Loyalists prisoner<sup>42</sup> and held them at Fort Garry until they each swore on a Bible that they would not take up arms against the Provisional Government.<sup>43</sup>

Charlebois states that Riel took this action because he had heard reports that Col. Dennis (an associate of Schultz) was soliciting the aid of Sioux Indians south of the 49th parallel, and arming them with rifles. Riel thought it best to disarm any internal threat to reduce the chances of success that an external force would have in attacking Fort Garry.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Bowsfield, *Louis Riel: Rebel of the Western Frontier or Victim of Politics and Prejudice?*, p. 37-38.

<sup>41</sup> Stanley, *Louis Riel*, p. 70-71.

<sup>42</sup> Bowsfield, *Louis Riel: Rebel of the Western Frontier or Victim of Politics and Prejudice?*, p. 40.

<sup>43</sup> Osler, *The Man Who Had to Hang: Louis Riel*, p.69.

<sup>44</sup> Charlebois, *The Life of Louis Riel*, p. 46.

Given the fact that Riel and the Métis had successfully taken over the settlement at Fort Garry, and because there was little support from the English speaking settlers for a pro-Canadian counter-rebellion, Colonel Dennis, head of the Canadian faction at Red River, quietly slipped out of the Red River settlement. He joined William McDougall, in Pembina, in what is now North Dakota.<sup>45</sup>

McDougall at this time was contemplating what action to take, if any, to deal with the situation at Red River. In addition, he had to suffer the antics of the American Enos Stutsman, a U.S. Customs agent in Pembina who favoured annexation of the Red River settlement and surrounding area by the U.S. Stutsman stated in the local papers that "Nothing short of a very liberal government, independence, or annexation to the United States will satisfy the whole of the people."<sup>46</sup> With this sort of atmosphere surrounding McDougall, he set forth (for a second time) to secure, what he believed was the Crown's legitimate rule over the territory.

Riel had a difficult time rallying support for his provisional government among the non-Métis settlers of the area. The taking up of arms by members of Riel's group frightened the other settlers and made them suspicious of the Métis' intent. Even though Riel's group had taken over physical control of the settlement, they could not gain enough support from the English speaking settlers, to democratically, much less legitimately, take charge and negotiate their demands with the Government of Canada. The provisional government, with

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<sup>45</sup> Osler, *The Man Who Had to Hang: Louis Riel*, p. 69.

<sup>46</sup> Howard, *Strange Empire: A Narrative of the North*, p. 119.

Riel as head, nearly came to an agreement with the English speaking delegates representing their parishes. This would have lent more credibility to Riel's proclamations outside, as well as inside Fort Garry. But because Riel saw it as too much of a compromise of his ideals, and because he thought the English-speaking members of the committee would not go along with this compromise anyway, he rejected the proposed agreement.

All the while, the Canadian Loyalist prisoners put in the stockade were causing problems. Several escape attempts were made, and many succeeded, including Schultz, Charles Mair, and an Orangeman by the name of Thomas Scott. By this time as well, the Canadian Government's chief negotiator, Donald A. Smith, arrived at Red River and attempted to convince the settlers that the Canadian Government would take care of them if they would agree to join the rest of the Dominion. Smith was at the time of his appointment to the position of negotiator also the chief representative of the Hudson's Bay Company. It was thought that the settlers, and especially the Métis, many of whom were employed by the company as fur trappers, hunters and traders, would be more receptive to him than to the likes of William McDougall.<sup>47</sup>

Smith was dispatched because the Canadian Government had a great fear that it would lose the territory to the Americans through annexation. It was hoped that his presence would reconcile the settlers to the fact that they would be better off by being part of Canada, rather than the United States. Smith presented the Canadian Government's offer to the Red River settlement during a mass meeting called by Riel specifically for that purpose. Riel

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<sup>47</sup> Stanely, *Louis Riel*, p. 83-103.

thought that if Smith's offer contained promises to negotiate with the settlement for its entrance into the Dominion, then there would be good chance that the settlers would legitimize the provisional government under his control by supporting it in such negotiations.

Unfortunately for Riel, it was Smith who won the favour of the crowd. Seeing this, Riel proposed a convention of forty delegates be assembled to discuss Smith's proposal and tender a new list of demands. In this way, Riel would be able to better control the response Smith would receive. Riel did succeed in getting one major motion passed and put on the list of demands, and that was the condition of Provincial status being given to the settlement upon entering the Dominion. Smith's reaction to this was that he could not guarantee that this demand would be accepted by the Canadian Government, and he suggested that the settlement send delegates to Ottawa to negotiate the final settlement in person. Riel proposed that if delegates were to be sent to Ottawa, they should be officially and democratically elected representatives. Thus elections were held to produce delegates who would best promote the concerns of the settlement, with some of them travelling to Ottawa to deliver their sentiments in person.<sup>48</sup>

It was at this time that a group of approximately 350 Canadians marched from Portage La Prairie, to near Fort Garry, and then on to Kildonan. Their intent was to incite the settlers into denouncing the provisional government, and somehow to facilitate the Canadian group in securing of the Fort. The Canadians, after initiating this movement, realized they had no popular support, and began to disband and go home. A small group of

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<sup>48</sup> W.L. Morton, *Manitoba: The Birth of a Province*, (Altona, Manitoba: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1965) p. 25-34.

them passed close by Fort Garry on the return trip, and this time caught the attention of the Métis guards of the provisional government. The Canadians were taken into custody. Some members of this group had just previously been involved in an incident which resulted in the death of two youths. These events prompted Riel to hold a court martial for those involved in the incident. The end result was that four members of the Canadian group were sentenced to be shot for their holding the legitimacy of the provisional government in contempt. Three of the men were pardoned soon after sentencing. The fourth, Major Boulton, who was in charge of the Canadian group, was later pardoned as well, after Smith and Riel came to an agreement that Smith would do all he could to encourage the settlers to have confidence in the provisional government, in exchange for sparing Boulton's life.<sup>49</sup>

As Riel's political achievements were adding up, the delegation of the provisional government was about to leave for Ottawa. Riel was on the verge of obtaining from the Canadian government recognition that Red River settlers, especially the Métis, had a legal claim to the land upon which they lived and derived their livelihood. The Government of Canada seemed prepared to ensure that their land would not be sold from under them and given to another. Unfortunately for Riel and his provisional government, Thomas Scott was about to create a serious challenge for Riel and his authority. Scott's actions and Riel's reaction were decisive in forming the negative opinion of English Canadians towards the Métis leader for decades to come.

Scott was a trouble-maker in the eyes of the provisional government. He was part

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<sup>49</sup> Osler, *The Man Who Had to Hang: Louis Riel*, p. 103.

of the Canadian group's feeble attempt to oust the Métis from Fort Garry and take control themselves. After he was captured with the rest of Boulton's men, Scott and a few others attempted to escape. This plan failed when the guards discovered the plot. At this point Scott began hurling insults at his jailors. A fight ensued between Scott and some of the Guards. A member of the provisional government was summoned to intercede, at which point the violence was halted.<sup>50</sup>

Riel, upon hearing of the commotion that Scott has caused, had the prisoner brought to him. After questioning Scott, and listening to his condemnation of the provisional government, and Métis in general, Riel decided to act decisively and stop Scott from causing more unrest. Riel believed that if he did not punish Scott quickly, the Métis guards which had taken the brunt of the verbal abuse, would take matters into their own hands. Riel could not afford to lose control over his men, as this would make his leadership seem ineffective, and the settlers would lose confidence in the provisional government.<sup>51</sup>

Riel and the other council members decided to court martial Scott. On March 3rd, Thomas Scott was given his court martial, in which sworn witnesses gave their account of his conduct. Then Scott was sentenced to death before a firing squad. Riel did not have to proceed with Scott's execution; he had the authority to pardon him as he had the others. Riel was caught in a tenuous position that did not present a solution that would have satisfied all those involved. Riel chose to pacify the Métis guards, who might have killed Scott

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<sup>50</sup> Stanley, *Louis Riel*, p. 112.

<sup>51</sup> Bowsfield, *Louis Riel: Rebel of the Western Frontier or Victim of Politics and Prejudice?*, p. 73-74.

themselves. The court martial was to give the impression of legality and fairness, along with the justification of being for the good of the state. Despite numerous attempts by some English settlers as well as Donald Smith to have the execution stopped, Thomas Scott was shot on March 4th, 1870.

With this one act Riel showed his Métis brethren that he was serious in advancing their rights for the land on which they had lived for generations. In what many English-speaking settlers interpreted as a brutal and senseless act of murder, the shooting of Scott also swayed many in Ontario in their dislike or hatred of Riel and the Métis cause.

Despite the use of a court martial to persuade settlers on the legality of the proceedings, there were still many who were appalled by the act. This, however, did not incite settlers to openly revolt against the provisional government. There were others though, who did stir up feelings of hatred toward the Métis, and Riel in particular. These were people like Charles Schultz and John Denison in Ontario, members of the Canada First party, who were outraged at the execution of a fellow Canadian at the hands of "half-breed savages," whose lineage (French Catholicism) was not fondly embraced by English Canadians.

The English-Canadian press, in particular the *Globe*, targeted the French clergy at Red River as being behind the movement to deny McDougall entrance into the settlement, and arousing the Métis militancy.<sup>52</sup> While it is true that the French Catholic clergy supported the Métis during the resistance to Canadian imposed rule, it was not the clergy which

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 60-61.



initiated the acts of resistance. The Métis settlers who felt their land and livelihood threatened, were the ones who brought about the Red River uprising. The clergy assisted the movement by using its powers of persuasion on certain Quebec members of the House of Commons to pressure the Canadian Government into negotiating with the settlers of Red River, but they were not the impetus for the resistance.

English-Canadians, especially those from Ontario, realized that the French Catholic clergy, Riel, and the Métis, were impeding the Dominion's right to control Rupert's Land. The possibility of not having Rupert's Land become part of Canada insulted the pride and threatened the prosperity of many English-Canadians who saw Western expansion as an economic boon. The response to this perceived threat was to lash out at those responsible: the French clergy, Riel, and the Métis. They were considered either as enemies of the state, or as misguided savages lead by a self-serving dictator.

Thus the Métis and the French catholic clergy were perceived to be the enemies of the Upper Canadian loyalists, Canada Firsters, the Ontario Orangemen and the like. These pro-Canadian forces attempted to persuade the Government of Canada to act quickly and decisively in obtaining the territories for the Dominion, without the humiliation of having to bargain with what many of them felt was an illegitimate and unjust provisional government.

The Canadian government was forced, by pressure from its Quebec members, to approach the situation more diplomatically, as the Quebec members of the federal government supported the Catholic clergy, who in turn supported the Métis. The English-Canadian members of Parliament could not afford to alienate the Quebec members, and lose

their support in the House of Commons. It was the Conservative government under John A. MacDonald which chose to send Donald A. Smith to Red River, and also to have representatives from the provisional government come to Ottawa to put forth their demands in person.

John A. MacDonald had serious doubts about the intentions of Riel and his followers. He feared they would not peacefully join the Dominion, even though negotiations were already taking place. MacDonald stated in a private letter to Sir John Rose, dated March 11th, 1870, that because of the ill-advised attempts by McDougall and Dennis to wrestle power away from Riel, the chances of bringing the territories into the Dominion had been dealt a severe blow.

He (Riel) has put down two distinct attempts to upset his government, and American sympathizers will begin to argue that his government has acquired a legal status, and he will be readily persuaded of this fact himself. Besides, the longer he remains in power, the more unwilling he will be to resign it, and I have therefore, no great confidence in him ratifying any arrangements made here with the delegates. Under these circumstances the preparations for the expeditionary force must not be delayed. We shall receive the delegation with all kindness, and I think beyond a doubt, make an arrangement with them; but we shall, at the same time, prepare for the expedition to leave by the end of April or the beginning of May.<sup>53</sup>

MacDonald's lack of confidence in Riel's provisional government settling amicably with Ottawa compelled the Prime Minister to send a Military expeditionary force to Red River. This action took place even though the Manitoba Act had been ratified by Parliament, which gave the Red River settlement the legitimacy of being created as a Province.<sup>54</sup> Riel

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>54</sup> Stanley, *Louis Riel*, p. 150-152.

himself was quite pleased with the fact that he had helped bring a Province into being, and had at the same time secured lands for his people in the process. Unfortunately, a guarantee of amnesty was not given by the Canadian government to the leaders of the uprising and provisional government. Amnesty was not granted mainly because Ontario Orangemen and others called for punishment of those responsible for the execution of Thomas Scott and the infringement on British sovereignty. The granting of amnesty at this point would have been political suicide for the federal government.

When Wolseley's troops finally arrived at Fort Garry on August 24th, 1870, Riel had already fled, as he had learned from an English settler, James G. Stewart, that Wolseley intended to take Riel prisoner and possibly hang him.<sup>55</sup> It is difficult to say whether or not Riel's life was really in jeopardy. It was clear that the seeds of suspicion were planted in Riel's mind when he did not receive the assurance of amnesty from the Canadian government which would have guaranteed his safety.<sup>56</sup>

Once he left the fort, Riel went across the river to see Bishop Tache in St. Boniface. Soon after Riel went to his mother's home in St. Vital. He was disappointed that he had to leave his position of leadership in this way, but he did draw some consolation from the protection he had won for Métis interests. A short time later Riel, along with Ambroise Lepine and W.B. O'Donogue, left the Province of Manitoba, and headed south along the Red River, bound for Pembina.

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<sup>55</sup> Charlebois, *The Life of Louis Riel*, p. 86.

<sup>56</sup> Stanley, *Louis Riel*, p. 155.

### 4.2.1 Analysis

This part of Riel's life shows the complexity of social relations which can entangle a figure such as Riel. Not only were Riel's actions affecting those in the immediate vicinity (Red River), but also abroad in Ontario, Quebec, The Northwestern United States, and even as far away as London, England. To whom was Riel a hero? The Métis felt Riel was a great person for accomplishing so much for them. Following in his father's footsteps, Riel had stood up for the rights of the Métis.

The Métis see the heroic qualities of responsibility, bravery, and accomplishment displayed in Riel's actions. His charisma elevated him to the position of leader, even though he was only 25 years old. This quick ascent to power also emphasizes the intelligence Riel must have had to handle such a position.

The reasons for Riel being considered a hero to the Métis today appear obvious. What becomes less clear, though, is why it has taken so long for other groups to recognize his heroic deeds. There should be admiration for Riel's actions outside of the Métis community, as heroism is not completely ethnocentric. Recognition of Martin Luther King's heroism extends well beyond Black Americans, and Ghandi's beyond East Indians.

Perhaps understanding the views of those opposed to Riel's actions, such as Ontario Orangemen will provide some insight . They would portray negatively all actions taken by the Métis when Riel was in charge. George Denison, one of the leaders of the movement in Ontario who opposed Riel and his actions, commented on some of the resolutions decided upon by his group to try to persuade the government in Ottawa to not receive the delegates

from Red River and negotiate a settlement.

The resolutions carried cover three points. Firstly, a welcome to the refugees, and endorsement of their action in fearlessly, and at the sacrifice of their liberty and property, resisting the usurpation of power by the murderer Riel; secondly, advocating the adaption of decisive measures to suppress the revolt, and to afford speedy protection to the loyal subjects in the North-West, and thirdly declaring that 'It would be a gross injustice to the loyal inhabitants of Red River, humiliating to our national honour, and contrary to all British traditions for our Government to receive, negotiate, or treat with the emissaries of those who have robbed, imprisoned, and murdered loyal Canadians, whose only fault was zeal for British institutions, whose only crime was devotion to the old flag.' This last resolution, which was carried with great enthusiasm, was moved by Capt. James Bennett and seconded by myself.<sup>57</sup>

From the viewpoint of Ontario Orangemen, Riel was a murderer, and the Métis were robbers and jailors of innocent, patriotic, British-Canadian loyalists. The projection of one of the groups (the British-Canadian loyalists) as being good, and other (the Métis leaders) as evil further promoted the idea that Riel was not heroic in his actions. The heroic elements of bravery, responsibility, and accomplishment can be perceived differently in historical figures such as Riel, depending on one's point of reference. If a person is from a Métis background, one is more likely to perceive Riel as heroic because of the positive things that were brought to his people. If one is an Ontario Orangemen, then the actions of the figure are perceived as opposing the ideals of the group.

The point of reference of one's upbringing determines how one should generally view things, if one adheres to the belief system promulgated by the group. The people from Ontario, outraged at Riel's leadership of the provisional government, saw him as the

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<sup>57</sup> Bowsfield, *Louis Riel: Rebel of the Western Frontier or Victim of Politics and Prejudice?*, p. 84-85.

antithesis of all that they stood for as loyal Canadians. Riel was a French Catholic Métis, and was perceived (inaccurately) as being easily persuaded by the American annexationist movement to join the U.S. The Orangemen and the Canada-First party were predominantly Anglican, British, loyal to Canada and the Queen. Any suggestion that a part of the Empire wanted to break away and join another country, especially one like the U.S., with a confrontational past with England, seemed blasphemous.

Riel's actions, when viewed from this perspective, would not be considered heroic. Ontario loyalists would perceive that Riel threatened their vision, their "belief system". His acts disrupted how they thought the Dominion should develop. These "Canadians" not only wanted Riel removed, but also made an example of to all those who dared to threaten the Dominion.

The other Eastern Canadian interest group, the Québécois, were for reasons of cultural similarity able to empathize and sympathize with the Métis plight. They supported Riel and the provisional government's actions. The fact that the French Catholic clergy was directly and indirectly involved in the situation also influenced people in Quebec to support the Métis.

The Québécois could relate to the cause Riel was attempting to advance, as it was reminiscent to some degree of the English-French Canadian conflicts of the past. A more powerful force was attempting to subjugate a smaller, though socially cohesive group. The fact that the group had French-Catholic ties made the sympathy all the greater. From the perspective of the Québécois, it is clear that Riel was imbued with heroic qualities. These feelings may not have been as strong as those that existed among the Métis, who had a direct

stake in Riel's action, but they exist nonetheless.

In this first stage of Riel's heroic development (The Red River Uprising), we see that he demonstrated the characteristics of responsibility and achievement. His charisma persuaded the Métis to stand up for their rights, but his strong and intelligent leadership kept them from becoming rebellious or unruly, even though others goaded or encouraged such acts.

### **4.3 Between the Rebellions 1870-1884**

The account of Louis Riel's life thus far has covered one of two major events in his public life, in which the basis of his heroism lies. Between the Red River Uprising and the Batoche Rebellion of 1885, Riel was troubled emotionally to the degree of being housed in asylums in Quebec by friends and relatives who felt they were only trying to protect him from himself.

There was one notable accomplishment between the Red River and Batoche uprisings. Riel was elected to Parliament as a representative from the riding of Provencher, on three separate occasions. But because he was still in exile, a fugitive from the Canadian authorities, Riel could not take his seat in Ottawa. He was subsequently expelled from the House of Commons in April, 1874. Riel was banished from Canada soon after his expulsion from the House of Commons a second time in February, 1875, for a period of five years by Alexander MacKenzie's government. As for other members of Riel's provisional government, William O'Donoghue was also banished from Canada for a period of five years,

and Ambroise Lepine was tried, convicted of murder, and given a death sentence (which was soon thereafter commuted to 2 years imprisonment and permanent loss of voting rights). All others who were involved with the uprising or the provisional government were given amnesty by the federal government.

Between 1875 and 1884, Riel lived a transient life. He moved to the U.S. for a time, attempting to secure employment with the American federal government. When his attempts failed, Riel stayed with some friends in New York State. Riel's mental health was seriously affected by the difficulty of his situation.<sup>58</sup> He began having religious fantasies of himself being the saviour of the Métis, and that he was destined to create a new homeland for all the oppressed people of the world. He stayed in New York until his condition worsened and he became a difficult guest. A friend was summoned to take him back to Montreal, to stay with his uncle John Lee.

Again Riel became a burden, and at the insistence of relatives and friends, he voluntarily allowed himself to be admitted to an asylum under a false name. Although content for a while, Riel could not maintain his composure. Friends and relatives, fearing that others might uncover his identity (there were still rewards being offered by Ontario Orangemen for his capture or assassination), moved Riel to another asylum. Riel spent almost two years of his life under close medical supervision, until his release in January of 1878.<sup>59</sup> On his release, the doctors at the hospital warned Riel to avoid situations which

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<sup>58</sup> Hartwell Bowsfield, ed. *Louis Riel: Selected Readings* (Toronto:Copp Clark Pittman Ltd., 1988), Section 4, *The Question of Louis Riel's Sanity* by Olive Knox, p.186-187.

<sup>59</sup> Charlebois, *The Life of Louis Riel*, p. 100-111.



could disturb him emotionally. This meant that life in politics for Riel was not advisable.

Riel moved back to the U.S., as he stood a good chance of being recognized in Canada, and he knew he was not safe in the Dominion as long as a price remained on his head. He again set out to find employment. His journey took him across the Northern United States. Riel stopped in Pembina and St. Joseph's, where he visited family and friends. He was informed by Ambroise Lepine of the happenings at Red River since his departure. Even Riel's mother and sister came to visit him while he was there. Once Riel left the border towns of Pembina and St. Joseph's in 1880, he travelled the northern U.S. prairie, living off the land with Métis nomads. The Métis group that Riel was travelling with survived by hunting and trading with others they met in their wanderings.

In 1881 Riel was in Montana, and it was there that Riel met the woman whom he would eventually marry, Marguerite Belhumeur. She was the daughter of a Québécois who had married a Cree woman from the area. Louis and Marguerite had several children together, and within two years of their marriage, Riel became an American citizen.<sup>60</sup>

During his time in the United States, Riel attempted to better the lives of the American Métis, whom Riel had found to be in a worse predicament than those at Red River. The Montana Métis were held in low regard by the white population of the territory because of the general belief that many Métis were making a living trading or selling alcohol to the Natives. Since this contributed to the debauchery of both cultures, many whites had little

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 116-118.

respect for the Métis as a whole.<sup>61</sup> Riel saw this rampant abuse of alcohol destroying an entire Métis culture, and decided to do something about it. He attempted, with limited success, to curb the amount of alcohol that was available to the Métis from bottling agents. Riel even went so far as to become a special deputy U.S. Marshall in his efforts to gather evidence to support his case that it was illegal for persons to sell alcohol to the Métis, as it was at time against federal law to sell liquor to "Indians" in Montana Territory.

Riel was also a prominent figure in political elections held in the state. He was again seen as being very influential within the Métis community. If one political party could secure Riel's influence working for them, the advantage of having a large bloc of Métis votes could definitely have an impact on the outcome of the election. Six months after the elections were held in 1882, Riel was arrested and charged with using his influence to have two Métis' vote, even though neither were U.S. citizens. The charge was later dismissed when the presiding judge declared that there was no evidence to suggest Riel was party to such conduct.<sup>62</sup>

During his stay in Montana, Riel was asked by the Jesuits to teach at their facility. The Jesuits ran a mission called St. Peters Boy's School, just west of what is now Great Falls, Montana. Riel believed that it was important to educate the Métis boys in ways that would help them adapt to the changes that were now affecting their people. Riel knew that the

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<sup>61</sup> Marcel Giraud, *Le Métis Canadien*, (Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle, 1945. First English language addition, *The Métis of the Canadian West vol.II*. Translated by George Woodcock. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1986) p. 404-406.

<sup>62</sup> Charlebois, *The Life of Louis Riel*, p. 118.

nomadic hunters of past and present generations had no future, and if the Métis as a distinct culture were to survive, they would have to change the way they lived off the land.

Riel visited Red River to see family and friends in the summer of 1883. He found the Métis suffering economic hardship because bison herds were diminishing and a recent influx of immigrants from Ontario restricted the once free roaming Métis even more. Many left Red River for Saskatchewan, in the hope of rediscovering their lost way of life.<sup>63</sup> Riel returned to Montana after his visit to Red River, where he continued teaching at the Jesuit mission.

#### 4.3.1 Analysis

This part of Riel's life shows many weaknesses within his personality, but also two points that contribute to his heroism. First, Riel was elected three times to Parliament, even when federal and provincial governments branded him an outlaw, and he could not actively represent his constituency in the House of Commons. This shows the charismatic influence Riel had on the Métis in Manitoba. The second point is that Riel went to Montana and attempted to improve the lives of the Métis in that region. This shows his dedication and responsibility to those he considered less fortunate. These two examples indicate that Riel continued to be a heroic figure to his own people after leaving Red River in 1870, and also that he did not lose his determination to assist others in need.

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<sup>63</sup> Giraud, *Le Métis Canadien*, p. 418-419.

#### 4.4 The Northwest Rebellion 1884-1885

Riel and his family were little more than a year together at the Jesuit mission when a delegation of four men from Saskatchewan came to see him in June of 1884.<sup>64</sup> These four men, three French speaking Métis (Gabriel Dumont, Michel Dumas, and Moise Ouelette), and an English half-breed by the name of James Isbister, were sent by disgruntled settlers of the Batoche region in Saskatchewan. They hoped that Riel would be persuaded to join their cause, which was to force the Federal government in Ottawa to act on their grievances which had been thus far ignored.<sup>65</sup>

The Métis refused to pay Ottawa for what it called Crown lands and demanded the land they originally settled be legally granted to them, not sold from beneath them.<sup>66</sup> Their position was similar to the Métis demands at Red River in 1869. It was thought that Riel's experience in political negotiations was an asset that could be used to the Métis' advantage. It took Riel only one day to decide to cast off the security of a stable occupation and home-life and put his effort once again into securing Métis land rights. Riel and his family, along with the delegation from Saskatchewan, arrived in Batoche on July 6th, 1884. Aside from the general Métis land claims, Riel had also come back to claim personally his allotment of land which all Métis at Red River were granted in the 1870 settlement with the Federal

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<sup>64</sup> Charlebois, *The Life of Louis Riel*, p. 119.

<sup>65</sup> George Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont: The Métis Chief and his Lost World*, (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1975) p. 137.

<sup>66</sup> Charlebois, *The Life of Louis Riel* p. 122-123.

government, which he had lost during his 15 years in exile from his native land. With the settlement of his land claim, he hoped to initiate the process by which all Métis land claims would be settled.<sup>67</sup>

The situation Riel found in Saskatchewan was similar to that which existed at Red River in 1869. The Federal government was not settling land claims to the satisfaction of those living off it; especially those who settled without governmental approval or registration. The Métis, many of whom had left Red River in the 1870's because of the overcrowding due to recent immigration into that region, had hoped that the largely unsettled areas in the Northwest Territories (Saskatchewan in particular) would provide for them the living space essential to their semi-nomadic way of life. Other Métis from Southern Saskatchewan and Alberta, who were affected by the declining bison herds (which they hunted for meat and skins), began to settle permanently in the central region of Saskatchewan also. Here they hoped to live off the land by adopting new means more in keeping with the limited area available to them. By the early 1880's, Métis no longer rode out on the buffalo hunt, for there were few, if any large herds in existence by that time. The time had come for the Métis to turn to agriculture as a means of living off the land; there was no other choice.<sup>68</sup>

By the mid-1880's however, the Métis, along with Native Indians of the territory, were upset with the action (or inaction) of the government in Ottawa in settling claims they had to the land on which they were attempting to survive. Natives were dissatisfied with the

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>68</sup> Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont: The Métis Chief and his Lost World*, p. 117-119.

reserve areas designated for their occupation, and were resisting signing treaties which they knew would drastically change their way of life forever. The Métis lived off unsurveyed Crown land and had built up small communities. They were told by the government that when the time came for the lands to be surveyed, they would have to pay \$2 an acre if they wished to remain on the land. Since each settler claimed several hundred acres, the amount to be paid could not be afforded by most of the Métis. The Métis hoped Ottawa would grant the land to them, and allow them to continue residence on it.<sup>69</sup>

Gabriel Dumont, one of the four members of the delegation who had gone to Montana to convince Riel to return to Canada and help the Métis, was one of the principal leaders of the Métis land claims movement in Saskatchewan. Though not as formally educated as Riel, Dumont was an intelligent leader. He was able to communicate in six Native languages and French. Most of his education came from being immersed in a semi-nomadic culture in which he had hunted and traded buffalo skins and pemmican most of his life. Dumont seemed to have all the natural physical attributes that were lacking in Riel. He was a good horseman, an accurate shot with rifle or bow and arrow. Dumont was also a good fisherman, canoeist and swimmer. He knew the country well, and often acted as a guide.<sup>70</sup> Dumont was a man who knew how to live off nature, and did so, whereas Riel was more comfortable in civilization, though he continually fought battles to prevent it from encroaching on his people's way of life.

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<sup>69</sup> Charlebois, *The Life of Louis Riel*, p. 122-126.

<sup>70</sup> Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont: The Métis Chief and his Lost World*, p. 44-47.

When Riel arrived in Saskatchewan, Dumont did not seek to lead the political protest of Métis land claims, for he understood Riel to be more adept than himself in these matters. Métis political agitation of the federal government brought about no change in the situation. A poor crop year for 1884 added to the feelings of discontent. Many Métis also felt that the Catholic clergy, who had shown support for their cause in previous protests, did not lend a guiding or helping hand when it was expected they would. It appeared that the clergy were trying to dissuade more devout Métis from participating in the movement. Riel and Dumont, among others, met with Bishop Grandin in September of 1884, the purpose of which was to present the Bishop with a list of demands and concerns to be passed on to Ottawa. It was hoped that the Catholic clergy would impress upon the Federal government the need to consider and act on this petition.<sup>71</sup>

The clergy had as little success as the Métis in arousing Ottawa to act. When a petition encompassing all concerns and demands was sent in December 1884, directly to the Secretary of State in Ottawa - J.A.Champleau, and received no substantial reply, this inaction made militant factions of the Métis conclude that they must physically force the Federal government to respond.

Riel felt frustrated in his failure to produce tangible results for his people. He had also had several confrontations with members of the clergy over their lack of support in furthering Métis rights, and began stating publicly that there needed to be reform in the church. Riel also brought up once again his "mission" to create a new homeland for the oppressed people

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 146-157.

of the world, which his Métis brethren would be the first to occupy. Riel seemed to be regressing into the religious visions that he had had during his exile and stays in the asylums in Quebec; ones the doctors had warned him might re-occur if he did not avoid extremely stressful situations.<sup>72</sup>

Riel's state of mind frightened the clergy. They attempted to persuade Riel to leave the country. Riel mentioned that his own personal claim had not yet been settled with the Federal government. Father Andre, Superior of the District, took Riel to mean by this that money could appease him enough to leave. Though Riel stated (it is not known if whether he was serious or not) that he felt the Federal government owed him a \$100,000 for the loss of his Red River property and the suffering he had to endure while in exile, it is doubtful that he believed he would ever be compensated fully for it.<sup>73</sup>

John A. MacDonald mentioned in a debate in the House of Commons in March of 1885, that he believed Riel's sole motive for returning to Canada in 1884 was to extort money from the Federal government using threat of violent insurrection if he was not paid. The sum of \$5,000 was mentioned by MacDonald as Riel's price, though he does not mention how this sum was arrived at.<sup>74</sup> It appears the \$5,000 figure came from D.H. MacDowell's recommendation to Lt. Governor Dewdney that this amount would be sufficient to persuade Riel to leave the territory. This sum was based on a conversation

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<sup>72</sup> Girard, *Le Métis Canadien*, p. 442-448.

<sup>73</sup> Charlebois, *The Life of Louis Riel*, p. 137-138.

<sup>74</sup> Bowsfield, *Louis Riel: Rebel of the Western Frontier or Victim of Politics and Prejudice?*, p. 124.



MacDowell had with Riel. MacDowell at the time was a representative in the Council of the North-West Territories.<sup>75</sup> Riel was never offered any sort of settlement, so it is impossible to say what he might have done. Given that Riel had dedicated much of his life to fighting the injustices thrust upon his people, monetary appeasement for himself when nothing had been done to change the Métis situation, may not have been sufficient to induce him to leave.

While all this was going on, Dumont was contemplating the actions needed to make Ottawa realize that the Métis were not going to be forced into accepting what would ultimately destroy them as a cohesive group. He concluded that the only available course of action was to take up arms and use force in displaying the Métis dissatisfaction with the government. All the military success the Métis were to have during the Rebellion can be directly attributed to Dumont's prowess. It is clear that Riel, while being politically masterful, was not the leader of the Métis militia. His own indecisiveness and growing delusions of a religious mission only decreased the effectiveness of the Métis forces.

Seeing little hope for positive government action regarding Métis demands, Riel mentioned on March 1st, 1885, that force might be the only means by which the Métis could secure their objectives.<sup>76</sup> The next day, Riel went to Father Andre and asked his permission to set up a provisional government. Andre would not agree to any such action, and Riel left realizing that a show of force would be needed to attain such a goal. Riel hoped that only

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<sup>75</sup> Charlebois, *The Life of Louis Riel*, p. 136-137.

<sup>76</sup> Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont: The Métis Chief and his Lost World*, p. 159.

a show of force would be needed, but conceded that the use of force could not be ruled out.<sup>77</sup>

With Riel and Dumont gathering men to support their efforts, a misleading report from Lawrence Clarke (a Hudson's Bay Company official) to a group of Métis at the ferrying crossing at Batoche started the events that led to the North-West Rebellion. Superintendent Crozier of the North West Mounted Police at Prince Albert heard rumours of a rebellion being imminent, and informed Commissioner Irvine in Regina of the situation. Lt. Governor Dewdney was also informed, and after communicating with Ottawa, it was decided that a force of 100 men would be sent to Prince Albert from Regina in an effort to settle things down. Lawrence Clarke, hearing of this troop movement, told the Métis at the ferry crossing of the action being taken. The story became distorted (though it is impossible to say by whom) and Riel and Dumont were told that 500 men were riding to arrest the Métis leaders responsible for conspiring to commit treason.<sup>78</sup> Since the Métis were already preparing for action of some sort, this report only escalated their actions.

Riel and Dumont, with the men that they had gathered, went to Batoche to obtain supplies. They confiscated weapons and powder from a local shop owner, whom they took prisoner, along with several others deemed useful as hostages. In this situation Dumont gave orders to his men on what to do, and Riel acted as an advisor on Dumont's strategy. Dumont was in a familiar role now, though it was not buffalo they were on the hunt for this time. In contrast to Dumont's style, Riel was not a natural leader of men in the field. His personality

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<sup>77</sup> Charlebois, *The Life of Louis Riel*, p. 141-142.

<sup>78</sup> Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont: The Métis Chief and his Lost World*, p. 161-164.

was more suited to speeches and charismatic displays of emotion in promoting a cause. He acted as political strategist and spiritual leader, while Dumont was the military tactician in charge of securing immediate goals.

After appropriating another store of weapons, and after men under Dumont's direction cut telegraph lines in the area, the Métis gathered at Batoche to form the Provisional government of Saskatchewan. Gabriel Dumont was nominated by Riel, and elected as Adjutant General, in control of all military forces. Dumont hand picked the others who would make up this government, including his own relatives. Riel himself declined to take any post, as he was officially an American citizen, and did not want the representativeness of the government to be in question.<sup>79</sup>

Dumont immediately created a War Council, and organized his force, now numbering some 300 men, and planned the action to be taken. Unfortunately for Dumont, his plan of attack was too violent for Riel to accept. It involved surprise attacks on Fort Carlton and Prince Albert, with the objective of capturing arms and ammunition. Riel was not the warrior that Dumont was, and wished him to proceed by more diplomatic means. A compromise was finally worked out between Dumont and Riel, in which a strongly worded notice to surrender was sent to the commanding officer of Fort Carlton, stating that if the occupants failed to comply, force would be used to make them do so. This compromise delayed action on Fort Carlton, and eventually led to the Métis abandoning that plan of attack, as the element of surprise was lost; Crozier forces did not surrender, and the English

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 165-166.

speaking half-breeds (whose support would have furthered the Métis cause) remained neutral.<sup>80</sup> All the battles fought during the rebellion by the Métis were generally defensive in nature. The Métis did attempt ambushes, but these failed to produce the desired results.

Crozier's main force was ordered to Duck Lake when it became known that the Métis that had set up camp there and had repulsed a small force of 22 men, made up mostly of North-West Mounted Police regulars. The small force was sent to guard Duck Lake from Métis take-over, not knowing at the time that the Métis already held it. Crozier's forces from Fort Carlton approached Duck Lake, and were spotted by Métis sentries, who warned of the police advance. The Métis sent out two representatives to discuss a surrender of the police forces to the Métis. A scuffle broke out and the two emissaries were shot dead, one of them being Dumont's older brother, Isidore. Immediately after the first shots were fired, both sides opened up on one another. Dumont himself led the Métis into action. Riel, clutching a crucifix he had taken from the church in Duck Lake, stood behind the lines and shouted inspirational messages to the Métis engaged in battle. Dumont was wounded in the head by a bullet, but continued to instruct his troops to fight on. Crozier, sensing that his forces were losing the fight, retreated. Another of Dumont's Brothers, Edouard, wished to pursue the fleeing Mounties to finish them off, but Riel persuaded him not to do so, wanting no more bloodshed.<sup>81</sup> The battle itself lasted about half an hour, with 5 persons on the Métis side, and

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 168-170.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 172-176.

12 from the North-West Mounted Police force killed.<sup>82</sup>

The Métis had inflicted defeat upon the government forces. However, this battle could have been more decisive if Riel had not opposed a massacre of the government forces when they retreated from battle, and again when Gabriel Dumont proposed an ambush of Crozier's column as it made its way back to Prince Albert.<sup>83</sup> Thus Riel's humanity had cost the Métis forces a military advantage.

The government in Ottawa, realizing that the situation was getting out of hand, sent a small army of about 6,000 soldiers into the North-West Territories to deal with the rebellion. Under the command of Major-General Frederick D. Middleton, they marched north from their bases at Qu'Appelle, and set out to attack Batoche from the East. The Métis forces were vastly outnumbered, and lacked the weaponry and supplies that the Canadian army had brought with it from Eastern Canada. It was the Métis inaction in dealing with the government forces immediately, though, that substantially diminished their military effectiveness. Certainly Riel's influence in promoting a sit and wait strategy, rather than taking the offensive, which Dumont had hoped to do, contributed to the rebellion's lack of success. Finally, Dumont could wait no longer, as he knew the opportunity to strike a decisive blow at the enemy was quickly fading. In George Woodcock's book, Dumont is quoted as saying: "I told Riel that I could no longer accept his humanitarian advice, that I

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<sup>82</sup> Charlebois, *The Life of Louis Riel*, p. 147-148.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

intended to go out and shoot at the invaders, and that my men supported me."<sup>84</sup> Riel's power of persuasion could no longer convince Dumont to act defensively, and so Riel realizing this, told Dumont to act as he thought necessary.<sup>85</sup>

The battle of Fish Creek, which took place south of Batoche, had originally started out as Dumont's plan to ambush Middleton's force as it marched toward the Métis settlement. Dumont's force, the night before the battle, was weakened when Riel had gone back to Batoche with fifty men to reinforce the settlement because of rumours that another military force was advancing from a different direction on the Métis there. The action did not go as Dumont had planned, as the element of surprise was lost when some of Middleton's advance scouts came up to the ambush site and spotted some of Dumont's men. The battle began with both sides firing wildly, and it appears that many of Dumont's men were frightened off by intense exchange of weaponry. Only a short time into the action Dumont had less than one-half of the troops he originally started with. Even though his forces were severely weakened by desertions, Dumont refused to retreat. With the men that he had left, Dumont continued to engage the Canadian troops in gunfire, and when ammunition began to run low, he had his soldiers start fires in the bushes and grass in an attempt to confuse the enemy.

Métis reinforcements from Batoche did not arrive until late in the day, to aid Dumont and his beleaguered men. From the account Dumont himself gives, it appears that the reason the reinforcements took so long in arriving, was that Riel had insisted that the reserve Métis

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<sup>84</sup> Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont: The Métis Chief and his Lost World*, p. 194-195.

<sup>85</sup> Charlebois, *The Life of Louis Riel*, p. 179.

fighters stay in Batoche, even though he and others heard the battle going on from the settlement. During the battle of Fish Creek Riel spent his time in Batoche praying and encouraging others to do likewise.<sup>86</sup> The Canadian forces, realizing there would be little gained from sustaining the attack and with night fast approaching, retreated to a safer position. The Métis, exhausted, cold, and wet from the rain that fell all day, themselves stopped to tend to their dead and wounded. After they ate and rested, the Métis forces moved back to Batoche.<sup>87</sup> The battle of Fish Creek had produced only seven casualties for the Métis, numbering four dead and three wounded. The Canadians had approximately 50 casualties: ten dead and forty wounded.

At approximately the same time as these actions were taking place, the Native Chiefs Big Bear and Poundmaker were rising up and attacking white settlements in their areas of Frog Lake, Fort Pitt, Battleford, and Cut Knife. The Natives saw all whites as the symbol of oppression which caused their suffering, and when they heard that the Métis had stood up to the North-West Mounted Police, many of them believed the time had come to halt the white encroachment on their land. The native attacks on white settlements were quashed by the more numerous, better armed and supplied Canadian troops and soon thereafter Big Bear and Poundmaker surrendered.

Riel, Dumont, and the rest of the Métis gathered at Batoche, and awaited Middleton's attack. Dumont and other Métis would have preferred a more offensive resistance, but it was

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<sup>86</sup> Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont: The Métis Chief and his Lost World*, p. 203.

<sup>87</sup> Howard, *Strange Empire: A Narrative of the North*, p. 429-430.

Riel's insistence that in the defence of Batoche, the Métis would make their stand. As Woodcock states:

Riel's plan was for the Métis to close themselves into the miniature city of God that Batoche had become in his mind, with no way of escape, so that the only alternatives would be defeat (probable) or victory (a miracle).<sup>88</sup>

At Batoche the Canadian forces totalled 850 soldiers, while the Métis numbered probably less than 300. Middleton's advance began May 9th, 1885, but for three days he could not bring his troops into a position that he felt tenable enough to strike decisively at the Métis. On the fourth day of fighting, the frustration of the Canadian forces showed in the action of two of its officers. Colonels Williams and Grasett, without orders to do so from Middleton, rushed their companies of soldiers through the heart of the Métis positions, and effectively routed the rebel forces, causing most of the Métis to retreat frantically from Batoche.<sup>89</sup> With this turn of events, the Métis resistance was crushed, and only a few fought on to their death in town, as most fled or were captured. Riel and Dumont both retreated to the woods outside of Batoche, where they saw and spoke with each other for the last time.

Several days later, on May 15th, after being told he would be given protection until his case was decided by the Canadian government, Riel surrendered to Middleton. Dumont refused to surrender, and eventually found his way to the U.S. border. Soon after, however, he and his travelling companion Michel Dumas were arrested by American troops that had

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<sup>88</sup> Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont: The Métis Chief and his Lost World*, p. 209.

<sup>89</sup> G.H. Needler, *Louis Riel: The Rebellion of 1885*, (Toronto: Burns & MacEachern, 1957) p. 49-50.



been alerted that the fugitives were planning on fleeing to the United States. Dumont and Dumas were both set free on May 29th, 1885, after the Canadian government failed to ask the U.S. government for their extradition. The two were able to ride away knowing they were no longer fugitives, as long as they remained in America.<sup>90</sup> Riel, on the other hand, was to face the brunt of the Canadian government's wrath, as he was the political agitator for much of what had taken place during the uprising, though he was not personally violent in anyway to anyone during the course of the rebellion. In fact, as has been noted earlier, his humanitarianism probably saved the lives of many fighting for the Dominion.

Unfortunately for Riel, as is true in most cases, it is the leaders of such insurrections who are held responsible when brought to the victor's justice. Thus Riel was put on trial in Regina, for High Treason for his acts against the Dominion of Canada. Riel's attorneys used insanity as the defence, which failed because Riel acted and spoke too competently to convince the jury he was insane. His disposition in court was calm, and when he spoke, he did so intelligently. While he did not deny involvement in the acts he was charged with committing, he stressed that his motives were righteous. He attempted to convince the jury that he was fighting for the rights of the Métis, and not his own blood-thirsty vanity (which the prosecution claimed), nor the religious fantasies of himself being a saviour (as his defense counsel stated). Riel repeatedly spoke out of turn in court, trying to convey to the judge that his defense council was not asking the necessary questions to the witnesses that he felt would prove his innocence. With the defense counsel limiting the jury's decision

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<sup>90</sup> Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont: The Métis Chief and his Lost World*, p. 226-229.

making to whether Riel was sane or not, the jury had only to agree that Riel was sane, and thus by the defense's argumentation - guilty as well.

Riel was convicted of the offence, though the jury did recommend mercy. He was sentenced to death by hanging. After several appeals, which only forestalled the inevitable, Riel was hanged in Regina on November 16th, 1885. His body was later transported to St. Boniface, Manitoba, where it was buried in the church cemetery, across the Red River from the site of the first Riel led uprising, 16 years previous. While Riel's personal presence ended with his hanging, his legacy was only beginning.

#### 4.4.1 Analysis

In this final part of Riel's life, his activity involved thousands of Métis and Indians, Canadian troops and police, and involved bloodshed at many sites throughout the Northwest. Wars are often the basis upon which heroes develop. In Riel's case however, there appears to be little he had done to promote himself as a heroic figure during this rebellion. Gabriel Dumont was the war hero of this rebellion. He was brave and charismatic in battle, and that carries over in the assessment most historians have of him.

For his part, Riel did show responsibility in returning to Canada to fight for the Métis cause, although unlike the Manitoba situation, it was less clear what was achieved by his involvement. The fact that he did not fight in battle and surrendered to Middleton once his safety was ensured diminished his claim to heroism especially in comparison to the war bravery of Dumont. However, Dumont ran away from the Canadian forces and abandoned

his country forever, whereas Riel faced the authorities. Riel also refused to follow his defense counsel's ploy of using insanity as grounds upon which to avoid a conviction. He believed he was responsible for his actions but that they were justified given the situation which existed in the Northwest at the time. It is possible that if he had followed his counsel's defense, he could have been placed in an insane asylum for the rest of his life, rather than being executed. This stand by Riel is similar to the position taken by Oedipus' and mentioned in Section 3 of this thesis. Riel, like Oedipus, displays an obligation to his principles. The responsibility Riel showed adds to his other heroic qualities such as charisma and the achievements arising from the Red River rebellion.

As for bravery, Riel did come back to Canada to promote the rights of his people, but no mention was made as to his life ever being in danger from loyal Canadian sympathizers before the rebellion started. Probably the bravest thing Riel did, referring to the heroic definition of bravery, is that he faced his fate in court in what is usually described as a calm and brave fashion.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This interpretation of Riel's life comes from English language biographers. Their insights are dispersed over one hundred years of history that has past since Riel was hanged for treason. This section has attempted to distill facts from opinion, and present the basic knowledge of what is known of Riel from a principally English Canadian perspective. The cultural perspective from which one views these facts determines the heroic significance of Riel to that person. The passage of time may serve to advance the building of a heroic

image, and I believe this can be demonstrated in Riel's case. The next section of thesis will focus on the evolution of Riel in one form of media, the daily newspaper. The origins and reasoning for Riel's transformation into a hero in English Canada will be answered in the following section.

## 5.0 English Literature Review of Louis Riel in Selected Canadian Newspapers

### 5.1 Introduction

The data gathered through the course of my research reviewing English Canadian newspapers have been subject to limitations, primarily due to data availability and time restrictions on examining all newspapers in detail. It was determined that a selective sampling of the years between 1869 and 1992 would be the most efficient approach in gathering information necessary to provide an understanding of the apparent attitudinal change in English Canadian society which has permitted Louis Riel to be viewed as heroic.

The sheer volume of material available to be scanned for references to Riel as well as opinions expressed about him in Canadian newspapers, necessitated some decisions regarding the choice of the publications to be search. Four newspapers were chosen from which to cull the data sought. The four papers were the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the *Toronto Globe*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, and the *Montreal Gazette*. These four daily publications were primarily chosen because they were established and have been published (for the most part) from the time of the Red River Rebellion in 1869 to the present day. In addition, the fact that these materials (available on microfilm) were readily available through the University of Manitoba, the public library system, and the Manitoba Provincial Archives had significant influence on my choice. There are however some limitations to the use of these four newspapers in this research.

First of all, the daily *Winnipeg Free Press* (or *Manitoba Free Press* as it was known

then) only began publication in 1874, thus other Winnipeg based newspapers (most weekly) were relied upon for opinions on Riel and the Red River Rebellion. Secondly, microfilm collections at the University of Manitoba and the Manitoba Provincial Archives have several large gaps in the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Ottawa Citizen* years of publication, and thus examination of papers from those years was not possible during the course of my research. The ranges of dates available to be examined for the papers examined was as follows:

#### Winnipeg papers

*The Nor'-Wester* 1869  
*Red River Pioneer/New Nation* 1869-1870  
*Manitoban* (weekly) 1870-1874  
*Winnipeg Tribune* (Intermittently) 1930-1970  
*Winnipeg Free Press* 1874-1992

#### *Ottawa Citizen*

1869 - 1889 and 1969 - 1992

#### *Montreal Gazette*

1869 - 1877 and 1968 - 1990

#### *Toronto Globe* (later *Globe and Mail*)

1869 - 1992

The papers mentioned above were scanned for references to Louis Riel. These references comprised many types, as there were news articles, editorials and letters to the editor which were found to make mention of Riel either directly, or indirectly through the actions of others which Louis Riel had somehow affected. The sheer volume of material

available could only be selectively sampled given the amount of time required to complete the work, thus a series of time frames have been decided upon as the most appropriate method of performing the research. The sampling time frames are as follows:

Days of Conflict 1869-1885  
Early Twentieth Century 1909-1939  
Mid-Twentieth Century 1950-70  
Late Twentieth Century 1979-1992

Within the first time period, 1869 to 1885, we see Riel's own actions as portrayed by English Canadian newspapers of the era. At this point in Canadian history, Canada itself was a nation in existence for only a few years when Riel first appeared on the scene. The newspaper industry during this period was heavily influenced by party politics. A paper was often run by owners and editors who held strong political beliefs and made no effort to conceal their partisanship either in editorials, article headlines, or even which stories they chose to emphasize to their audiences.

In this period, the *Toronto Globe* was the most widely read Canadian newspaper, having a daily circulation of 45,000 in 1872. It was strongly Liberal (or Reform as it was often called) in its editorializing and had no qualms about engaging in verbal conflicts with publications known to support Tory interests such as the *Ottawa Citizen* and *Montreal Gazette*.

The Winnipeg papers of this era which were researched, run the gamut of political affiliations. The *Nor'-Wester* was in publication before Manitoba was brought into confederation, and its political affiliation was not clear, but it was *for* Canadian emigration into the Northwest and free enterprise, and *against* the Hudson Bay Company which had a

monopoly within the territory in terms of trade. The *Nor'-Wester* was forced to cease operations after the Métis uprising in November of 1869, and its presses were consequently seized by the Métis and put to use informing the population of Red River and beyond of the happenings within the settlement.

The next paper reviewed was the *Red River Pioneer/New Nation*. The *Red River Pioneer* only lasted a few issues as it came into being right after the Métis uprising in late 1869, and was purported to be an organ of the newly formed Provisional Government. It appeared though that Riel and other Rebel leaders did not like the publication's coverage of the uprising and resistance to Dominion take over, and took steps to ensure the publication portrayed a proper image of the Provisional Government. The name of the publication became the *New Nation*, which, under strict control of the Métis rebels, printed articles and editorials on the happenings at Red River which did not criticize the provisional government's actions. It lasted until the arrival of General Wolseley's troops, and the departure of Riel and other rebel leaders in late August, 1870.

The *New Nation*, after Riel had left Red River, evolved into the *Weekly Manitoban*. Although the *Manitoban* generally supported Federal policy, it seemed more concerned about political affiliation with the ruling Provincial party than Federal partisanship. It went out of business in 1874, just about at the time the *Manitoba Free Press* (as it was known then) came into daily publication. The *Free Press* carried a Liberal tone in its editorials, and in so doing chastised practically every move Conservative governments made (including the provincial ones) while praising the Liberal party as the true guardian of Manitoba's and the Northwest's rights.



The newspapers of the three remaining periods examined; 1909-1939, 1950-1970, and 1979-1992 appear relatively free of the blatantly oblivious political editorializing exhibited in the 1869-1885 period. Although there is less mention of Riel, it is in these periods that significant changes occur in English Canadian perceptions of the Métis leader.

Note should be made at this point as to the differences in the types of information available in the newspapers scanned. Since editorials, news articles, and letters to the editor are all used in this analyses, some qualification needs to be made as to the role each type plays in demonstrating opinion on Riel. The newspaper editorials, especially in the mid-to-late 1800s, demonstrate political biases. These editorials are considered a reflection of the political climate at the time with regard to each editor's own specific political affiliation. Reported stories and articles can also be biased in manner similar to editorials as editors can choose which stories to run or emphasize; they become a reflection of the editor's philosophy. These articles and stories also act as a shaper of the public's perception of events, as they are for many the main means by which news information is received. If a reader takes as factual the stories published in the newspaper, without seriously questioning their validity, then reading politically biased articles will foster politically biased views on the subject. As for letters to the editor, they are basically considered as a reflection of public opinion at the time, although the limited number found specifically referring to Riel in any of the time periods scanned, limits the extent to which generalizations can be made as to those letters being representative of the entire population. The following pages provide a chronological analysis of the English Canadian views of Louis Riel over nearly a century and a quarter of Canadian history.

## 5.2 Days of Conflict 1869-1885

This is the period upon which all that has been made of Riel is based. As an actor on the early Canadian frontier scene, his performance often had him playing centre stage, with all of Canada as his audience. What will be discussed in this section is what was made of his actions in the English Canadian press of the day, which was principally Protestant Anglo-Saxon in perspective.

### Initial Rumblings

Before the Red River Rebellion of 1869, the local English press (the *Nor'-Wester*) at Red River was scanned for an English Canadian perspective on the Native and Métis situation in the territory. It must be mentioned as somewhat of a disclaimer that the *Nor'-Wester*, edited by John Schultz, was a very pro-Canadian, pro-expansion biased newspaper, and its tone could probably only be generalized to the Upper-Canadian (Ontario) immigrants who had recently settled in the territory from the East, and were a minority of the population at the time.

From the May 1st, 1869 edition of the *Nor'-Wester* which refers to the speculation that Canada was preparing to purchase the Northwest from England we find the following: "We can only rejoice that there is probability that the wealth of those magnificent valleys,

lakes and rivers will no longer be abandoned to the fur-bearing animals."<sup>91</sup> While this quote was taken from the *Nor'-Wester*, it originated in an article found in the New York Herald. While this may display the ignorance of an American journalist as to those in residence in the Northwest, it also shows that this type of attitude (that the Northwest is a unused resource to be exploited) was the desired view point fostered by this publication. A later editorial mentions what methods were required in order to resolve land claim disputes with those of native ancestry.

Apart from all of this, of satisfactory dealing with the Indians is no mystery; honesty is the sole secret. We have to give the Indians, in fairness, the equivalent of what is taken from him. And in taking from him those portions of prairie country which we may want for immediate use, we must recollect that as the proportion of Indian population in an open country to its extent very small indeed, we have only to calculate on giving them as an equal exchange, the scanty food and scanty clothing to which he has been accustomed. If we add to this pittance, some of the advantages which are so well designed and so illy executed by our neighbours over the line, we shall find the Indians quite ready to appreciate the change for the better, whether the intelligence reaches them through a Canadian official who has the interests of the Dominion really at heart, or through some Hudson's Bay trader who has hitherto expended his energies in procuring furs at the lowest possible rate.<sup>92</sup>

What is interesting here is not only the extent to which Indian land rights are minimized into token concerns, but also that there is, in the concluding lines of the quote, an allusion to the dislike the author feels towards the Hudson Bay Company. This animosity was based on the opinion that the Hudson Bay Company acted as a barrier to further immigration into the territory due to the company's desire to protect its supply of goods

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<sup>91</sup>*Nor'-Wester*, 1 May 1869.

<sup>92</sup>*Nor'-Wester*, 19 June 1869.

which were at the time being supplied by natives and Métis from the area. Further expansion would reduce the supply area and destroy the Hudson Bay's monopoly by bringing in businesses that would compete with it for the purchase of goods.

An illustration of the type of "honest" approach used to settle disputes between Indians and settlers is given in the same edition of the *Nor'-Wester*. An article entitled "Immigration at Portage La Prairie" discusses an incident in which recent immigrants were threatened with violence by a band of Natives which resided nearby, if they (the settlers) persisted in laying claim to as yet unsettled land. In order to resolve the issue, two members of the community, Charles Mair and John Schultz interceded on behalf of the settlers and met with and discussed the situation (through an interpreter) with the band of Indians. An excerpt from this article displays the reasoning used to persuade Natives not to resist.

Mr. Mair in opening the talk, said that he had heard that the Portage band had prevented some "brothers" from Canada from settling on the Rat Creek, and wished to know if it was true. Sahwahgunn replied evasively, that he had pointed out another place for them to take lands, but that they were not satisfied. Mr. Mair now told them that it was not wise for them to interfere in the matter at all; that their friends in Canada had now got the right of governing the country from their great Mother the Queen, but that their old men were now in council and could not decide anything in haste, and perhaps not till late this year; but meantime, their young men wished to travel here, as the grass had now grown, they wished to take homes at once, and must be allowed to do so or their friends in Canada would be angry. The Indians then said that they did not like that their lands should be "jumped over". "Why not settle on the lands back of the river lots at the Portage?" Besides, they seemed to believe that if they allowed people to take up lands now, it did away with the possibility of receiving payment for them afterwards. They did not wish to stop people settling; the coming of the strangers "was like the march of the sun, it could not be stopped", but they were poor and wished to receive something for their lands. It was explained to them in answer, that the coming government would deal with them fairly, would look into their rights, if they had any to that part of the country, and see that all due justice was done to them; but if they did not treat strangers well, if they attempted to prevent their settling on such lands as they wanted, they would gain the displeasure of the rulers shortly to be over them, and perhaps it would affect

their future transactions. The chief men present seemed to be satisfied, and declared after consulting together, that they would offer no opposition to any extended settlement, and molest and trouble no one who came in.

It was well, perhaps, that this little episode of immigrant life should occur when it did, at the beginning of the season, as it establishes an understanding between those who take and those who give up the lands; and it shows too, what a little rational explanation will do towards avoiding these fearful difficulties which arise from misunderstandings of each other's intentions.<sup>93</sup>

The apparent condescending attitude the writer displays towards the Natives who disputed the right of settlers to claim rights to lands in their vicinity shows the mind-set Canadian immigrants often held, that the land was there to be taken, free and clear of any Aboriginal claims that might be made. This approach of threatening sanctions from an authority not as yet empowered to rule over the land, indicates that the editor of the *Nor'-Wester* was more concerned with enhancing the territory's image as a place friendly to English Canadian immigration than in settling land disputes fairly.

There was no direct mention of Métis concerns noted in the *Nor'-Wester*, until the October 26, 1869 publication which provided the headline "Insurrection of the French Half-Breeds". There was no mention of Riel's name at this point, only that the French half-breed leader would not listen to "their" reason.

The last issue of the *Nor'-Wester*, published November 23rd, 1869, made mention of the fact that the "Insurgents took possession of Upper Fort Garry" and also featured the proclamation "Public Notice to the People of Rupertsland" which was written and signed by Louis Riel, which stated the reasons for the Métis actions to date. By this point in time the

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

news had reached Central Canada as to the happenings at Red River, and the name Louis Riel began to figure significantly in copy of all newspapers throughout the land.

### 5.2.1 The Red River Rebellion

The first mention of the Métis uprising at Red River appears in the *Toronto Globe* November 13, 1869. The front page headlines "Armed Insurrection at Red River" and "Half-Breeds Seize the Road" caught the attention of all readers, though there was little detail provided at this point as events were still unfolding in the Northwest. A *Globe* editorial remarking on the actions of the Métis at Red River displays a tone remarkably similar to that of the *Nor'-wester*.

That country (the Northwest) is bound to be occupied, at no distant day, by thousands and millions of industrious cultivators; and the few foolish persons who are now thinking to stop the way are no wiser, nor be more successful, than Mrs. Partington in her well known effort to brush back the Atlantic tide with a mop and pail.<sup>94</sup>

In the weeks that followed many theories were put forth as to the cause of the rebellion. Some suggested that the uprising was plotted by a French Catholic priest, others mentioned American influences as instigating the unrest, and still another stated that specific bands of Indians were assisting the Métis. When it was reported William McDougall was refused entry into the settlement by the rebels, this story was received with scepticism by some papers; it did not seem probable that a Canadian official would be refused entry into

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<sup>94</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 17 November 1869.

a British Territory. The Tory biased papers the *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Montreal Gazette* both printed articles doubting the veracity of the reports of McDougall being refused entry. The *Citizen* (Nov.18th) stated that the first reports (of McDougall's non-entry) reliability is highly questionable and of a "highly dubious" nature. The *Gazette* (Nov.19th) said there was misinformation about a repulsion of McDougall's party, and that it did not happen at all.

Towards the end of November, 1869, enough details had been supplied from Red River to give the Central Canadian Papers a clearer understanding of the situation at Red River. Riel's name began to be mentioned in the papers. Articles on him, originally published in the St. Paul, Minnesota press, were reprinted in many Central Canadian papers. One such article stated "Mr. Louis Riall, a young man of considerable pluck, leads the insurrectionists." The misspelling of Riel's name was very common in the early months of the Red River Rebellion, and the correct spelling became standardized in the press only sometime in 1870.

The *Globe* published several letters from Canadians at Red River at the time of the uprising. Their views indicate a "French Priest is the directing mind of the disturbance" and that "..some thirty or forty of these miserable specimens of humanity (the Métis rebels) sneaked into Fort Garry". Another letter was more descriptive of the leaders of the rebellion.

A labouring man by the name of Brouse (John Bruce) is the president, save the mark of the precious moment, and a young Frenchman named Riel, secretary. He was sent to Canada some few years ago, for education, did not remain there long, and subsequently was clerk in a grocery store in this city<sup>95</sup> for two or three years. He is

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<sup>95</sup> The data sources researched do not mention Riel ever working as a grocery clerk at the Red River Settlement. It is concluded that this reference must be to St. Paul, Minnesota, where it has been noted from other sources that Riel did work in a dry goods store in the Minnesota capital.

really the moving spirit in the affair, but the two men appear to act from instructions from some quarter.<sup>96</sup>

Generally letters from Upper Canadians (Ontarians) or "loyal" settlers were negative towards Riel and the Métis cause. It is understood that this attitude was held predominantly because the uprising halted the Canadian Government's takeover of the territory and curtailed the flow of immigrants from Ontario. By interrupting these two movements, the rebels were seen to be standing in the way of nation building of the Dominion, and also denying the Canadian residents of the Northwest more of their own kind to make the territory more *comfortable*.

The *Toronto Globe* also published, on December 2nd, a letter to the editor from a Hudson Bay Company official at Red River. The message the letter attempts to get across is that the rights of the Red River settlers have been trampled by the purchase of the North West Territories by the Dominion Government. The writer of the article also questions the motivation of the *Nor'-Wester* in promising that Canadian rule will benefit all persons in the territory. The article was signed by *Justitia*, November 10th, 1869. The *Globe* also reprinted an article originally run in the *St. Paul Dispatch* which provided the following description of Riel.

I think some wrong information has been given in regard to Louis Rielle, who is now commander-in-chief of the revolutionary force in the Red River. On Monday evening the Dispatch expressed itself about him as follows;  
"Louis Rielle was, a year or two ago, a resident of St. Paul, and a clerk in Langerin's grocery store. He is a tall, well formed man, but of no particular mental ability, and his friends and acquaintances here will be rather astonished to learn the position he

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<sup>96</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 26 November 1869.



holds in the new war."

As I am acquainted with the gentleman, I am not at all surprised for my part, to learn the position he holds in that movement; for I consider him, and he is considered by all those who can appreciate him, not only as a tall well formed man, but as a man of strong mental ability, thoroughly educated for his age, and possessing high aspirations though not exceeding the limits of his talents.

I don't know if Mr. Rielle possesses any military or political genius. Should he fail or not in his career, I would consider him too able for being at the head of a body of half-breeds, who are hardly semi-civilized.

As a writer and a speaker in the French language, he cannot easily be surpassed by any man of his age. To that point of view his mind is always reasoning and reasonable, and L.Rielle would undoubtedly become a first class lawyer. That he could not do without having a strong mental ability.<sup>97</sup>

This *sketch* of Riel was not attributed to an individual, so its impossible to determine the extent of the writer's acquaintance with Riel. Given the detail provided in the article about Louis Riel's personality, it is suspected that the writer did know him personally. This positive view of Riel will not be the last one noted in this period, but as will be seen, more negative opinions of Riel surface as the Red River Rebellion drags on.

The resolve of the rebels (also known as insurgents) was not anticipated to last a significant length of time, as both the *Citizen* and *Gazette* ran editorials indicating that "peaceful settlement was probable"<sup>98</sup> and that "The 'disturbances' at Red River are probably quietly dying out."<sup>99</sup> By late December, 1869, however, it was apparent that the rebels would have to be negotiated with in some manner in order to get the dispute settled.

The Ottawa citizen first made mention of Riel by name, in the December 20th issue

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<sup>97</sup> "The Red River Commander - A Sketch of his Career", *Toronto Globe*, 1 December 1869.

<sup>98</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 23 November 1869.

<sup>99</sup> *Ottawa Citizen*, 29 November 1869.

of that paper. Soon after this mention of Riel, a letter to the editor, appeared from a person by the name of Malcom Reid. Reid claimed to have been a teacher at Red River, and stated that he had joined a group desiring to overthrow the Métis insurgents. The letter centres around the writer's meeting with Riel to obtain a pass to leave the settlement.

Riel received him politely, signed his pass and remarked that he was glad that he was leaving Red River. Riel also stated to him that if the writer could not find a better place than Red River, he (Riel replied) "If my scalp happens to still be on my head, I will extend the right hand of fellowship to you." Riel also stated that the ultimate aim of his government is to *resist being made Irishmen*.<sup>100</sup>

Mr. Reid also stated that Riel made the following remark to him at this time: "What particular direction events may take I cannot predict; but while I yield any sway, there shall be no cruelty or bloodshed. If disorders arise, I shall probably be among the first to suffer; but I am prepared."<sup>101</sup> This is not the sort letter to the editor about Riel that would be expected from a person who has admitted to being the rebel's adversary. The tone is one of admiration, which suggests that while the writer opposes the group Riel leads, he also finds qualities in Riel that he values. Any charitable feelings the Canadian settlers at Red River and the people of Ontario had for Riel to this point, were extinguished when Riel and his men arrested a group of mainly Canadian settlers for plotting to overthrow the Métis insurgents. The *Globe* states the course of events as follows:

At the call of Riel, six-hundred men rallied at Fort Garry. On the 7th, at Dr. Schultz's house at Fort Garry, the headquarters of the Canadian party, about fifty prominent representatives of the friends of Canada were arrested and confined; and Riel sent a

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<sup>100</sup> *Ottawa Citizen*, 22 December 1869.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

force to the border to take possession of the Hudson Bay Company's post near Pembina, and to prevent McDougall's further communication with the interior. This bold coup d'etat re-established the authority of the revolution - the small contingent raised to enforce the Royal Proclamation were reported dispersed, except 60 who still hold the stone fort.<sup>102</sup>

With the Métis arresting and confining the loyal Canadian settlers who wished to see Canadian authority reign in the Northwest, many of the people in Ontario identified with the cause of the "Loyalists", as most Canadian immigrants to Red River were Protestant and came from Ontario at that time. Riel, being at the head of the forces committing the acts of capture and confinement, was the focus of Ontarian rage against such deeds. From this point in time onward, Upper Canadian's were encouraged by much of the English Canadian press to despise the Métis rebels at Red River, by assuming all acts committed were inherently aimed at offending Canadian liberty. Although there were some articles, editorials and letters to the editor which cast Riel in a positive light, much of the English Canadian press reports which mentioned Riel, gave the impression that he was cunning, temperamental, deceitful, a rabble rouser, and under the control of the Roman Catholic clergy and American annexationist forces.

A definite pattern begins to emerge in the types of articles that are printed on the Red River Rebellion and Riel. The Tory biased papers (the *Gazette* and *Citizen*) attempt to down play the actions of the rebels, and discredit their cause as petty opportunism. This is understandable given that such acts of rebellion embarrassed the Federal Government, which was a Tory Government at the time. On the other hand, the *Globe*, which was biased

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<sup>102</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 22 December 1869.

towards the Reform (Liberal) party, tended to sensationalize the happenings at Red River, in an attempt to embarrass and discredit the government in Ottawa. The *Globe* as often as it printed negative articles on the Métis Leader also ran material that portrayed Riel in either in a positive or neutral light, and made the Federal Government appear as the villain. The evenness with which the *Globe* depicted Riel and the rebellion was not because the paper necessarily sympathized with the Métis, but was due to the editors' political antagonism towards the Ottawa government. The fact that material published happened to characterize Riel or the Rebellion positively, or at least a less negatively than other English Canadian papers, was a by-product of political attacks on the Dominion government.

In January of 1870, the English press in Ontario and Quebec were printing articles based on the impressions received from correspondence from Red River. There were few interesting developments to report at this time. The Commissioners sent by the federal government were in Red River negotiating a settlement to the dispute, and nothing sensational had occurred which pointed to an end to the insurrection. The *New Nation* published an article which, not surprisingly, was very favourable towards the Provisional Government at Red River. "The gentlemen (the Commissioners) expressed their thanks for the kindness and courtesy they had received during their stay, and were complimented in turn by President Riel for their judicious policy of their own acts in the matter."<sup>103</sup> Since the *New Nation* was published under the authority of Riel and other insurgents, the objectivity of any article published regarding the Provisional Government or Riel in this paper would have to

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<sup>103</sup> *The New Nation*, 14 January 1870

be regarded with suspicion.

Even though the *New Nation* was controlled as to the content of the articles relating to the uprising, this did not stop residents from voicing their opinion of the situation through the papers of the east. In a letter to the editor published in the *Globe*, a Red River merchant by the name of W.E. Sanford Esq. gives his viewpoint on the situation and how he would like to see it resolved.

There is no doubt the greater part of the French are humbugged by their leaders, namely Riel and the priests. No one seems to know what they are struggling for. It is pretty certain that Americans are helping busily; of course their drift is plain. I know one thing, Canada ought to send a body of troops here, and as soon as possible, for if she don't, we shall have to appeal to the United States to protect our lives and property. As it is, there is a sort of reign of terror begun, no one feels secure for his life or property and prisoners are being made daily. I write so much because I know you expect to do business in this country, and if Canada does not look sharp, the place will be lost entirely to her.<sup>104</sup>

From this letter, and others from the business community who echoed similar sentiments, it can be seen what interest this sector of the population has in the Red River Rebellion. What the above quote states is that the rebellion is bad for business, and if the Canadian Government takes the concerns of the business community seriously, it will quickly resolve the dispute, so that commerce can thrive, which in turn will benefit Canada. The concerns of the Métis are not mentioned, and were probably considered trivial in comparison to what was to be gained from a new territory soon to be open for business. This perception was not lost on the Canadian Government that saw the purchase of the Northwest as a large step towards strengthening the Dominion's sovereignty by uniting east with west,

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<sup>104</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 7 January 1870.

especially in relation to the very powerful neighbour to the south, who it was feared would annex the Northwest if Canadian rule was not established without delay.

Near the end of January, the *Globe's* "special correspondent" at Red River was arrested and ordered to leave the settlement by Riel. It was not stated precisely why the reporter was banished, but the following article, written by the *Globe* correspondent at the time of his expulsion from Red River may give an indication.

Riel and O'Donohue rule with an iron hand and are becoming extremely unpopular with all parties, while Riel's vanity makes him contemptible. He is a vain glorious creature and sold his poor mother's last cow to buy for himself, the modern Napoleon, a suit of clothes when he became president.<sup>105</sup>

The same correspondent also described his encounter with Riel on the subject of his expulsion from the community.

He was a man of about thirty years of age, about five feet seven inches in height - rather stoutly built. His head was covered with dark curly hair; his face had a kind of Jewish appearance, with a very small and very fast receding forehead. This I was sure, was M. Le President Riel, and he stood gazing at me in the most piercing manner at least, there is no doubt, he thought so. I did my utmost to realize in him a Napoleon or an Alexander, but it was a failure, - I could not get beyond the fact that there stood before me a linen draper's assistant. There could be no mistake about that, and though he stood looking at me a full ten minutes, he could not put the linen draper out of my mind, and if he has continued to gaze at me until now, the result would have been all the same. He was clad in a light tweed coat and black trousers, and he seemed exceedingly proud of them - and well he might be, for it is certain as the fact that he wore them, that these clothes were purchased with the price of his poor widowed mother's only cow.

...He gathered down his brows and looked thunder at me, no doubt imagining I was terribly afraid, and walked off; but I was not afraid at all. I had measured the man at first glance, and saw where the pen and ink sketches had made their mistake. They credited him with military genius and ambition - and had failed to appreciate the fact that he was a vain glorious creature, so elated by the position he had attained to, that

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<sup>105</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 31 January 1870.

any particle of common sense he had ever owned had been eliminated from his being, and that though he read no book but the Life of Napoleon, he was a mere tool of a certain party, who used him for their purposes as they listed and laughed at him.<sup>106</sup>

In hindsight, the lack of objectivity expressed by this particular reporter, provides a sampling of the type of information (or misinformation) persons in Central Canada were exposed to regarding the personality of Riel. It may be easier today to distinguish between fact and the opinion of the writer on this subject, however, with so little known of Riel by the general public at that time, these opinions may have been taken as more factual than they appear today. It is also difficult to determine what weight these opinions may have carried with the people of Ontario, but since the tone of this article appears highly critical of Riel, and because anti-Riel feelings were widespread among many English Canadians, it is probably safe to assume writing of this nature served only to promote more anger towards Riel.

In early February the *Ottawa Citizen* and *Montreal Gazette* were reporting a rumour that the Métis rebels at Red River had been overthrown and Riel had been jailed. Editorials published in the *Ottawa Citizen* mention the rumour and also display the editor's sentiments.

Since writing the above we have heard it rumoured that Mr. Riell, the so called President of the Red River Territory, has been arrested by order of the Hudson's Bay Company, and placed in durance vile. We would not at all be surprised if this should turn out to be correct. It would be a fitting end to the ridiculous attempt at insurrection, got up by a few ill-conditioned persons at Winnipeg, at a time when they knew that the proper authorities were not in a position to frown them down. This may be accepted as the exit of Mr. Riell from the stage of official life at Fort Garry or any other portion of the British Territory.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

... We have reason to believe that the sudden collapse of authority of Riell has been brought about as much by his own absurd pride and vanity as anything else. Even had he displayed more discretion than he did, his rule must necessarily be short-lived. It was founded upon a mistake. He and Stutzman desired annexation, which was a thing furthest from the thoughts of the inhabitants of the territory, whether Indian or not.<sup>107</sup>

It took several days for the rumours of Riel's overthrow to be proved false. The feelings portrayed in the above editorial appear to indicate the press, or at least the Tory press in Ottawa, underestimated the resolve of the rebels, and misunderstood the reasoning behind the insurrection. It may be that the editors wished to minimize the significance of the Métis cause by degrading its leader and linking his motives with that of American annexationists, and thus legitimizing the Federal Government's actions with regard to the purchase of the Northwest.

By February 7th the *Gazette* and *Citizen* were reporting that Riel had not been overthrown or arrested, and as stated in the *Gazette*, he (Riel) had the full support of the French and that his backers were "anti-Canadian." The *Citizen*, considering what had been previously editorialized of Riel, appeared to do an about-face on the subject, as it published the following under the editorial column once accurate information was obtained as to the happenings at Red River.

The actual position may be taken to be something like this, that Riel and those that support him have had two or more meetings with the Commissioners sent to the Northwest by the Canadian Government, and that the probable result of these conferences will be the sending of a delegation to Ottawa to make known fully the wishes of the residents of the country. These wishes will be liberally considered, and can we believe easily met. We would not be greatly surprised if Mr. Riel formed one

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<sup>107</sup> *Ottawa Citizen*, 1-2 February 1870.



of the deputations, the prominent part lately being played by him, pointing him out as a representative man, and an exponent of the views of a considerable section of the community.<sup>108</sup>

This abrupt change in editorial tone shows that the *Citizen's* editors either held deeply divided views of Riel and the rebellion. or were ambivalent to the situation. Quite possibly those who condemned Riel's leadership when they thought he was overthrown, were attempting to legitimize their own beliefs that the rebellion was not a popular uprising.

By the beginning of March papers in the East were mentioning the fact that Louis Riel had been appointed President of the Provisional Government, known as the Council of Assiniboia. This event had occurred some five weeks previous on January 27th. An article printed in the *Ottawa Citizen* reportedly written by a *Toronto Globe* correspondent, indicated the correspondent's impressions of matters at Red River after Riel's designation as President.

It would appear that the proper time and place for removing Riel was at the convention. His appointment as president was unpopular with the majority, who desired to place, as they ought to have done, Governor MacTavish at the head of affairs. They were coerced into appointing Riel by his threats of what he would do in case they refused.<sup>109</sup>

Other papers carried similar articles which down-played the significance of Riel's authority and emphasized the discontent and lack of support for his rule at Red River.

Not all papers were against Riel and the uprising; an article in the *Toronto Globe* proclaimed that the *Montreal News* (an obscure short-lived journal) was an organ of the

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<sup>108</sup> *Ottawa Citizen*, 7 February 1870.

<sup>109</sup> *Ottawa Citizen*, 15 March 1870.

Provisional Government of Red River. The *Globe* indicated that *News* was biased towards Riel and his followers, and not the Canadians. This sympathy toward Riel in the English Canadian press was definitely the exception and not the rule.

There was also mention in the papers of the ill-fated counter-movement among the pro-Canadians at Red River. The failure to oust Riel was blamed on the lack of support the English and Scottish settlers showed towards the Canadians. A *Ottawa Citizen* editorial laid blame for the failed counter-movement on two of its main architects, Major Boulton and John Schultz, for their haste in action taken at Red River.

The *New Nation*, whose articles were published under the scrutiny of the insurgents, printed a letter from a settler by the name of Kenneth McKenzie on March 11th. The writer thanked Riel and Lepine for allowing the release of specific prisoners being held at Fort Garry, so that these individuals could visit their dying mother. In another letter, this one appearing in the *Globe* on March 18th, and written by one of the Canadian counter-insurgents, Riel is portrayed as cunning, cowardly, and dishonest.

Not all letters published in the *Globe* and the other English papers of the East were of an explicitly negative tone. An article on Riel was written by a correspondent at Red River using the pen-name, Justitia, previously mentioned as supplying the *Globe* in November of 1869 with information on the situation at Red River. The article is interesting because it relates to Riel's health, and foretells the future for the Métis leader after the rebellion collapsed. One particular sentence is especially revealing. "Riel has been very ill from a threatened attack of brain fever, brought on by want of rest and excitement as well as

overwork, but he is now recovering."<sup>110</sup>

This I believe is the first recorded mention of Riel having any sort of mental illness, and as we have since learned from information published on Riel's stay at the two Quebec asylums, a doctor at one of those facilities once warned Riel that in order to avoid a relapse he must avoid extreme physical exertion and excitement at all costs. This diagnosis must be taken in the context of period in which Riel lived; the treatment of psychological disorders at this time involved placement into often overcrowded asylums with little or no medical attention provided to patients. Other authors have provided more of a medical explanation of Riel's illness, calling it encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), possibly caused by a tuberculous infection in his lungs.<sup>111</sup> However, this early episode of what was termed "brain fever" may also indicate that Riel was beginning to suffer from the strain of leadership.

### The Execution of Scott

Since many from Boulton's own pro-Canadian force were captured near Fort Garry by Riel's men, the fact that Canadians were once again being held by the Métis (Schultz's party that was arrested a couple of months earlier having since been released) made a few newspaper headlines. However, it was the incident involving one of those captured Canadian prisoners that was to cause the English Canadian press to heighten its coverage of the Red

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<sup>110</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 19 March 1870.

<sup>111</sup> Charlebois, *The Life of Louis Riel*, p.66.

River Rebellion and all the indignation arising from that one event.

The most infamous deed of the Provisional Government, at least in the minds of many Ontarians, was the execution of Thomas Scott, which extinguished any hope of empathy from Upper Canada for the rebel cause. If one chronicles the events as they happened on each day, one would notice that even though Thomas Scott was executed on March 4th, confirmation of this act did not reach the eastern papers until approximately three weeks later. One reason for this delay was that there were no telegraph lines between Red River and Upper Canada. Another reason for the long delay was that the event received very little local media coverage with the provisional government down-playing any publicity of the affair.

The *New Nation*, in the March 4th edition, the day of Thomas Scott's execution, mentions in a small headline "Military Execution". There are few details provided, although it is mentioned that Thomas Scott, along with others had acted with the intent of shooting Riel, in reference to the failed attempt by pro-Canadian settlers to overthrow the Métis leader in February. No other mention is noted in the *New Nation* of the incident, either in that issue or any other issue following it.

In March, 1870, many rumours were being circulated in the papers of the east, regarding a shooting which had supposedly taken place at Red River. A person by the name of William Gaudy was reported, by the *Montreal Gazette* in their March 10th edition, to have been executed by the Métis, as he was stated to be spying for John Schultz on Riel's force. It was not until March 26th, when The *Globe* reported the rumour that Thomas Scott had been shot, that the people of Central Canada were informed as to the actual course of events.

Once the deed was known to have been committed, an outpouring of pity for Scott's fate, sympathy for his family, and revulsion towards Riel and the rebels was displayed in the English language papers of the east. The *Montreal Gazette* provided readers with a pro-Canadian view of the incident based on information supplied by a party of Canadians at St. Paul Minnesota who had just arrived from Red River.

They state positively that Scott was not a paroled prisoner. He escaped with Mace and others, and afterwards joined Schultz and Boulton's party, and Riel had had him shot because he was an Orangeman and obnoxious to the priesthood, and the priests favoured his execution.<sup>112</sup>

An editorial in the *Globe* purports that Thomas Scott was a "true British subject and a lover of freedom." Scott was also a member of the Orange Lodge, and thus was viewed as one closely aligned with the views of many Ontarians. Other editorials indicated that the entire English and Scottish population at Red River were "exasperated" at Riel's "insolent and tyrannical rule", but none dared to raise a force against him in case support from the East was not forthcoming. An opinion expressed in a *Globe* article provides a snapshot of the sentiment at the time. "This act (Scott's execution) has created an intense feeling in the settlement, and no man now feels his life safe for a single minute in the hands of the detested ruffian to whom they render an unwilling allegiance."<sup>113</sup>

Charles Mair, formerly of the Red River settlement, and a staunch supporter of Canadian expansionism, gave brief summation of his memories of Thomas Scott. "Scott was a thorough Canadian, a bold intrepid fellow, always ready to stand by the Canadians who had

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<sup>112</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 1 April 1870.

<sup>113</sup> "The Fort Garry Murder", *Toronto Globe*, 2 April 1870.

resented Riel's authority."<sup>114</sup> The next day, a *Gazette* editorial claimed to express the general feelings of the population towards matters at Red River.

The news of the execution of Thomas Scott, a Canadian, by Riel, has settled public opinion rather than changed it. A feeling very generally prevailed that hostilities were, if possible, to be avoided - though many doubted this possibility. Now, the certainty has come to most minds that an era of violence and bloodshed has been opened by this Provisional Government which one can hardly hope to see closed without bloodshed on the other side. There has been some sympathy, indeed in some quarters with the movement of the half-breeds as an assertion of that right to self-government which we all prize. Now that has ceased, or must cease. For, with an offer of the same freedom which we all enjoy, while pretending to negotiate for a basis of union, this act of needless barbarous murder has been committed. It calls for rigorous measures in return.<sup>115</sup>

The *Globe's* editor paints an even more sinister picture of Riel and those claimed to be his "creators".

He (Riel) and his immediate supporters have deeper designs that the uneducated French are aware of, and the Hudson Bay Company and the clergy together, in playing the part of Frankenstein, have let loose a monster whose craft, condition, and ferocity are greater than anyone supposed. His audacity and unscrupulous character which is exemplified in his utter disregard for the rights and even the lives of those who oppose his wishes, has enabled him to reduce the people of the Northwest to an abject and pitiable condition. At this moment he exercises the power of a Tarquin; and having the opportunity, he only requires time to consolidate his power and become a formidable opponent.<sup>116</sup>

The impression gleaned from articles such as these is that the people of Red River are labouring under the control of a vile dictator, and are too weak to rid themselves of his clutches. It would seem only a humane gesture then to send troops to Red River and free the

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<sup>114</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 5 April 1870.

<sup>115</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 6 April 1870.

<sup>116</sup> "Expedition to Red River", *Toronto Globe*, 4 April 1870.

ravaged settlers from their oppressors.

A steady stream of articles began to appear on the pages of the English Canadian press, full of emotion and speculation. Rumour and gossip often filled the breaches where factual information was not available. A letter published in the *St. Paul Pioneer*<sup>117</sup> from a resident of Portage la Prairie, and reprinted in the *Globe* April 5th, gives a negative portrayal of Riel: "Riel is becoming bloated and drunken, and totally unfit to be entrusted with any authority over life and liberty." Other stories tell of how the quiet and inoffensive Thomas Scott was stopped by Riel on a road some time before his arrest. When Riel questioned him as to business, "Mr. Scott, with a strong arm thrust him aside and told him to mind his own business." Riel sought revenge for this slighting by Scott, and attained this end by having Scott shot, which also served to frighten Canadians out of the territory.

At this point in time very few letters to the editor referred at all to the happenings at Red River. Most letter writers were concerned with matters which had a more immediate impact on their lives such as street lighting, sidewalk and road repairs, along with local political wrangling. One of the few letters which alludes to the Red River Rebellion, was written by an individual who was wanting to know where and when "loyal subjects" could sign up to join the force going to Red River.<sup>118</sup>

Within a few weeks of the news of Scott's execution reaching Central Canada, there

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<sup>117</sup> Letters, articles, and editorials indicated from American newspapers are identified here because they were published in Canadian newspapers. They are not placed here to display any specific attitudes which may have been held by American citizens at the time.

<sup>118</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 4 April 1870.

was mention of indignation meetings being held in major centres throughout the province of Ontario and in Montreal. Meetings were often organized by the members of the Orange Lodge, a particularly powerful association which defended and advanced Protestantism throughout Canada. The public meetings were not just gatherings of common folk, but were usually chaired or opened by prominent members of the community. Mayors, ministers of provincial legislatures, businessmen, doctors, lawyers, and the clergy all were mentioned as participating in the meetings. It was at such meeting that Scott was portrayed as a martyr, and his fate was seen as the ultimate sacrifice a loyal British subject could make. The *Montreal Gazette* gives the details of a "Great Public Meeting" on "The Red River Question" in that city.

One of the largest and influential public meetings ever held in this city was that held in Mechanics' Hall last evening, to consider the circumstances attending the recent murder of a British subject in the Red River Territory, and to give an expression of opinion in regard thereto. Before the meeting was open the hall was crowded, and before it closed hundreds had gone away unable to gain admission. His Worship the Mayor occupied the chair.<sup>119</sup>

The Mayor of Montreal was noted as making the following speech on the subject of Scott's execution at the rally.

To kill the unfortunate man as he has been killed, was to commit murder, a foul and cowardly murder too, but the blackness of the crime has been added to, by the cruel and barbarous manner in which the deed was done. It makes one's blood chill to read the details of poor Scott's death, shot at, pierced by three balls, then another revolver fired into his ear, he still lived and was, pitched alive into his coffin, where he remained for a long time still alive and quivering, in the struggle of his last agony.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 8 April 1870.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*



Portrayals of Scott's execution in the above manner could not help but add to the hatred and disgust felt by English Canadians who were shocked that such a thing could happen to a British subject on British soil. The *Ottawa Citizen* also reported an indignation meeting at Toronto, where 8,000 people attended to voice their displeasure regarding the Red River Rebellion, and at which it was resolved, among other things:

Resolved that this meeting cordially welcomes Dr. Schultz and the others present from Red River, who fearlessly and at the sacrifice of their liberty and property have nobly resisted the usurpation of power, by the murderer Riel, and that we heartily sympathized with them and recognize fully their sacrifices in the interests of Canada and Canadians.<sup>121</sup>

Reports of meetings such as these indicate that English Canadians were angry at Riel, the Métis, and the French Catholic clergy, all of whom were seen in having a willing hand in the death of Thomas Scott. More and more articles and editorials were published in the English Canadian newspapers with a decidedly negative view on Riel and the rebellion. Stories were printed from Canadian settlers at Red River, stating that the Métis supporting Riel were beginning to become suspicious of his motives. It was said Riel was preparing to dispose of \$30,000 in furs which had been taken from the Hudson Bay Company, and flee with the take if things began to look bad for him. Two Red River residents, Mr. Cameron and Mr. Dawson, both Canadians, tell of Riel's current activities. "These gentlemen (Cameron and Dawson) confirm the report of Riel's growing debauchery, having frequently seen him under the influence of liquor while themselves prisoners. They represent him as

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<sup>121</sup> *Ottawa Citizen*, 8 April 1870.

a man of low and depraved tastes, and have no great opinion of his abilities."<sup>122</sup> Readers of this type of article would get the impression that Riel is not a very respectable person and that he must not be the true leader of the rebellion, as he is not capable of taking on such a task alone. Therefore it could be surmised that the French clergy must really be behind the insurrection at Red River, with Riel merely being its figurehead.

At the same time, it was mentioned in the *Globe*, among other papers, that the French language papers were generally sympathetic to the Red River insurgents. This support shown by the French papers was often ridiculed in the English-language papers as being anti-Canadian and irrational. Even the French Canadian papers, however, did see the execution of Scott as a "grave political blunder", and stated that Riel should have heeded the wishes of the Roman Catholic clergy who called for mercy for Scott. Their reasoning was that through this reckless act of violence toward a British subject, Riel has plunged the entire colony into an altercation with Canada which could only lead to more bloodshed, mainly of the inhabitants of Red River.

An article published in the *Montreal Gazette* and originally published in the *Quebec Telegraph* (purported to be a Tory organ), refers to poem a written by the Poet Laureate for Quebec, Pamphile Lemay. It appeared that Mr. Lemay, who also worked as a librarian at the legislative library, wrote a poem which sympathized with Riel's actions regarding the execution of Thomas Scott, and this disturbed the English press of Quebec. The *Telegraph's* comment on the poem are as follows:

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<sup>122</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 12 April 1870.

The president and the poet are about on the same level: The verses are even worse than the degraded sentiments they hatingly strive to convey. The librarian should be dismissed on the evidence of his verses, as an illiterate person, even if calling Riel Scott's 'souverain', and justifying assassination could be pardoned in a public officer. In the retirement of public life M.Lemay might compose an ode to the late patriot Whelan, and eulogistic verses on Booth, and the more notorious miscreants of our enlightened days. An appropriate title to this collection would be "The miscreants of the nineteenth century idealized by one of themselves".<sup>123</sup>

This type of reaction to the poem by Lemay was not isolated to the English press of Quebec City. A letter to the editor of the *Gazette* appeared several days after the above mentioned comments were published, and convey a similar sentiment. The writer states that he cannot believe all French speaking Québécois have the same feelings as expressed by the Poet Laureate, but if they do, "...they have lost all instincts of honour and true courage of their ancestors."<sup>124</sup>

The English Canadians of Quebec, and their counter-parts in Ontario, have shown that they took the execution of Scott as an affront to their cultural sovereignty, and would not be satisfied until the tyranny of Riel and the Métis was broken, and the Northwest was a place where the unrestricted expansion of Canadian civilization could proceed unhindered. In the months that followed the execution of Thomas Scott and until the arrival of Wolseley's troops at Red River in August, many articles, editorials, and even some letters to the editor were published in the English papers of Central Canada, of a similar anti-Riel, anti-Métis, and anti-French nature. The indignation meetings continued to be held in

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<sup>123</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 18 April 1870.

<sup>124</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 20 April 1870.

Ontario, and not just in larger centres like Toronto or Hamilton, but in towns such as Blyth and Newmarket as well. This suggests that the anger shown toward the insurgents had a wide basis of support throughout the Upper Canada.

### The New Province

By May of 1870, the *Globe* was publishing articles on the proclamation of the Federal government regarding the creation of "...a new province of somewhat limited extent is to be erected, and to be called Manitoba." There was also mention of some of the territory of the new province being reserved for "Indians and Half-Breeds". There was no mention of this new province being a direct result of the negotiations held with delegates from the provisional government at Red River or any role played by the people of Red River in deciding the conditions under which the territory was to become a province. The Government in Ottawa most likely purposely wished to portray the situation as a unilateral act of the government, so as not to excite the English Canadian population into thinking the Federal Government bargained with the killers of Thomas Scott for the right to rule over the Northwest. At about the same time, it was being reported that Louis Riel was being officially sworn in as the President of the Provisional Government of Assiniboia, a position it was generally expected he would hold until the Ottawa government placed a representative of the Canadian people at Red River.

Between May and late August, 1870, there were various reports of Riel refusing Fenian assistance, Riel preparing for battle against Wolseley's troops, and Riel not preparing for resistance. It was difficult to tell what was going on at Red River and what the response

would be to the Imperial force being sent there. Talk of this military force to Red River dominated the headlines of the Central Canadian papers in these months.

Articles noted regarding amnesty for the rebels aroused considerable interest in the editorial columns. There were two main groupings of opinion in the East with regard to amnesty. One point of view was that the Ottawa government would not dare grant a pardon to those involved in the uprising as it would be an affront to the Canadians that sacrificed their liberty and property, not to mention the Protestants of Ontario. The other view, of a more cynical nature, was that the Federal Government would have to pardon Riel and the others as it was all part of the deal made for the peaceful surrender of the territory and the price paid for Riel's silence in not divulging the blundering of the Ottawa Government. This latter view was mostly espoused by editors from Reform papers such as the *Globe*. The *New Nation* was much more positive regarding amnesty for Riel and the other participants, mentioning at one point that "...the crown has an indisputable right to grant such an amnesty."<sup>125</sup>

An American correspondent's view of Riel was published in the *Globe*, which is surprisingly quite flattering of Riel. All negative press given to Riel at that point in time made it somewhat surprising that this positive piece was even published. The article appears as follows:

Judging from personal intercourse with Riel and the atmosphere of opinion in the settlements, it is evident that the President of the Provisional Government is a person of no mean abilities, and that to his decision, energy, and fearlessness of character, is owing the success of the Red River movement.

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<sup>125</sup> *The New Nation*, 23 July 1870.

What ever mistakes may be attributed to him in the management of affairs here during the last year, it is certain that a less determined man would have singly failed, and the English and Scotch settlers, who at one time stood aloof, together with many of those who, with Dr. Schultz, opposed the Provisional Government, now admit that but for such a man as Riel Canada would have gobbled up the entire settlement, and not a single guarantee of respect of private rights would have been secured.<sup>126</sup>

While many derogatory articles were published regarding Riel's tenure as leader of the insurgents and head of the Provisional Government, this favourable piece indicates the *Globe* was not completely biased in what it printed regarding Riel and the uprising.

The end of Riel's stay in the spotlight of Canadian affairs for his part in the Red River Rebellion came as Wolseley's force approached the settlement in August of 1870. It was reported in the *Globe* that an emissary for Wolseley's force had journeyed ahead of the main force and met with Riel. The purpose of the conference was to inform Riel of Wolseley's intentions, and with the sanction of Riel, post a public proclamation from Colonel Wolseley to the people of Red River announcing the purpose of the expedition. Riel gave his approval to the posting of the proclamation, and an editorial expounds the *Globe's* understanding of Riel's endorsement.

That Riel had given 'his sanction' to this document (Wolseley's proclamation) being published, and that a good understanding existed between him and Colonel Wolseley, are probably touches of Mr. Bannatyne's loyalty to the 'President' of whose 'bogus' administration he has so conspicuously been a member. Riel would be glad enough to issue Col. Wolseley's proclamation, or black Col. Wolseley's boots, we may be quite sure, now that there is some one with British troops and British law at his back to put a stop to the game Messrs. Riel, Bannatyne and Co. have been carrying on for the past nine months.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 18 July 1870.

<sup>127</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 6 August 1870.

It would seem that the news editor for the *Globe* was not one to dismiss a grudge easily, as the above commentary carries with it the hatred for Riel and the other insurgents that surfaced principally after Scott's execution.

By late August it was reported that Riel and his closest advisors had fled at the approach of Wolseley's troops near Fort Garry. Not until the beginning of September did full details of the departure of Riel from Red River become completely known. Papers in the East reported that Riel has left rather hastily, just prior to Wolseley's soldiers entering Fort Garry. A headline in the *Montreal Gazette* on September 2nd, 1870 proclaims "Riel has skedaddled - He leaves his breakfast behind." The fact that no resistance of any sort was encountered by the Imperial troops was also noted. The "escape" of Riel is mentioned along with the issuance of warrants for his and O'Donohue's arrest.

The *Globe* correspondent, upon the arrival of Wolseley, made comment on the condition the Fort was left in by the fleeing rebels. "The fort is in a dreadful state of mud and dirt. It looked in just that kind of dirty disorder that makes a well-ordered establishment when committed to the care of a person unaccustomed to anything larger than a hovel."<sup>128</sup>

The mood of the citizens of Red River appeared to be enthusiastic toward the military force, as described by the *Gazette* correspondent.

Need I tell you that the arrival of this small body of somewhere about 300 troops, is hailed with general satisfaction throughout the settlement by both French and English. We are not a very demonstrative people in the matter of public rejoicing, but we had a good deal in spite of the only bad thunderstorm which visited us this year, in welcoming Her Majesty's servants among us. Flags were flung out to the breeze, church bells were rung and firearms discharged in all quarters.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 6 September 1870.

<sup>129</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 7 September 1870.

While the people of Red River were busy "rejoicing" over the liberation of Fort Garry, it was related that Riel had gone into hiding. For the next several years Riel was considered an outlaw by many Canadians, but the English and Scottish settlers seemed to have little interest in his whereabouts. It was repeatedly remarked in the English language papers of Central Canada that many French residents aided Riel in evading capture by the Canadian authorities. Riel and the other rebels were called "banditti" by Colonel Wolseley in his address to the people of Red River, which was immediately noted in the Central Canadian papers.

The feeling in Canada was generally one of relief that the troubles at Red River ended without any further loss of life. Many Orangemen however, were disappointed with the Ottawa government for allowing Riel and his supporters to go unpunished. An article published in the *Montreal Witness* from an Orangeman states that those who rule in Ottawa must "cow" to the Catholics for support, given the lack of justice done in the matter of Scott's murder. This article was noted in a letter to the editor of the *Gazette* on September 15th, from a Catholic who said this piece found in the *Witness* stirs Orange feelings of hatred toward Catholics. During the early part of September the *Globe*, *Citizen*, and *Gazette* correspondents published stories extolling the virtues of the Canadian militia at Fort Garry and emphasizing that no one was mournful of Riel's departure.

While it was not noted by journalists from the Central Canadian papers that hatred of the French half-breeds was materializing at Red River, there were certainly indications from the Red River settlement that tensions were high between the volunteer Canadian



troops (mostly Orangemen) who arrived with Wolseley, and those who had previously supported the Provisional Government. A resident from Red River, purported to be a friend of Riel's, related his concerns to a correspondent in St. Paul Minnesota, who sent the story on to the *Globe* soon thereafter. The resident's statements portray a somewhat apprehensive view of the situation. Part of the article is reprinted below.

A gentleman from Fort Garry asserts that there is a bitter feeling among the French against the overbearing acts of the volunteers, and against what they term the violation of the pledges made by the Canadian Government. The day before the troops arrived, Riel told this gentleman that he intended to turn over the government to Governor Archibald peaceably, and everything would be alright. Our informant, who is a friend of Riel's, speaks strongly against the bullying of Riel's friends by the Canadian volunteers, most of whom are Orangemen, and says the dissatisfaction toward the Government exists everywhere, and hopes on the arrival of the new Governor they will be brought under decent control.<sup>130</sup>

It is difficult to determine what impact this one article had on the English Canadian population, but considering the person mentioned in the above article is cited as a "friend" of Riel's, the credibility of this source and validity of the information is probably questionable. Another article, this one appearing in the *Gazette* offers more proof of support for Riel after his departure from the scene.

Riel and O'Donohue, the master spirits in the rising last fall are now off the scene, temporarily at all events. They are absent from Fort Garry, whether still at St. Boniface or Pembina, is a point of dispute with us. Now that their reign is over, I observe that several of the English residents, who are by no means believers in Rielism, do not hesitate to say a word in his favour. While regretting the loss of three lives which resulted from the movement, they maintain that but for Riel's command over his men, but for his strong personal influence and predilection for Canada and her institutions, the loss of life would, in all probability, have reached hundreds, massacre and assassination would have done their bloody work. The Canadian expedition would certainly never have reached Fort Garry this year - and the second

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<sup>130</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 14 September 1870.

Lieutenant Governor and his men would have fared very little better than the first in their attempt to enter the country. Any one acquainted with the road over which the expedition passed, knows how easily its passage might have been barred by a few hundred determined men.<sup>131</sup>

This type of open commendation from English settlers was not without its hazards. Those with a strong connection to Riel and the former provisional government were specifically targeted for malicious treatment. By the later part of September, the papers of Central Canada began printing stories of discontentment within the settlement, but the articles depict strong support within the settlement towards punishment of those who embraced the Provisional Government. One such story, published in the *Globe*, reports the events which occurred soon after Governor Archibald was officially received as the Governor of Manitoba.

Since the levee of this afternoon, placards of a character calculated to disquiet certain persons resident here have been posted about Winnipeg. One is a picture of a man hanging, with the assertion written underneath that this is the proper fate of Thomas Bunn; Thomas Bunn being one of the Council of Assiniboia, and the Secretary of State of Riel's Provisional Government. Another asks 'What shall be done with the consort of murderers?' and similar alarming sentences follow in other places. It is asserted that a tar barrel and a liberal supply of feathers have been got together for the benefit of certain gentlemen whose relationship with Riel is deemed to have been too close, and several men who until very recently held their heads high must now be slightly alarmed.<sup>132</sup>

From this description it would appear that any former supporters of Riel would be subject to severe ridicule and possibly assault. This anger toward Riel and his rule most

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<sup>131</sup> "Latest from Manitobah", *Montreal Gazette*, 16 September 1870

<sup>132</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 22 September 1870.

likely came from Canadians and other English settlers who were imprisoned or felt they were dealt with unfairly under the former regime. Not helping matters was the fact that a large contingent of Canadian volunteer troops had arrived with the Wolseley force. These recent arrivals contributed their resentment toward the former rulers, resentment quite possibly aggravated by newspaper reports they had read while in the East.

Stories of discontentment within the settlement were also reported in the pages of a new local paper called the *Weekly Manitoban*. The *Manitoban* sided with the new Provincial Government, and was against those who attempted to discredit or malign its rule. The *Manitoban* primarily protested against the antics of the Canadian "loyalists" who tried to agitate the English population into hateful acts against anyone who had supported the Provisional Government or who did not support pro-Canadian views. This paper called these Canadians *ruffians*, and one Editorial of December 3rd, 1870 asks: "How long is this 'loyal' rowdyism to continue?"

### **5.2.2 The Years Between Rebellions**

There is little chronicled information on Riel's life between the events at Red River in 1869-70 and the Northwest Rebellion of 1885. Facts or interesting rumours that were known were published in English Canadian papers, especially those that held views opposite to that of the ruling Federal Government. The publishing of any news on Riel was seen by these papers as a method of embarrassing the current administration; Riel being at large signified to English Canadians, especially those in Ontario, the failure of the Federal

Government to bring a vile criminal to justice.

There was mention of amnesty for the rebels, but usually it was stated that these "rumours" were started by influential French Canadians who sympathized with Riel and the Métis cause. The stories of amnesty being given to the rebels were emphatically denied by the Federal Government and others who disagreed with any actions that would see Riel and his cohorts go unpunished. At the other end of the rumour spectrum, the death of Riel was also reported to have taken place. The *Weekly Manitoban* of December 22nd, 1870, published a rumour from an unnamed source on Riel's death from a poisonous toxin deliberately added to a letter sent to him by his enemies.

In January, 1871, the *Globe* published a report that Riel had been nominated by the French at St. Boniface, St. Vital, and St. Norbert to run in the elections for both the Provincial Legislature and the Federal Parliament. It was claimed that Riel declined both offers, and stated that he was honoured at the invitation, but given the present circumstances thought it was best he not accept.

During the period between 1871 and 1885, the *Globe* published the greatest number of the articles mentioning Riel directly, while other papers (especially the conservative ones) ignored Riel's existence for as long as possible. The *Globe* was so active in its mission to discredit the Ottawa Government that it played on any story which related the exploits of Riel. The *Globe* was mentioned by the *Manitoban* as promoting hatred against members of the Manitoba Provincial Government. An editorial published in the *Globe* October 21st, 1871, after the attempted Fenian raid into Manitoba and Riel's support of the Provincial Government in repulsing the attack, shows this and its other target quite clearly.

Nobody now denies that Scott was murdered, and nobody denies that Riel was responsible for that murder. Why then has there been no attempt to let justice have its proper course? And why finish off with such a piece of transparent imposition as was gone through when Messrs. Archibald and Riel talked and sobbed and shook hands?

It is well known that Louis Riel of himself would never have had one follower two years ago, and could not induce one person to try conclusions against the British and Canadian Governments. He is no value in himself as a strength and defence to the province. The puppet has danced somewhat vigorously, but everyone now knows who pulled and still pulls the strings.<sup>133</sup>

The *Globe* in this article insinuates that Riel is nothing but a front man for the French Catholic Clergy and other prominent French Canadians, who are trying to disgrace British and Canadian authority in Western Canada.

The Ontario Provincial Government and some Municipal Governments in early 1872 offered a reward for the capture and bringing to justice of Scott's murderers. While the *Globe* was extremely vocal in enunciating these proclamations for justice, other papers who supported the Federal Government were displeased with actions of the Liberal Provincial Government. The *Ottawa Citizen* places the following article in response to such motions.

The fact is that enough has been said and written in relation to the matter, and it would be much better for the country if the unpleasant episode were allowed to quietly pass into the history of the territory, and the attention of the people were drawn to the promotion of friendly and cordial relations.<sup>134</sup>

Government officials in Ottawa would have preferred the people of Canada forget about the Red River Rebellion, as it was a political thorn in the side of Federal Government

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<sup>133</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 21 October 1871.

<sup>134</sup> *Ottawa Citizen*, 1 February 1872.

up until the time of Riel's execution in 1885. Unfortunately for the Federal Government, the people of Red River, principally the French speaking population, did not let Riel slip into the realm of obscurity. They accomplished this by nominating and electing Riel to represent the Federal riding of Provencher on three separate occasions, and each time he was elected, the embarrassment of that feat was affixed to the presiding government in Ottawa. The *Globe* makes reference to this support of Riel by the French residents of Manitoba in a sarcastic and insulting manner.

Doubtless, were discretion not a consideration, Riel would be the man, but to send the 'hero' of '69-70 to Ottawa, would be incurring too much of a risk to warrant the venture. The people of Provencher are not a "free will" class. They do precisely as are bidden, so general political intelligence is something for which there is no requirement, and it therefore surprises no one to know that it does not pertain to any great extent in that country.<sup>135</sup>

While the *Globe* was blaming the people of Provencher for wishing to elect Riel as their representative, the *Ottawa Citizen* was busy attacking the *Globe* and the Liberal party. The reason for its attacks were because the *Citizen* claimed that Riel was a "full-fledged Grit", in that he would be running for the Liberal party in the federal elections. It was stated in a September 14th editorial that the Liberal party was being hypocritical in allowing Riel to run when they had earlier in the year called for his head. The *Montreal Gazette* made similar charges against the Ontario Liberals in an article claiming to have originated in Ottawa. "It is rumoured that Riel is supplied with funds from Ontario, to carry on the contest against the Attorney General Clark (Riel's opponent in the campaign) in Manitoba, and most

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<sup>135</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 24 August 1872.

of the money spent by him is in Royal Canadian bills."<sup>136</sup> The insinuation here is that the provincial and federal Liberals in Ontario are backing Riel, and that this makes them look foolish given their previous stance against Riel. Of course this was all political innuendo, and it really did not matter whether the rumours were true, as long as the story succeeded for the moment in embarrassing one's opponent.

The local paper, the *Weekly Manitoban*, at this time, remained relatively passive in its description of events. No sensationalism was noted in the few articles that were found in this publication. When the story was disclosed that Sir George Cartier was going to run in Provencher and Riel and Provincial Attorney General Clark were going to step aside, the *Weekly Manitoban* published the following article.

Sir George Cartier is going in virtually unopposed for Provencher. Riel has given him his support, so does Dr. Schultz. As Riel and Schultz were the two persons primarily responsible for the 'late unpleasantness', and as they have agreed upon blending their political opinions, their personal differences will, we suppose, be harmonized.<sup>137</sup>

Since this commentary places blame on both Riel and Schultz for the past Red River uprising, these opinions suggest that this editor supports neither the pro-Riel nor the pro-loyalist community.

Ambroise Lepine, Riel's Adjutant General during the Red River Uprising was arrested in the fall of 1873 for the murder of Thomas Scott. The French residents of Manitoba were upset with this course of events. The reason for their alarm, as stated by the

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<sup>136</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 10 September 1872.

<sup>137</sup> *The Weekly Manitoban*, 14 September 1872.

*Weekly Manitoban*, was because the French population in Manitoba had lived under the assumption that the rebel leaders had been unofficially pardoned by Ottawa and the Queen for the past three years. Originally, a warrant of arrest for both Riel and Lepine was issued by a magistrate by the name of Dr. O'Donnel. Riel could not be located by the provincial authorities, as his supporters kept a lookout for pending threats to his liberty and shielded him from danger whenever necessary.

Even though Riel was technically a fugitive from the Manitoba authorities, it did not prevent him from running in the federal election of October of that year and being elected by acclamation. The *Weekly Manitoban* published an article on Riel's election which clearly states the situation in Manitoba at that time.

That there was no a single division on the subject among our French neighbours is quite certain. We must therefore conclude that Riel is the chosen representative of the French speaking population. It will therefore appear a strange mixture of affairs to the outside world when it is known that while a large portion of our people elected a man to represent them, the other portion is busily engaged in hunting him from place to place.<sup>138</sup>

The *Globe* portrayed Riel's election as an embarrassment to the Conservative Government in Ottawa. The Conservative organs, the *Citizen* and the *Gazette*, had differing views on the significance of outcome of the Provencher election. The Ottawa paper stated that a large proportion of the half-breeds in Manitoba are so "deluded" that they consider Riel a patriot. It also says that the people of Ontario have a different opinion of Riel's character.

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<sup>138</sup> *The Weekly Manitoba*, 18 October 1873.



They look upon him as a reckless adventurer whose hands are red with the blood of a young man whose only crime was his hatred for Riel and his creatures. We believe a calm, rational view of the history of the West will prove conclusively that the insurrection of the Métis was entirely unjustifiable. Their rights and interests were always safe in the hands of the Dominion Government.<sup>139</sup>

The "calm" and "rational" view of Riel prevailed throughout Ontario and many other English Canadian regions of the country for many decades after Riel's death. A *Montreal Gazette* editorial describes the election of Riel as a sign that the Imperial Government in England should issue an amnesty to all those involved in the Red River uprising, so that the whole matter can be soon forgotten.

Is it wise to go from month to month and from year to year with the constant danger of a disturbance of the public peace and harmony by the revival of all the heartburnings of the past, in consequence of some arrest arising out of the troubles of 1869? Candidly we think not. In Mr. Riel's election we have seen evidence of the feelings of the people towards him. He and they have long since ceased to be in any sense rebels against the authority of the Crown or the Dominion of Canada.<sup>140</sup>

The luxury of writing in a predominantly French province gave the editors of the *Gazette* a distinct advantage over their counterparts in Ottawa. The fact that opinion in Ontario was fiercely against Riel probably influenced the Conservative press, as the Tory Government in Ottawa relied heavily on the population of Ontario for support. Appearing to hold the same opinions as the majority of their electors would enhance the incumbent administration's prospects for re-election.

Probably the greatest sensation involving Riel in the years between the two

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<sup>139</sup> *Ottawa Citizen*, 18 October 1873.

<sup>140</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 18 October 1873.

rebellions, was when he signed the roll in Ottawa in March of 1874. By this time the country had a change in government, as Alexander MacKenzie's Liberals had taken over from John A. MacDonald's Conservatives. Now it was the Liberal press that was on the defensive, trying to limit the embarrassment caused by Riel being an elected member of Parliament and by the rumours that he was coming to Ottawa to take his seat in the House of Commons. The Conservative press used the event to attempt to make the Liberal Government look hypocritical in their stance on Riel. The *Weekly Manitoban* played down the attendance of Riel in Ottawa, supposedly to quell any local conflict between French and English on the subject.

Only one *Globe* editorial at this time commented on the rumours of Riel being in Montreal and possible journeying to Ottawa. "Under such circumstances to talk of taking his seat in Parliament is ridiculous. If he is seen openly in Ottawa he will be arrested and sent to Manitoba for trial. There are plenty of persons in Ottawa who will be quite ready to apprehend him. How can a man in such a position take his seat?"<sup>141</sup>

This seeming disbelief that Riel would risk his liberty by attending a parliamentary session was most likely aimed to discredit the rumours and display the opinion that the editor of this Liberal paper was on side with the majority of those in Ontario in thinking Riel would be captured if he came into their province.

When Riel finally did attend the House of Commons and signed the roll, opposition papers took great pleasure in defaming the Liberal administration for allowing such a feat.

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<sup>141</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 30 March 1874.

The *Citizen* used sensational articles to get this message to its readers.

At no time since the murder of Thomas Scott has there been such excitement about Riel in this city - as there was last evening. When the news of Riel's appearance in the Parliament buildings was announced, it spread like wild fire through the city and there was an almost universal expression of disapproval with the Government in allowing the member for Provencher to sign the roll and be sworn in as a member of the House of Commons. To guard against emergencies that might be expected to arise from the course pursued by the Government, the Militia Department transmitted instructions to the commandants of the different corps in the city, ordering them to place a strong guard over the armories, and hold themselves in readiness for actual duty should the occasion demand it.<sup>142</sup>

The *Gazette* hurled equally strong statements against the Ottawa Government for its failing to have Riel arrested when he attended the House of Commons.

Citizens that have hitherto been strong supporters of the Reform Government, are indignant that Riel should have been sworn-in with the consent of the Premier, and the men who a short time ago howled so loudly for his blood. It is generally believed that Riel is at present, and has been all afternoon, in the building, and is now in one of the galleries in disguise.<sup>143</sup>

The *Globe's* approach was to minimize the importance of the event and to introduce some rumours of its own. The editorial of March 31 emphasized that Riel did not take his seat in the Commons, and speculated that he either left Ottawa immediately after appearing, or was in hiding within the city, awaiting "some fortune" to come to him. The reference to "some fortune" was a political dart thrown at the Conservatives, inferring that Riel was being supported and rewarded by those of the previous administration, for services rendered during the settling of the Red River Uprising in 1870.

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<sup>142</sup> "Excitement about Riel - Guarding the armories last evening", *Ottawa Citizen*, 31 March 1874.

<sup>143</sup> "What goes on in Ottawa", *Montreal Gazette*, 31 March 1874.

Rumour-filled stories on Riel's whereabouts circulated throughout the Central Canadian papers for several days after his appearance in Ottawa. Indignation meetings were reported to have been held or were planned in major centres in Ontario, in Montreal, and in Winnipeg to call upon the Federal Government to have Riel arrested and brought to justice. The expulsion of Riel from Parliament was mentioned as a definite possibility in *Globe* articles. Another article in the *Globe* mentions the "excitement in Winnipeg" which resulted in the "largest mass meeting ever held in this province".

At the same time, the *Weekly Manitoban* provided very little coverage on Riel's actions, and only mentions the indignation meeting held in that city in a small, somewhat obscurely displayed article in the paper. The limited coverage of these events by this publication may be explained by its previous efforts to avoid publishing stories which could provoke dissension between the French and English segments of the population.

Soon after the expulsion of Riel from Parliament, mention of Riel's name in print began to decline. Except for the mention of Riel being re-elected several times after his expulsion, there were few articles written on Riel in the East or in Manitoba until the following year. Riel again became prominent for a short time in the press when serious consideration was given to granting amnesty for those involved in the Red River Rebellion by Parliament in February, 1875. Once the conditional amnesty was granted to Riel, Lepine and O'Donohue, Riel's presence in the press diminished greatly. The only mentions found in 1876 were rumours of Riel being in a lunatic asylum, and later that he was said to have been cured or that his insanity was only feigned. After this mention of Riel, no further direct references were noted until 1884.

### 5.2.3 The Northwest Rebellion

#### Initial Rumblings

The *Manitoba Free Press* printed an article in mid-1884 on the happenings in the Northwest, near Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. The article mentions that the Métis of the region have been meeting to discuss their "alleged" grievances with the federal government. It also states that a delegation has been formed to travel to Montana and interview Louis Riel regarding these grievances.<sup>144</sup> This is the first noted mention of Riel and the Métis of the Northwest in the same article. Shortly after the above article appeared, a letter to the editor was printed in the *Free Press*, which responded to a column in the *Winnipeg Times*. The writer of the letter was angered by the inference that the provisional government during the Red River Rebellion was a legal and recognized governing body, and that the column in the *Times* cites documents produced by the Riel government.

Sir - Mr. Taylor of Winnipeg, in today's issue of the Times, has a letter partly made up of copies of letters, and partly by himself. These letters or documents enacted from a body of men in rebellion, but who by themselves and friends, were called a government. Their pretensions were well sifted, and their real character laid bare during the trial for murder (the Lepine trial) of one of their number. I do not wish at this time to divide the feelings throughout the province by reference in detail to the acts of that body of rebels - the so-called provisional government of Assiniboia. But on the other hand, I for one feel that I must at least let the new population, for whom Mr. Taylor is so anxious, know that there were then and there are now, in this country men whose loyalty is a sacred thing, and who now as then, are prepared to risk all in its defence. They did not acknowledge the men in arms in Fort Garry as a government, nor will they do so today, not withstanding the arguments of those

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<sup>144</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 28 May 1884.

who are now dallying with treason, and who now quote so often the so-called state papers that come from a source that many of us remembered only too well.<sup>145</sup>

This letter reiterates the feeling of those pro-Canadian loyalists who opposed the provisional government, just in case there are persons unaware of this fact or have forgotten the resistance of these persons. It is interesting to note that reference is made to the fact that a large portion of the settlement's population sympathized with the provisional government and Riel. The purpose of the letter appears to be to "inform" the newly arrived immigrants to Red River of the pro-Canadian version of the Red River Rebellion.

Throughout the summer of 1884, various reports in the *Free Press* via telegraph from Prince Albert indicated that "Louis Riel was among the Saskatchewan half-breeds"<sup>146</sup> and that "The half-breeds decide to petition the government"<sup>147</sup> During this period, a letter to the editor of the *Free Press* showed sympathy for the Métis grievances and indicated that Lieutenant Governor Dewdney was doing nothing to address these concerns.

Sir - In common with many others, no doubt, I expected that the opening of the Sixth Council of the Northwest would be marked by some reference to the state of disquietude manifest in the half-breed settlement of St. Laurent and adjacent places. But not a word was breathed on the subject. His Honour the Lieutenant Governor while commending to the attention of the Council "a measure for the encouragement of tree planting" could say nothing of the needs and lawful demands of a large portion of the population whose services in the past were beyond all price, and whose increasing numbers and intelligence would seem to entitle their particular interests to at least respectful consideration. Had the seat of government not been moved from Battleford, where the half-breeds have more strength, and some influence, to suit the

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<sup>145</sup> "The Riel government criticized" *Manitoba Free Press*, 3 June 1884.

<sup>146</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 3 July 1884.

<sup>147</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 15 July 1884.

sordid views of Mr. Dewdney, it is possible that the speech from the Throne would have taken a wider range than we read of, that, for instance, the land claims of the half-breeds would at least have ranked with "cattle herds, boarding houses, and billiard tables".<sup>148</sup>

This is only a partial quote of this letter, as in its totality it is quite lengthy. The writer further indicates that he served as a special land grants commissioner who determined which half-breeds were entitled to receive scrip under the provisions of Acts 33 and 37. This person indicated that he knew little of the people or the situation existing in the Northwest before being placed in his position. What he did know he stated he gleaned from English and American historical accounts which placed the Métis and the Red River Rebellion in a somewhat favourable light. The writer alluded to the fact that he had not been at Red River during 1869-70, and thus had not witnessed first hand the rebellion. This did not prevent the writer from forming the opinion that the Métis had legitimate grievances. This writer must comprise part of the "new population" the Canadian loyalist in the May 28, 1884 letter mentions as needing to be informed of the resistance to half-breed proclamations.

An article on Riel's "visit" to the Saskatchewan Métis settlements stated that a large meeting was held by the Métis, at which their grievances were discussed at length. Riel was also quoted in the article as giving his reasons for returning to Canada with the four delegates that travelled to Montana to seek his counsel.

I doubt whether my advice given to you on this soil concerning the affairs in Canadian territory could cross the border and retain any influence. But here is another view of the matter. I am entitled according to the thirty-first and thirty-second clauses of the Manitoba Treaty, to land of which the Canadian government

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<sup>148</sup> "The Northwest half-breed question" *Manitoba Free Press*, 16 July 1884.

have directly or indirectly deprived me, and my claim to which is valid not withstanding the fact that I have become an American citizen. Considering then that my interests are identical with yours, I accept your very kind invitation and will go and spend some months amongst you, in the hope that by petitioning the government we will obtain the redress of all our grievances. Montana has a population of which the native half-breed element constitutes a considerable proportion, and if we include those white men who, through being connected by marriage, or in other ways have a personal interest in their welfare, I believe it is safe to assert that the element is a pretty strong one. I am just getting acquainted with them, and I am one of those who would like to unite and direct its vote for the furtherance of their best interests; moreover I have made friends and acquaintances amongst those whom I would like to live. I go with you but to come back here sometime in September.<sup>149</sup>

By the end of July 1884, articles on Riel and the Métis grievances subsided and nothing more was noted until the new year.

In January of 1885 a small article published in the *Free Press* mentioned Louis Riel and the official government opinion on the situation in the Northwest. "Mr. Vankoughnet, Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs, says there is no truth in the sensational report telegraphed to the American papers of Louis Riel's inciting the Indians to rebellion in the Northwest."<sup>150</sup> It does appear the rumours of insurrection were a bit premature, as full scale rebellion was more than two full months away. The federal government and Central Canada, as they had been prior to the Red River Rebellion, appeared totally oblivious to the happenings in the Northwest. The papers in the east carried little information on what was occurring west of Manitoba. It was not until *after* the rebellion started that the Northwest caught the attention of the eastern papers.

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<sup>149</sup> "Louis Riel: He expresses sentiments of an amicable nature" *Manitoba Free Press*, 24 July 1884.

<sup>150</sup> "Mr. Vankoughnet on Louis Riel" *Manitoba Free Press*, 10 January 1885.



## Open Conflict

The *Free Press* was the first paper to report that hostilities had started in Saskatchewan. This occurred on March 18, 1885, and the headlines read "Rebellion - Riel openly defies the Queen's authority". In the same column was another headline stating "Several hundred men ready to enrol" which referred to those Canadians wishing to show their loyalty to the Queen and Dominion by enlisting to fight the Métis rebels in the Northwest. The initial reports from Prince Albert echoed these sentiments.

Louis Riel has thrown off the mask and now openly defies the Queen's authority. He says he has the half-breeds and Indians entirely under his control. He says that the Northwest police force is a mere nothing, and that their authority shall not be respected. Depriving the white settlers of their stand of arms last year has exasperated them but they remain loyal, and if given arms and ammunition they will defend themselves against Riel and uphold the Queen's authority. A mass meeting is to be held to-morrow afternoon and several hundred men will enlist if the government will furnish them with arms and ammunition. The feeling is very strong here that the government should come to their assistance if only for the sake of the women and children in the settlement. The government should act at once to avoid serious consequences.<sup>151</sup>

It was not until the following week that the eastern papers carried news of the Rebellion. The *Globe* stated in its headline "Louis Riel again heading an insurrection"<sup>152</sup>, with editorials from the Toronto paper attacking the Tory government in Ottawa for mismanagement of the Northwest which has led to the situation now existing. Articles in

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<sup>151</sup> "Rebellion" *Manitoba Free Press*, 18 March 1885.

<sup>152</sup> "Rebellion - Louis Riel again heading an insurrection" *Toronto Globe*, 23 March 1885.

the *Globe* initially focused on blaming the federal government and relegating Riel's significance to that of a player in the politics of the region. One article provided a sympathetic view of Riel: "Some men appear to have inherited certain tendencies which though not necessarily reprehensible, are nevertheless always landing them in trouble. Louis Riel appears to have come honestly enough by his revolutionary ideas."<sup>153</sup>

While the *Globe* attacked the Ottawa government, the *Ottawa Citizen* initially tried to minimize the insurrection by at first calling some of the reports "startling rumours" and then stating "The alleged uprising is confined to 500 half-breeds". Articles carried headlines such as "Riel Rumpus" and "Good news from disturbed quarters", which attempted to lessen the apparent seriousness of the situation. As well, editorials attacked the *Globe* for criticizing the federal government, and called the Toronto paper *Riel's Ontario Organ*. "The truth is that the *Globe* is as mad as Riel, and if Riel requires an organ, then that organ should be the *Globe*."<sup>154</sup>

Reports out of Ottawa suggested the government's official position was that of ignorance as to the reasons for the Métis uprising. "The immediate cause of the troubles is not known. Claims were made by half-breeds, some of which were unreasonable, and others were receiving investigation."<sup>155</sup>

It was not only the eastern papers that seemed to think the insurrection was of

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<sup>153</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 26 March 1885.

<sup>154</sup> *Ottawa Citizen*, 24-26 March 1885.

<sup>155</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 24 March 1885.

minimal concern; a *Free Press* editorial espoused a similar view on the matter.

Those who are familiar with the country know that the "rebellion" which has been stirred up in the vicinity of Fort Carlton, apparently by the aid of Louis Riel, is really an insignificant affair. People at a distance, however, cannot be expected to see it in that light since they do not know the circumstances. It would be hard to say what impressions have even now been formed regarding it on the other side of the Atlantic, whither tidings of it are pretty sure to have travelled. It is safe to say that the common notion will be that well nigh the whole Northwest is in the hands of a bloodthirsty lot of rebel half-breeds and Indians, and that the lives of all the settlers are threatened. Accurate knowledge of Northwest geography is not common in the Old country, so we need not be surprised if a great many there should look upon this rising as threatening even Winnipeg. The evil results of the spread of such ideas as we have indicated will be apparent to all. The season of immigration is just now opening, and who can tell how serious a check may be given to immigration by the impression being created that the whole northwest is seething with rebellion? It is most unfortunate indeed that an incident of this kind should have occurred at the present time.<sup>156</sup>

Letters to the editor from various businessmen echo these sentiments regarding the economic impact of the rebellion on the province. The editorial from which the above is a partial quote reflects the concern for economic growth and prosperity for the province. At the same time it illustrates the disregard outsiders have to the concerns of those involved in actual conflict, and emphasizes the self-centred interests of those indirectly affected by the uprising. In this same editorial, blame for the situation in the Northwest is placed on the Ottawa government. Thus, while the *Globe* was busy attacking federal policy and the *Citizen* was down-playing the significance of the rebellion, this *Free Press* editorial manages to combine both of these features into one article. Based on what is known of the paper, the ridiculing of the Tory federal policies is in its *Liberal* nature, but the attempt at lessening the significance of the rebellion is most likely due to the proximity of Manitoba to the area of

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

conflict and the effects such strife would have on the economic prosperity of the province.

By late March it was conceded that a military force would have to be assembled to put down the rebellion. The *Ottawa Citizen* published an article summing up what it had previously hoped would be avoidable; its headline read "Riel revolt: Extensive military preparations to crush it". This article focuses on the "magnificent outburst of loyal enthusiasm" regarding volunteers for the military force to the Northwest.<sup>157</sup>

The official government position in Ottawa, at least as reported in the *Free Press*, was that the Métis' unreasonable demands were entirely to blame for the rebellion. It was stated John A. MacDonald said in the House of Commons that greed on the part of the half-breeds caused them to rise up and defy Canadian authority.<sup>158</sup>

As has been shown in the past references, political wars were being waged between papers in the East. Editorials in the *Citizen* blamed Liberals for inciting further trouble in the Northwest, while the *Globe's* editors printed letters to the editor condemning federal administrations of the past 15 years (but carefully excusing the few years of Mackenzie's Liberal government) for their policies toward the Northwest. The *Free Press* published an article on Riel's stay in a Quebec asylum, in which it was stated the government was fully aware of his whereabouts, but did not act on this knowledge to apprehend him. The article entitled "How they hid him"<sup>159</sup> was aimed at embarrassing the Tory government in Ottawa,

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<sup>157</sup> *Ottawa Citizen*, 30 March 1885.

<sup>158</sup> "Sir John lays the blame on the half-breeds" *Manitoba Free Press*, 27 March 1885.

<sup>159</sup> "How they hid him" *Manitoba Free Press*, 30 March 1885.

but it neglected (perhaps purposely) to mention the time frame of Riel's stay in the asylum. It has been indicated by other sources that Riel's stay in the mental hospitals in Quebec was between 1876 and 1878. In this period of time it was Alexander MacKenzie's Liberal government which ruled in Ottawa. Accuracy of information often fell by the wayside when an opportunity to strike a blow against the political opposition presented itself.

All letters to the editor in the *Citizen* were of anti-Riel in sentiment. About half of the letters to the editor in the *Frees Press* were negative towards Riel or the Rebellion, with the other half being either neutral to or somewhat supportive of the Métis cause. Letters to the editor in the *Globe*, concerning Riel and the Rebellion, generally attacked the federal government first, then proceeded to criticize Riel actions, though some justification was given for the Métis grievances which led to the rebellion.

Several of the clergy in Winnipeg during this period had their views on the Northwest Rebellion published in the *Free Press*. Archbishop Tache from St. Boniface called upon the parishioners to obey their pastors' and the constituted authorities' wishes and not become involved in any activities which would cause excitement throughout the settlement. Given that Riel had gone against the wishes of the French Catholic clergy in Saskatchewan, it is not surprising that Archbishop Tache did not favour supporting the Métis rebels cause.<sup>160</sup>

Clergy from the English speaking communities of the Red River settlement were vocal in their condemnation of the Saskatchewan Métis and Riel. Reverend E.A. Stafford and Reverend J.B. Silcox were both quoted in the *Free Press* on their views. Stafford was

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<sup>160</sup> "Archbishop Tache speaks" *Manitoba Free Press*, 31 March 1885.

reported to have said that unlike John Brown who was a prophet who came before his time and whose cause was successful after his death, Riel had not come before his time, his prophecies were failures, and his fate would be to hang for his transgressions. Silcox aimed at the loyalist spirit in his address, and urged citizens to support the government to put down the rebels.

It is the duty of almost every man at this important period in our history to give serious thought to the country's needs. What is the present condition of affairs? Briefly it is this. In our Territories some of the settlers, under the leadership of Louis Riel, have risen in rebellion, and have already shed the blood of loyal citizens and soldiers. These men claim that they have been unjustly dealt with by the government, and have taken sanguinary measures to redress their grievances. It is an open secret that these men have many sympathizers in this city and country.

It is the supreme duty of every citizen at this crisis to assist the government to suppress this lawless uprising in the Northwest. Men wearing the British uniform and defending British laws have been shot through the heart almost within sight of us.

These are the days when the blatant demagogue yells himself hoarse over liberty of speech, and in the exercise of this liberty which in his case degenerates into licence, he was an incendiary's torch in the community and sets on fire the thoughts and passions of men. This so called free speech has kindled the fires of rebellion along the Saskatchewan. Men there have allowed their passions to pronounce on their wrongs, and listening to an arch-traitor they find themselves to-day arranged in a deadly war against the throne and flag of England.<sup>161</sup>

These pronouncements from prominent figures in the community portray Riel as basically an evil person who must be punished for his sinister ways. This feeling of animosity towards the rebels and their cause reached beyond Manitoba and Ontario. Editorials from the Maritime newspapers in Halifax and Fredericton, published in the *Ottawa Citizen*, ring with these sentiments. "The people of Canada are loyal; the feeling abroad in the land demands that this armed rebellion must be crushed quickly and severely. Our

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<sup>161</sup> "At the churches" *Manitoba Free Press*, 30 March 1885.

people not only demand this, but loyal citizens all over Canada come forward and offer their aid to do it."<sup>162</sup> *Ottawa Citizen* letters to the editor were captioned with such headlines as "Warfare with savages" and "How to deal with the murderers in the Northwest" Excerpts from the two letters are reprinted below

Why has not some combative officer introduced war rockets such as the British used against the Caffres, and with such good results? I feel certain that rockets would do good service if our boys had a few and let them loose, to hiss and squirm, among Mr. Riel's horses and Mr. strike-me-on-the-Back's young bucks and braves. They like the Cossacks and the Caffres, would think hell had broken loose, and the fiery devils with long tails had allied themselves with the Canadians to work their ruin.<sup>163</sup>

We should employ the most efficient means of speedily putting down and sweeping from the land these murderers, and the country will demand it and justify it. Those means are, as I have said, the employment of Indians and half-breeds and there are enough to do it. We have dealt justly and liberally with these savages, and are we to continue to feed them that they may periodically perpetrate these atrocities? Nor can we forget the millions with which the people will be burdened in restoring peace, and damages to the Dominion amounting to untold millions.<sup>164</sup>

Humour, not often used describing the situation in the Northwest, was employed in one *Citizen* article entitled "President Reil's [sic] speech from the throne"

My lords and gentlemen, I have called you together at this inclement season to consult on the best means of getting away. Circumstances over which I have no control make a long session inexpedient. The air at Duck Lake is not healthy. My physician says that the Throat and Neck disease promise to be prevalent about the palace during the summer and advise us to go South.<sup>165</sup>

In contrast to the *Citizen*, the *Globe* appeared moderate in its approach to the

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<sup>162</sup> "Editorial from the Fredericton Capital" *Ottawa Citizen*, 7 April 1885.

<sup>163</sup> "Warfare with savages" *Ottawa Citizen*, 15 April 1885.

<sup>164</sup> "How to deal with the murderers in the Northwest" *Ottawa Citizen*, 15 April 1885

<sup>165</sup> "President Reil's speech from the throne" *Ottawa Citizen*, 15 April 1885.

situation, and in one editorial mentioned amnesty for those rebels willing to listen to reason and surrender, in order to avoid Canadians shooting Canadians.<sup>166</sup> A letter to the editor from a Manitoba settler blames Ottawa for neglected half-breed land claims which are indicated to be the reason for Riel's entrance on the scene and the insurrection.<sup>167</sup>

Not all articles published showed Riel in a completely negative light. An article published in the *Citizen* and originally printed in the *Winnipeg Times* states the following of Riel. "So far from being a lunatic, Riel is a cool, calculating and able man. He has the capacity to plot with great intelligence, and he inspires confidence in his followers. He is a natural leader."<sup>168</sup>

Reports published in the *Free Press* indicated that there was open support for Riel in Montreal and Chicago as meetings were held by those who sympathized with his cause and hoped that matters could be resolved "amicably" in the Northwest.<sup>169</sup> Letters to the editor of the *Free Press* indicate some sympathy for the Métis cause and blame much of the trouble on the federal government.<sup>170</sup>

The newspapers in April and May of 1885 were full of references to the soldiers who

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<sup>166</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 3 April 1885.

<sup>167</sup> "Incapacity and wicked misrule at Ottawa the cause of the Rebellion" *Toronto Globe*, 7 April 1885.

<sup>168</sup> "A picture of Riel" *Ottawa Citizen*, 7 April 1885.

<sup>169</sup> "Sympathy with Riel" *Manitoba Free Press*, 3,27 April 1885; and "Riel sympathizers" *Manitoba Free Press*, 22 April 1885.

<sup>170</sup> "A letter from Prince Albert" and "S.C. Elliots Views" *Manitoba Free Press*, 4 April 1885.



were going off into battle, the various troops movements, and various accounts of the battles and Indian uprisings. These types of stories dominated the headlines. Accounts pertaining specifically to Riel were less prevalent. Those accounts that did mention Riel were of a variety of opinions on the man, and described his personality in various ways. Some letters indicated Riel was not seeking violence, but that government inaction prompted the actions taken by the Métis. Accounts of released or escaped prisoners of the Métis suggest that Riel was humane in his treatment, and that he spared many from torture and death. One such report from Mr. John Kerr, a shop owner at Batoche who was taken prisoner by the Métis, is partially quoted here.

After the Duck Lake fight Mr. Kerr says that the half-breeds wanted to use the prisoners as target practice, but Riel's "gentle heart" warmed towards them and they were spared. Speaking of Riel, Mr.Kerr said he was a crank, and that he made the half-breeds and Indians believe he was super-human.<sup>171</sup>

Another account of a prisoner by the name of Harrold E. Ross, a police scout, enforces the view of Riel as humanitarian.

Old Gabriel Dumont, who got a bullet wound in the head in the first of the action, and was unconscious during the fight, said "bring out the prisoners till I have my revenge." The Indians took up a his yell, and just about that time things looked very black for us. Riel, however, rode up, and after some talking and the interference of some sensible men, saved us. The police had retreated in such a hurry that nine civilians were left on the field, and one wounded man Riel saved. He was shot through the leg, and an Indian was beating him on the head with his gun when he was rescued. Poor chap! He had his head badly cut , and two of his fingers broken. The next day Riel called to see us. I had seen him before lots of times and knew him well. He said "How do you do Mr. Ross? God has sent me to establish a new code of laws in the Northwest, and has placed you in my power. You shall not suffer, for I will give you the position under the Provisional government as you held under the

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<sup>171</sup> "The Rebellion - Arrival of one of Riel's Prisoners" *Manitoba Free Press*, 20 April 1885.

Dominion." I thanked him, and suggested he might raise me to full sheriff.<sup>172</sup>

This account also provides a glimpse of Riel's own comprehension of the situation. In this quote Riel appears to be deluded by his vision of forming a new religious state. This outlook by Riel no doubt contributed to the view that he was insane, although English Canadians did not want this to interfere with punishment for his acts against the Dominion<sup>173</sup>

The coverage of the rebellion by the press was often criticized in newspapers, but one such editorial singled out the *Canadian Pictorial and Illustrated War News* for its attempt at providing the readers with visual images of the battle scenes.

An alleged illustrated paper is being published in Toronto, yelpt [sic] the "War News", which ought to be suppressed. Its chief aim seems to be to convey impressions with regard to this country as misleading as any utterly ignorant person is capable of conceiving. We did not seriously object to having a section of an old painting of the Battle of Waterloo reproduced as the Duck Lake fight, but when it comes to exhibiting a northern Ontario mid-winter logging scene as an illustration of the progress of our troops through the Touchwood Hills we protest. The whole conception of this "Illustrated War News" is absurd. The paper has no artist with the troops, no means of getting a correct idea of the scenes it undertakes to depict. Surely the public does not want imaginary whitewash-brushed sketches. The "Illustrated War News" is too enterprising by half. Its publishers should have confined themselves to their legitimate business - issuing sign boards.<sup>174</sup>

The author of the above quote conveys the feelings of those westerners irritated by misrepresentation of the Northwest as a snowy and storm-ridden expanse, even in mid-Spring. As well this quote is an example of how preconceptions of the reporter can provide

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<sup>172</sup> "A prisoners tale" *Manitoba Free Press*, 9 July 1885.

<sup>173</sup> "Riel and Sir John" *Manitoba Free Press*, 18 May 1885; "What about Riel" *Ottawa Citizen*, 20 May 1885; "What will be done with him?" *Toronto Globe*, 22 May 1885.

<sup>174</sup> "Illustrated War News" *Manitoba Free Press*, 29 April 1885.

the reader (or viewer) with a distorted representation of a particular situation. All newspapers scanned to this point have been guilty of some distortion of events, although the *Illustrated War News* appears to be the most obvious.

The *Canadian Pictorial and Illustrated War News* itself was published in two issues, one in July and one in August of 1885, several months after the Northwest Rebellion had been quashed. The two issues were subtitled: *Being a History of Riel's Second Rebellion*. The cover pages of both these issues displayed a drawing of a woman in a long dress and metal corset brandishing a broadsword and shield. In the drawing the woman is stepping on a snake and is thrusting the tip of her sword through the snakes head. It is surmised that this image is to symbolize the Queen and Dominion (the woman with the sword) and the rebels in the Northwest (the snake). The opening sentence of this publication provided its purpose. "It contains graphic illustrations of experiences of the volunteers and events transpiring at the front in connection with the North-Western Rebellion."<sup>175</sup> Most of the illustrations and text of this paper focused on the accounts of Canadian soldiers and settlers during the Northwest Rebellion. The illustration of the capture of Louis Riel contains a Canadian army scout on horseback pointing a pistol at three men (the one in the middle intended to be Riel) standing with their arms raised high in the air. Other than this drawing, and some information on Riel's trial in Regina, there is little information that directly pertains to Riel. Things such as an honour role of those Canadians comprising the Northwest Field Force "which suppressed the rebellion", and drawings of soldiers in action and the capturing of

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<sup>175</sup> *Canadian Pictorial and Illustrated War News*, (Toronto: Grip Publishing Co., 1885) July 1885.

Natives fill up most of the pages of this publication. It seems that the *Illustrated War News*' aim was to provide visual images of the success and bravery of the Loyal Canadian troops who fought to preserve the Dominion's constituted authority in the region.

A poem written on the Northwest Rebellion was published in the *Citizen* and it also promoted the loyalty and bravery of those who voluntarily participated on the side of the Dominion. It is interesting to note that from the perspective of the poet the Canadian volunteers were essentially virtuous in their mission of putting down the rebellion, while the Métis were ruthless and completely without justification for their actions. In these verses Canadian volunteers become brave, responsible men, who with right on their side will rid the country of the villainous rebels. This is one example of English Canadians generating their own heroes to counter-act the heroes generated by the Metis and French.

Onward ye trusty volunteers,  
Against the sneaking foes  
Who in our country's time of peace  
her laws and rules oppose.

Onward, and let each faithful heart  
Be braced up to the fight;  
And let the traitorous rascals know  
And feel our power and might.

Onward, and let each soldier brave  
Fight for his country's fame,  
That as our brilliant sun goes up,  
May their's go down in shame.

Onward, and let the bullets fly  
Amongst the savage men,  
That the vengeance they are meting out  
May be meted back to them.

Onward then in your country's right  
And let your arm be strong;  
Fight bravely, show the rebel crew  
Your scorn of craft and wrong.

Onward, and let the guns speak out  
And sweep the rebels down  
Like chaff before the wind of heaven  
For country and for Crown.<sup>176</sup>

The Métis resistance fell in mid-May, and Riel was subsequently taken into custody, once he had secured a promise from General Middleton that he would be protected from vengeful loyalists. One account of his capture appears typical of how it was described in the English Canadian press at the time.

Capture of Riel to-day caused great excitement and joy in the camp. The three scouts that effected the capture came upon him and two young men in a bluff a short distance North of here. One of his companions was armed, but no resistance was made to arrest. While Riel was talking with the three men he saw Boulton's and French's troops approaching and grew alarmed lest he should be shot for revenge. He begged the men to take him quietly and quickly before General Middleton. He also expressed his fears of a military trial, and eagerly asked the scouts what they thought of his chances of coming before a civil court.

General Middleton was apprehensive of Riel being shot by someone in camp, as many had sworn openly that they would shoot him down on sight. However, the men all remained quiet, and nothing occurred while the prisoner was taken before the General. Riel is now in camp and closely guarded to prevent any harm coming to him.<sup>177</sup>

This news was reported to have been celebrated throughout Ontario, and an advertisement in the *Globe* for a clothing store joined in the act. The clothier, as part of the ad, has caricatures of Middleton and Riel prominently displayed on the page. Middleton, in full military dress, is marching and holding up by the neck with one hand extended in

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<sup>176</sup> "Poem on the Northwest Rebellion" *Ottawa Citizen*, 23 May 1885.

<sup>177</sup> "Riel captured" *Manitoba Free Press*, 16 May 1885.

front of him, a smaller likeness of Riel. Accompanying this sketch is a caption that besides promoting the firm's fine selection of merchandise, states the following: "The announcement of the capture of Riel in Saturday morning's *Globe* created the wildest joy and excitement throughout the whole of Ontario, and many a Canadian home was made happy by the joyful news."<sup>178</sup> With Riel in the hands of the Canadian authorities, speculation now concentrated on whether he would be held accountable for his actions and be punished fully for his crimes against the Dominion.

Editorials in the *Free Press* and *Globe* indicated both their dislike of the Prime Minister and at the same time the expected outcome for Riel. Referring to John A. MacDonald's options regarding Riel's fate, the following editorial summarizes their cynical views on the matter.

He would not be asked to hang his partner in the rebellion. That would be cruel! If Riel cannot be hustled out of the country some dark night, with a few thousand dollars worth of dominion notes in his possession to serve as pocket money when he gets south of the line, or conveniently shot in the meantime, he must be got into a lunatic asylum as soon as possible. If a suitable asylum is not available, one must be built.<sup>179</sup>

The question of Riel's sanity was a popular topic in the newspapers before, after, and during his trial. Mention was again made of his stays in the Quebec asylums between 1876 and 1878. Stories from various persons who purported to know of his stays in the hospitals

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<sup>178</sup> "Crushed again" *Toronto Globe*, 20 May 1885.

<sup>179</sup> "Riel and Sir John" *Manitoba Free Press*, 18 May 1885.

provided conflicting reports as to whether he was feigning illness or actually insane.<sup>180</sup> The use of the insanity defence by his legal counsel and the utilization of expert medical opinions also provided the press with interesting angles with which to frame articles on his trial.<sup>181</sup>

As for public opinion, loyalists voiced that they hoped Riel would be hanged expeditiously and without the meddling of certain factions designed to help Riel escape just punishment. These certain factions were the influential French Catholic clergy and politicians. A reply to the loyalist opinions voiced in the *Citizen* was sent in by a French Canadian who took exception to the generalizations made regarding the French.

We are not saying that Riel is not a rebel, but we will never say it until justice has proclaimed him to be one. It is not the task of "Mr. Loyalist" to enter a list of crimes where fanaticism is looking through a magnifying glass. Moreover, nobody I think wants any kind of immunity, among the French, for Riel if he is found guilty. The only thing any well-born citizen would ask is respect for a poor wretched being, who appears to be much guilty, but who is never-the-less innocent until he has had a trial. Above all, is not this hanging business something like a remains of barbarity which existed centuries ago? Do not the simplest laws of humanity forbid such low, degrading and cowardly actions?

We will provoke nobody, but if some hot headed idiots were to forget that the French Canadians will not allow the Britons nor anything in that shape to insult them with impunity, it may be a day of gloomy for those who think that our feelings are no more than a plaything in their hands! (Signed a Loyal French Canadian)<sup>182</sup>

Immediately following this letter, the editor writes a notice to the readers which states

"As we have permitted a reply to *Loyalist* we think it best that correspondence on the subject

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<sup>180</sup> "Crazy Riel" and "The rebel chief not so crazy as reported" *Manitoba Free Press*, 22,27 May 1885; and "Riel's feigned insanity" *Ottawa Citizen*, 29 May 1885.

<sup>181</sup> "The Riel trial: The prisoner wants to examine witnesses - contends he is sane, doctors differ on the point" *Toronto Globe*, 31 July 1885.

<sup>182</sup> "The Riel Effigy" *Ottawa Citizen*, 29 July 1885.

should close with *A loyal French Canadian's* letter. The continuance of the discussion would only tend to engender feelings which it is not desirable should be developed."<sup>183</sup>

In the *Free Press* opinion was divided between those who thought Riel was already guilty and should be executed, to those who wanted to see a fair trial for Riel.<sup>184</sup> At approximately the same time, other letters to the editor were observed to be written by those denying any involvement with the rebel forces. One was from a settler from Prince Albert who refuted a *Toronto Mail* report that he was a "white rebel" in collusion with Riel.<sup>185</sup> Another was from Father Andre, a representative of the Catholic missions in the Prince Albert region. He denounced the actions of Riel and stated that the clergy had taken no part in rebellion. Father Andre states:

Riel had so completely won their affections and so poisoned their minds against the priests that they refused to listen to our remonstrances. Those poor people were carried by their enthusiasm for their leader to such a pitch that they considered him as something supernatural and we, their old friends, were thrown aside to make room for the new prophet. Riel clever knave as he is, in order to conceal from the Métis his selfish designs and to make them ready tools for his future plans, pandered to their prejudices, roused their national feelings by reminding them of happy times when, master of this country, they acted as Supreme Lords without police, without Canadian government to interfere with them.<sup>186</sup>

It was obvious why certain people would want to disassociate themselves from any

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> "The Commission" and "A plea for justice" *Manitoba Free Press*, 1,5 June 1885.

<sup>185</sup> "White Rebels" *Manitoba Free Press*, 10 July 1885.

<sup>186</sup> "The priests and the rebellion" *Manitoba Free Press*, 6 July 1885.



presumed or inferred relationship with Riel. Outside of the Métis community he was generally considered to have committed serious criminal acts against the country. These persons did not want to have their own or their professions reputation linked to such lawlessness.

Once Riel was pronounced guilty, the reactions of various persons and groups were transmitted onto the pages of the papers of Canada. English Canadian liberals generally agreed with the verdict, but often cited the recommendation for mercy by the jury as an indication that the federal government was also guilty of misconduct. English Canadian conservatives rejoiced that justice had been served. The Québécois papers indicated that Riel was probably insane, and thus unjustly punished. An editorial in the *Montreal Gazette* summarized the opinion most English language press had of the guilty verdict.

The evidence of guilt was overwhelming. Indeed there was no serious attempt made to combat the testimony produced by the crown. His attempt to extort money from the government as the price for his departure from the country indicated no religious mania, the pretence of a desire to establish a new system of government in the Northwest was rather a blind to hide his real purposes, and that his is simply a bold, dangerous adventurer.<sup>187</sup>

While this was the opinion of the press an incident in a Montreal opera hall suggested the feelings of the public on the subject in that city was far from being unified. The *Free Press* reported the following story several days after the guilty verdict was announced. "An actress created a great commotion at the Crystal Palace opera house by getting off a joke about Riel being like a picture, 'doomed to be hung'. The audience was about evenly divided.

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<sup>187</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 4 August 1885.

There was much uproar, but nobody was hurt."<sup>188</sup> Out in the West, a mass meeting of the general public occurred in St. Boniface, in which one thousand people attended to protest Riel's sentence.<sup>189</sup> The liberal press voiced its doubts on Riel being executed at all, especially since the execution date was moved back several times, and it appeared the federal government was reluctant to give the order to carry out the sentence. However, after numerous appeals and reprieves were exhausted, Riel was finally executed in Regina on November 16, 1885. A letter to the editor of the *Globe* provides a surprisingly contemporary sounding summation of the significance of the hanging Riel.

Sir- at last the Ottawa government has made up their minds to hang Riel. It was supposed by a majority of Canadian people and by the Americans, that this would not be done, because his offence although very serious, could not be divested of a political character. Many Canadians, especially Orangemen, have said that he deserved to be hanged, because he acted in a cruel manner to Scott, and in fact they say murdered him. If this was the case, how can such men reconcile themselves, especially Orangemen, to the thick and thin support of that master spirit of hypocrisy and political corruption, Sir John A. MacDonald? Is it not on record (and nothing can be plainer, as it is in proof on oath) that Sir John helped the departed man with money to leave the Northwest after the rebellion of 1870, and after the death of Scott? This offense then was condemned, pardoned, and cannot be taken into consideration in reference to the recent rebellion.

Under the circumstances (as the jury, not chosen by Riel, but by the Sheriff and local authorities, in his trial recommended him to mercy) it would have been better to have commuted his sentence to life imprisonment.

The mere hanging of Riel cannot stifle the feeling in the Northwest or in Lower Canada. The spirit of the age would have dictated a different course, and future history will probably say that the conduct of rulers must always be taken into consideration in rebellions. (Signed - *Patriot*, November 18, 1885, Toronto)<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> "Riel like a picture" *Manitoba Free Press*, 7 August 1885.

<sup>189</sup> "Riel" *Manitoba Free Press*, 10 September 1885.

<sup>190</sup> "Political executions for treason" *Toronto Globe*, 20 November 1885.

Taking into consideration that the *Globe* is notorious for Tory bashing, it is still somewhat surprising that such a suggestion that Riel should not be hanged could come from an Ontario resident, abet a non-Orangemen. Perhaps this is a clue as to why Riel has over time come to be considered heroic. It was not that all English Canadians held the Orange Lodge view of hatred towards Riel. In Manitoba and in the West generally opinion appeared divided amongst the English Canadians on Riel's guilt. However, in Ontario and other English-speaking provinces, opinion appeared strongly biased against Riel. Those in power in Ontario and Ottawa have dictated what future generations of Canadians should believe about Riel and the Métis cause by exaggerating his guilt by putting him to death, and also covering up their own misconduct in the Northwest Rebellion, as well as the Red River Uprising.

Weeks after his hanging, the papers still printed articles mentioning Riel's funeral and of student protests in Quebec, but by mid-December all references to Riel had ceased. This concludes the analysis of the rebellion years. It shall be seen in the following time periods the evolution in perceptions on Riel when compared to this first interval of analysis.

### 5.3 Early Twentieth Century 1909-1939

In this time period it has been noted that very little information on Riel was published in the English language newspapers in Canada. Dates considered significant today, such as July 15th, the official date of Manitoba's entrance into confederation, and November 16th, the date Riel was executed, provided little reference to the man or his deeds. Articles uncovered through the scanning of the various papers indicate a strongly negative opinion of Riel, at least that appears to be the official government sentiment.

The earliest reference to Riel and the Rebellion were found in an article which centred around a visit of Donald Smith (a.k.a Lord Strathcona) to Winnipeg. It was stated in the article that Smith (or Lord Strathcona as he was commonly referred to during the time period) was sent as a special commissioner to investigate and seek a settlement of the matter at Red River. It was also indicated that if Smith had been sent to the West earlier, the uprising would not have occurred.<sup>191</sup>

In 1910, in what was the year of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Northwest Rebellion, the *Globe* ran various stories of those soldiers that fought for Canada against the Métis in 1885. One of these articles extolled the loyalty and bravery of the Queen's Own Rifles who fought in the campaign, and also included war recollections of the veterans. No direct mention of Riel is made, and the uprising is summed up in a rather cursory fashion: "The story of the second Northwest rebellion and its terrible hardships has been told and

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<sup>191</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 23 August 1909; and *Manitoba Free Press*, 24 August 1909.

retold in every Canadian household."<sup>192</sup> It seems that this remark excused the writer from any further need to discuss the events leading up to and occurring during the rebellion regarding the Métis.

An article that actually focused on Riel was found in the Saturday edition of the *Globe*. The story involved the reminiscences of a person described as an "old Scotch Highlander" by the name of Duncan, who apparently knew Riel. Duncan states that if Riel's father had made him work in the family mill rather than allowing Louis to attend school, Riel would probably not have caused the "trouble" he did. Riel was described as a person with "an air about him", and deep penetrating eyes that "would be looking through you."<sup>193</sup>

There was also mention of the hanging of Louis Riel in the *Free Press* on the date of the 25th anniversary, although this was done in a very brief note, and no other references were made to Riel or the Rebellion. "Mr. Sherwood, Chief of the Dominion Police, arrived in the city from Ottawa on the regular train yesterday. He carried a warrant for the execution of Riel." The following day it was printed that: "Riel has expiated his crimes. The rebel leader has met his fate with courage."<sup>194</sup>

After 1910, no mention of Riel was noted until the 30th anniversary of his execution in 1915. The *Winnipeg Tribune* provided this description of the Métis leader.

It was just thirty years ago yesterday that Louis Riel, the half-breed leader of two

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<sup>192</sup> "Semi-centennial of the Queen's Own" *Toronto Globe*, 2 April 1910.

<sup>193</sup> "In the Assiniboia Valley: Memories of Indians and Louis Riel" *Toronto Globe*, 26 March 1910.

<sup>194</sup> "Twenty-five years ago today" *Manitoba Free Press*, 16,17 November 1910.

western rebellions, had his rather meteoric career forcefully cut short by the government of the Northwest Territories, when he was led to a wooden gallows and hanged by the neck till he was dead.<sup>195</sup>

This was all that was published on Riel thirty years after his death. It appears more important to convey the method of his execution, rather than the circumstances explaining why he rebelled.

The 50th anniversary of Canadian Confederation in 1917 furnished a somewhat more detailed reference to Riel. The *Free Press*, in its special supplement commemorating the semi-centennial of Canada's birth, provided an inaccurate description of Manitoba's entrance into Confederation.

Manitoba did not enter the confederacy until July of 1870, or three years after its (Canada's) formation. This was due to a lack of easy communication with eastern provinces and to the small number of white inhabitants. No more than had she established her provinciality than trouble came. Before a general election could be held, the few white men then here were confronted with a rebellion headed by a half-breed named Riel. The uprising was soon squelched without bloodshed, and the first election was held December 27, 1870.<sup>196</sup>

This blatant falsifying of historical facts leads one to wonder if this was done intentionally to enhance the Dominion's and the English Canadian's role in the formation of the province since no mention is made of the provisional government in its negotiations with the federal government. It is possible that this rendition of events was proclaimed as the truth the by authorities and thus believed to be the actual circumstances that caused the

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<sup>195</sup> "Thirty years ago Louis Riel paid the penalty at Regina" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 17 November 1915.

<sup>196</sup> "Manitoba's half-century journey" *Manitoba Free Press*, 30 June 1917.

creation of Manitoba. It may also be that those reporting the history (in this instance the press) were simply repeating what had been relayed to them as fact.

Regardless of the reasons for the misinformation being promulgated as historical fact in a prominent newspaper, the actual publishing of such inaccurate accounts of Riel's role in the formation of Manitoba would not surprisingly lead many persons to believe that Riel was a villain. This notion was compounded by there being little published by other newspapers on Riel, and nothing noted that contradicted this version of events during this time period.

In the same issue of the *Free Press*, reference is made to the Manitoba contribution to the war effort of the First World War, which had been underway for three years at the time on the Dominion's 50th anniversary. In order to promote a sense of pride in the province's military history, the following narration was noted.

Manitoba entered this world fighting for the liberty of its newly born province, and now, nearly fifty years later, her people are fighting for the liberation of the world. Always peace-loving people, nevertheless her citizens have ever acquitted themselves bravely on the field of battle. The military history of the province is a notable one, starting as it did with handful of loyal Canadian settlers of the embryo village of Winnipeg enrolled to defend government stores against Riel, the half-breed, and his motley mob, up to the present participation in the world's great war. These early settlers, 39 in number, were enrolled by Lt. Col. Dennis and did not capitulate to Riel until promises were made that both sides should lay down their arms. Riel did not live up to the agreement, but instead herded the loyal defenders into Fort Garry, where they were imprisoned for four months.

Winnipeg next heard the martial tramp of soldiers a few months later, when Col. Garnet Wolseley was sent by the Dominion government to end the reign of the wily Riel, who had persisted in running amuck. On hearing the troops were approaching, Riel fled and the Union Jack was hoisted above the fort.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> "Winnipeg fifty years ago fought for liberty as today" *Manitoba Free Press*, 30 June 1917.

Clearly, what constitutes a "loyal" Manitoban is that he or she is Anglo-Saxon and pro-Canadian, in this context at least. What is somewhat surprising is that no mention is made of the execution of Thomas Scott in this story. Such a reference would surely have made Riel appear even more villainous. Perhaps the mentioning of such a fact would have ignited controversy over other points made in this rendition, and possibly lead to an uncovering of more accurate information. In addition, by changing the chronological order of events so that Manitoba became a province before Riel and his "mob" caused trouble, the article ensured that no connection was made between the Métis uprising and the creation of Manitoba.

Several years later, for the 50th anniversary of Manitoba entering Confederation, a more accurate, though still somewhat confused version of the events, was printed in the *Free Press* editorial column.

The original idea at Ottawa was to administer the West, including the Red River settlement, as a territorial appanage; and if discretion had been shown in the choice of a governor and in recognition of the right of the original settlers to be consulted, this might have proved a very satisfactory stepping stone to a larger status. But for reasons not known for twenty years Red River settlement was erected into a province with a postage stamp area, and it was at the same time deliberately deprived of its resources, although the best defined of all the principles of British Colonial administration provides that self-government and control of lands go together. There followed the lamentable events of 1870. The very natural and within proper limits entirely justifiable opposition of the original settlers to this policy of the Dominion government got out of hand; and under the leadership of a hare-brained youth of twenty-five took the form of open rebellion. When Manitoba was finally organized as a province it became a member of the Confederation family under severe handicaps. Eastern opinion about the new province was coloured by two misconceptions, which persist to this day: One that this province had been "bought" by the East, and the other that after being bought it had been "conquered."<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> "A troubled fifty years" *Manitoba Free Press*, 15 July 1920.



This article promotes the idea that Manitoba would have been a better province if it had not been granted provincial status in 1870. Riel is portrayed as a contributor to the poor image this province had in the East. Rather than being recognized as bringing Manitoba into Confederation, he is viewed as causing Manitoba to be brought in prematurely, resulting in it being disadvantaged compared to the rest of the Dominion.

A more historically accurate article was published in the same edition of the *Free Press* on Riel and his political significance at Red River. This article still provides a one-sided view and judgement of Riel's contribution.

The troubles attendant upon the birth of the province projected themselves into the politics of the new province and of eastern Canada as well. There was a view strongly backed both in the Red River settlement and at Ottawa that the government headed by Riel had been a real provisional government and that an amnesty for its leaders would be justified; against this the Canadian element in the settlement raged, demanding that Riel and his associates be regarded as murderers and rebels and treated as such. For years the question of amnesty for Riel was a burning question at Ottawa; it was settled when Lepine, his associate, was tried in the Manitoba courts and found guilty of murder. Thereafter Riel was an exile in the United States until he made the ill-fated venture of 1885, which cost him his life.<sup>199</sup>

Here there is no mention of the fact that Riel was banished for five years from Canada and that though Lepine was found guilty of murder, his sentence was commuted from the death penalty to two years imprisonment. The understanding this article conveys is that constituted legal British or Dominion authority proclaimed that Riel was guilty, and thus the argument was settled outright.

The *Winnipeg Tribune* at the time, also published items referring the Manitoba's past

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<sup>199</sup> "Half century of political development" *Manitoba Free Press*, 15 July 1920.

history. The *Tribune* stories followed a pattern similar to that of its rival Winnipeg daily, although some of the columns mentioned the provisional government's structure and activity in detail. One particular article, in describing the Council of Assiniboia and its members, mentioned that Riel was the leader of a structured, somewhat "official" governing body.<sup>200</sup> The same article also states that Riel the "insurrectionist" was duly elected president by his friends prevailing upon the electorate. Further along, in describing the imprisonment at Fort Garry of the Canadians who tried to overthrow the Métis, Riel is painted as a more sinister character.

Riel promised to release the prisoners, and to announce a general amnesty, but delayed fulfilment of the pledge. It was not until the Northwest was shocked and terrified by the brutal execution of Thomas Scott that Riel, fearing the growing strength of his enemies, released the captives. No explanation appears in any history as to the real motive for shooting Scott. He was the only man executed by Riel, although previously Major Boulton of Portage, had been condemned to death and pardoned. It is believed Riel wished to strike terror into the hearts of the English settlers by his actions, and became terrified afterward at what he had done. In any event, history shows that his policy became weaker and more vacillating afterward.<sup>201</sup>

This story states that no information was available as to precisely why Scott was executed, but fills in this gap in the facts with pro-Canadian loyalist gossip. No other possible explanation is provided, thus reinforcing the notion that this is probably a correct interpretation of events. Other stories in this issue carry a pro-Canadian theme regarding happenings at Red River. There was also published the population figures for Manitoba after

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<sup>200</sup> "Manitoba was a republic for 9 months, with Riel as leader, history shows" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 17 July 1920.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

an official census was taken in 1870. The number of inhabitants of the province was displayed in the following ranking:

Whites	1,565
English half-breeds	4,083
French half-breeds	5,757
<u>Indians</u>	<u>558</u>
Total	11,963 <sup>202</sup>

This hierarchical order has the Whites, who made up the second smallest group in number, being placed on top, with the French Métis constituting the largest group placed next to last. This small example illustrates quite openly the preferred social order, at least the one espoused by this particular paper. These pro-Canadian sentiments seemed to be also displayed in the eastern papers, even though few stories were found specifically mentioning Riel. The *London Free Press* carried an article on one of the Canadians held prisoner by the Métis in 1870 at Fort Garry, an Adam W. Graham. The former prisoner gave this account of the Scott incident.

Scott escaped from prison along with Dr. Schultz and hurried to raise a rescue army. He marched backed with the rescuing force, demanding the release of the other prisoners. Riel reluctantly acceded to the demand and the rescuing force started back to Portage la Prairie. Riel promptly sprang a coup. He rushed out a band of his men and captured some fifty of the rescuers. By a strange turn of fate Thomas Scott was in that company. He and three of four other prominent prisoners were sentenced to death by Riel. Immediately there was an appeal for clemency from several directions. The death sentence was commuted on all except Scott. Riel was obdurate on his case and would not listen to those who sought to save him. Scott paid for his bravery with his blood.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> "Flaunted Riel but escaped fate of others who refused to join rebel" *London Free Press*, 21 August 1926.

This article portrays Riel as a treacherous enemy to anyone who did not side with him. This recollection fails to provide an explanation of why Scott was executed when the others were pardoned. The prisoner's story seeks to impart that Scott's brave actions brought about his demise at the hands of Riel.

On the 60th anniversary of Confederation, a small reference in the *Toronto Globe* is made to Riel, in regard to Manitoba's entrance into Confederation. The article is fairly accurate in its description of events, with the exception that it implies Manitoba entered Confederation after Riel had fled from Wolseley's troops.<sup>204</sup> This produces the impression that Riel was an impediment to Manitoba becoming a province, rather than the main cause of provincial status being granted at that time. These few examples display the pro-Canadian sentiment that existed in Ontario during this period of time.

The majority of articles written on Riel in this era have been found in the Winnipeg newspapers, with the bulk of the stories surfacing in the 1930's. During the 1930's, pro-Riel articles were noted for the first time in English language papers since his execution. These articles furnished the Métis view of events, as they were written primarily by Métis or French authors. With the advent of articles such as these, a whole new interest on Riel began. Controversy, which was not evident since the time of the Red River and Northwest rebellions, began to surface, as persons began discussing Riel's significance with regard to Canadian history. Both pro and anti-Riel stories were noted in this decade, along with articles of those in some way associated with Riel.

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<sup>204</sup> "How Dominion has expanded" *Toronto Globe*, 30 June 1927.

One of the first major accounts of Riel during this decade was noted, not in a newspaper, but in a popular Canada news magazine. The story on Riel covered several pages of the *Maclean's* October 15, 1930 edition. The article by Vernon LaChance exhibited a questioning tone regarding Riel. A caption read "Patriot or rebel, zealot and reformer, hero, martyr, or knave - how shall he be judged?"<sup>205</sup> This was a basically sympathetic account of Riel's activities. The author laid much of the blame for the two rebellions upon the federal government of the day, which he portrayed as an ignorant and blundering administration in dealings with the Métis grievances. The article primarily focuses on the Red River uprising and Riel's election to parliament. It states that the English half-breeds at Red River approved of the Métis action, but were reluctant to become actively involved. Thomas Scott was stated to have assaulted his guard, and as a result was "court-martialled", sentenced to death, and executed the next morning. The author stated that this act by Riel contributed to his demise. "Riel's day was done. The death of Scott was laid at his door. It aroused the most frenzied feeling in Ontario, and vengeance was demanded."<sup>206</sup>

This pro-Riel account provided some justification for the execution of Scott, other than that Riel wanted to strike terror into the English population or was simply being obstinate. It also states that by executing Scott, Riel incurred the wrath of Ontario which ultimately led to his downfall at Red River. By portraying Riel in this fashion, LaChance hoped to present an alternative view and perhaps bring into question any negative

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<sup>205</sup> Vernon LaChance, "Picture of Riel" *Maclean's*, 15 October 1930, p.14,15,71-74.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

conceptions the reader may have of Métis leader. Very little biographical information is available on Vernon LaChance. In a scan of publications, only one other work is noted to have been produced by him, and it appears as a bulletin from the Departments of History and Political and Economic Science at Queen's University, in Kingston, Ontario. This work was entitled the *Diary of Francis Dickens*, and was dated May 1930. It is not clear from the work the type of affiliation LaChance had with Queen's University.

A *Winnipeg Tribune* article also demonstrates the doubting of popular belief, with its headline, "Was Riel a rebel against rule of Queen Victoria in year 1870?"<sup>207</sup> This report presents the Métis viewpoint and "Claims Louis Riel yielded to no man in loyalty to the crown."<sup>208</sup> Articles of this nature raised the interest of the public to the mystery and controversy surrounding Louis Riel, and with this interest came more articles on a variety of topics surrounding the man.

Several articles appeared in 1932 which disputed Riel's ancestry and nationality. Persons said to be acquaintances or relatives stated through stories published in the Winnipeg daily papers that Riel's ancestors originated from various European regions. One biographer stated that Riel's last name was originally Rielson, and that he was of Irish descent. In denouncing this assertion, a person claiming to be the daughter-in-law of Riel stated emphatically that Riel was purely French. "Riel did not have a single drop of Indian blood in his veins, as on both his fathers's and mother's side of the family his ancestors were

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<sup>207</sup> "Was Riel a rebel against rule of Queen Victoria in year 1870?" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 15 January 1930.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

Canadians of French extraction. I think the misapprehension arises from the fact that he married a Métis woman."<sup>209</sup> Several years later another article was to surface that suggested Riel was of Scandinavian lineage.<sup>210</sup>

These articles indicate there was little factual knowledge about Riel's background that was commonly available to the general public at this time. Today there are a plethora of biographies and Riel's own writings have been translated into English. The understanding that exists today of who Riel was, while not universally agreed upon, is still many times more accurate than what existed in the 1930's.

The curiosity evoked by the increased number of stories that probed Riel's background and motivations did not stop articles claiming to be historically accurate, like the following, from being published.

Sixty-five years ago today the Red River Expedition as it was called, of troops under Colonel Garnet Wolseley, marched into Upper Fort Garry through the front gate in the pouring rain. This effected the "capture" of the famous fur-trading stronghold which had been the seat of the unofficial provisional government set up by Louis Riel, famous Métis who had led the armed protest of his people against wrongs incidental to the creation of the province of Manitoba.<sup>211</sup>

Another article's headline indicates the views of the author quite openly. "Glimpses of Louis Riel: An intimate pen picture of the misguided patriot who failed in his ambition to set up a Western empire, written by one who has made a study of his life and

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<sup>209</sup> "Relative of Riel claims rebel French" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 26 November 1932.

<sup>210</sup> "Riel's Nationality: Was he Scandinavian?" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 3 August 1935.

<sup>211</sup> "Fort Gary, held by Riel, "captured" by Wolseley's army 65 years ago today" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 24 August 1935.

personality"<sup>212</sup> Surprisingly, this account is somewhat sympathetic to Riel, and it concludes with the following: "Tragedy usually awaits the man who, not counting the cost, espouses a cause grandly."<sup>213</sup> Accounts such as these that do not acknowledge Riel's contribution or the significance of the Métis uprising to the creation of Manitoba, were fuelled principally by recollections of Canadians who sided with the federal government during the events of 1869-70.

Along with biographical and historical articles on Riel, other stories which involved Riel indirectly were reported in the papers. Obituaries of relatives and people linked to Riel made print, where otherwise their deaths would have gone largely unnoticed.<sup>214</sup> More inconsequential stories on objects with some linking to Riel also appeared in print, showing the interest that was being aroused in the life and times of Louis Riel. An example of this is an article titled "Louis Riel's dinner plates added to museum's collection".<sup>215</sup>

During the 1930's there was a renewed interest in Riel. In the Manitoba newspapers the level of coverage Riel received was to that point in time the most since his hanging in 1885. The controversy as to his political and historical significance in relation to Canada's identity as a nation was only just beginning to surface. As shall be seen, in the next time period, this curiosity in Riel would grow into an obsession by the late 1960's.

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<sup>212</sup> Margaret Arnett MacLeod "Glimpses of Louis Riel" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 13 July 1935.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> "Alex Riel succumbs" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 22 September 1938; and "Man who built Riel scaffold dies" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 15 May 1939.

<sup>215</sup> "Louis Riel's dinner plates added to museum's collection" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 3 August 1939.



#### 5.4 Mid-Twentieth Century 1950-70

During the 1950's the interest in Louis Riel continued to grow. There were many articles published that were sympathetic to Riel and the Métis' cause. As well, there were still many pro-loyalist accounts of the Red River and Northwest rebellions. The controversy over Riel seemed initially to be limited to the western part of Canada, for little information was found in any eastern Canadian papers referring to Riel, until the late 1960's.

The first article of national interest regarding Riel was published by the Canadian Press under the headline "Riel Rebellion Sites" in which it was stated these sites were to be preserved for their historical significance.<sup>216</sup> There were a growing number of pro-Riel articles noted, but one in particular stood out for its directness. Published through the Canadian Press, an article from Ottawa titled "When prejudice goes" stated the following.

Louis Riel, the Métis executed in 1885 for leading the Northwest Rebellion, was described Wednesday in the Senate as a great Canadian statesman. Senator George H. Ross (Liberal- Alberta) said Riel was an unselfish and humane man who attempted to protect the Métis and Indians in the old Manitoba settlement of Red River. "When prejudice vanishes, writers of history will, no doubt, place him in the front rank among the most eminent of Canadian statesmen" he said. Senator Ross referred to Riel as he urged the government to give Canadian Indians a better deal.<sup>217</sup>

Senator Ross, who resided in Calgary and was also a prominent lawyer, made this statement while referring to the treatment of Canada's Aboriginals by the Canadian government as "treacherous and barbarous" throughout this country's history. A further quote by the

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<sup>216</sup> "Riel rebellion sites saved for the nation" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 27 December 1952.

<sup>217</sup> "When 'prejudice' goes" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 3 February 1955.

Senator from the same article illustrates his sentiments.

In view of the maltreatment the Indians received from Canada in the past, we can well afford to be generous and spend much to help them and the Metis who have been brought up as Indians on reserves to become rejuvenated. Financial assistance should be given to Indian families by Canada sufficient to induce the more ambitious to become more emancipated.<sup>218</sup>

Pro-loyalist accounts were still offered up, but now in vogue were investigative and analytical articles on Riel which attempted to understand more fully his historical significance. On the 70th anniversary of Riel's hanging, an article summed up the interest in Riel since his death, with a focus on the past 25 years.

In life Riel was a controversial figure. But even his death and the passing of seven decades has done little to eradicate the controversy. Today there is such a bewildering array of story and legend, fact and fiction, libel and over-praise about his life and times that even the serious student finds it hard to winnow the chaff from the grain, the fact from the legend.

Riel has been claimed by the Irish, honoured by the communists, castigated by those whom he opposed, revered by his own people. His patriotism has been impugned and his nationality questioned. Even his burial place has been in dispute.

Today, most Canadians are taking another long look at that strange and tragic figure who played such a dominant role in the birth of responsible government in Western Canada.<sup>219</sup>

This summation of Riel's imprint on Canadian society to that date shows his impact on the English Canadian press; he is described as a "dominant figure", where thirty of forty years previous he would have been described as traitor who deserved to hang in every English Canadian historical account. More pro-Riel accounts began to show up in articles

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Gwain Hamilton "70 years later: New views on a stranger of the West" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 18 November 1955.

written in the Winnipeg papers. It seemed to be more acceptable to print sympathetic stories on Riel and those related or considered friends.<sup>220</sup> The relatives of Riel and others involved in the Red River uprising were especially noted for their lineage. One column entitled "Kin relive historic Riel days" mentions the distant relatives of Riel, Bruce, and Nault commemorating the provisional government under Louis Riel.<sup>221</sup> Another story relates that the grand nephew of Louis Riel, Roger Teillet, an elected member to parliament, was being sworn in as the Minister of Veteran's Affairs under the Liberal government.<sup>222</sup> An article was also published on Zachary Macaulay Hamilton, a Scottish settler, who though not directly related to Riel or the Métis, nonetheless "fought (for) the cause of Louis Riel and the inarticulate Métis people."<sup>223</sup>

By the end of the 1950's, an article appeared with a headline that would have been unthinkable several decades previous. The story "Is the time ripe to honour Louis Riel?" contained the opinions of University of Manitoba history professor and noted Canadian historian, William Morton, who stated that there are two unreconciled views of Riel. One was that Riel was a great leader, and the other that he was a traitor. The Morton also notes that if Riel had not shot Scott and run from Wolseley's approaching troops, he would not have been such a controversial figure and his historical stature today would have been much

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<sup>220</sup> "Mrs. L.E. Martel at 95, recalls the days of Louis Riel" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 26 February 1955; "Riel and eight-foot Métis spark memories" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 12 May 1956.

<sup>221</sup> "Kin relive historic Riel days" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 4 March 1959.

<sup>222</sup> "Riel clan finds place in Ottawa" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 23 April 1963.

<sup>223</sup> "Stage was set for Riel's escape" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 15 January 1955.

greater.<sup>224</sup> Morton himself is best known for his historical pieces on his native province, Manitoba, in such works as *Alexander Begg's Red River journal and other papers relative to the Red River resistance of 1869-70*, *Manitoba: a history*, and *Manitoba: the birth of a province*.

While pro-loyalist articles continued to be published throughout the fifties and sixties, they were clearly becoming less popular and weaker in their influence over public opinion. Most of these types of articles reminisced of the days when Canadians fought to uphold the values and integrity of the Crown and Dominion. Articles featuring prominent citizens such as Hugh John MacDonal<sup>225</sup>, John A. MacDonal's son who fought in the Northwest Rebellion, related those person's experiences during this period. Other examples include "The diary or Lieutenant R.S. Cassels"<sup>226</sup>; and the "Rich historical memories for lively Heather Boulton"<sup>227</sup>, Major Boulton's daughter. These articles all espoused Victorian age British virtues.

Articles reviewing biographies on Riel by Osler and Stanley<sup>228</sup> appeared at this time. The Osler article took the form of a book review, with the critic stating the following of this work: "Billed as the first frankly sympathetic biography of Louis Riel by an English Canadian, the book occasionally suffers from the author's efforts to carry his pleading

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<sup>224</sup> "Is the time ripe to honour Louis Riel?" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 11 November 1959.

<sup>225</sup> "Sore feet, no whiskey" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 26 April 1958.

<sup>226</sup> *Winnipeg Free Press*, 6 January, 1962.

<sup>227</sup> *Winnipeg Tribune*, 16 December 1961.

<sup>228</sup> "Riel: Métis statesman despite his madness" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 3 August 1963.

beyond the documentary evidence."<sup>229</sup> Stanely's book "Louis Riel" is praised in a letter to the editor on the 80th anniversary of Riel's hanging.

For 80 years we have allowed racial and religious bigotry to blind us to the true worth of this great Manitoban. Manitoba is deeply indebted to Riel, not merely for securing our rights, but for obtaining our entry into Confederation as a peer of the founding provinces. He is truly the father of Confederation as far as Manitoba is concerned. A fitting centennial gesture by the provincial government would be a statue of Riel on the legislative grounds or in Memorial Park. Such a tribute would afford some long overdue recognition of a great man. (Signed S.E. Varcol)<sup>230</sup>

While articles sympathetic to Riel were becoming prominent in the Winnipeg papers, there were many articles written discussing the unreconciled patriot/traitor viewpoints.<sup>231</sup> An article published in the *Tribune* reported that a University of Waterloo history professor, Paul G. Cornell, had done a study on Ontario and Quebec history text books and found that Ontario books portrayed Riel as a villain and in Quebec books he is much more favourably discussed.<sup>232</sup> While this may seem obvious today, it appears that this was not something that was commonly known during this period in time. The two contradictory versions of the same historical events had been seen in Manitoba since the events occurred. The pro-Canadian loyalist account had for many years predominated over the Métis interpretation events, and as seen in this analysis, it was not until the 1930's that suppressed views began to infiltrate the English community in Winnipeg.

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<sup>229</sup> *Winnipeg Tribune*, 29 July 1961.

<sup>230</sup> *Winnipeg Tribune*, 16 November 1965.

<sup>231</sup> "Louis Riel - Rebel or patriot?" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 4 June 1960; "A Canadian Hero?" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 14 July 1962.

<sup>232</sup> "Louis Riel good or Bad? - It depends" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 12 August 1964.

Winnipeg city council debated whether or not to name a St. Vital bridge after Riel. The article indicated that naming a bridge after Riel at this time was not an easy task. "Support is widespread. The name is going to elicit some controversy because Riel is considered to be a national hero by some people, and a delirious madman by others."<sup>233</sup> Seven months later a story in the *Tribune* indicated the St. Vital municipal government was considering erecting a monument to honour Riel in that district.<sup>234</sup> One reason St. Vital considered erecting a statue of Riel was because Riel's mother's home was located in this municipality.

Plays, songs and ballets were all mentioned at this time as being performed to honour Riel and enlighten the public. A young Canadian actor by the name of Bruno Gerussi, acted as the Métis leader in a play entitled *All About Us* which was performed in Winnipeg. Gerussi is quoted as referring to Riel: "He was a fantastic, complex character, whose life was so theatrical, you don't have to use any dramatic license. He was one of the few true heroes in our history. He has been maligned as a traitor and malcontent, when he really was a patriot."<sup>235</sup> This play was one of the first locally written projects produced by the Manitoba Theatre Centre (MTC), and was developed by John Hirsch, a playwright noted for works which often questioned the Anglo-Canadian vision of history in this country.

Also in this period a song entitled "The Ballad of Louis Riel" was written by a

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<sup>233</sup> *Winnipeg Free Press*, 11 September 1963.

<sup>234</sup> "St. Vital will ask for a Riel monument" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 17 March 1964.

<sup>235</sup> "He'll help Canadians to know one of their few true heroes" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 24 October 1964.

Toronto insurance salesman by the name of Eamonn Martin, which criticised the whiteman's treatment of the Métis and admires Riel for the cause he advanced. The song ends with these words:

For Louis' brave stand the Métis still pay  
But there'll come a reckoning,  
For still lives the will  
To bring back the freedom of Louis Riel.<sup>236</sup>

While artists were busy promoting the Métis leader and historians were debating his significance, the medical community became involved as well. Riel's mental state at the time of the Northwest Rebellion was once again under scrutiny, as it was reported that psychiatrists at an American Psychiatric Association convention discussed the topic of his sanity at length.<sup>237</sup>

An editorial questioned Manitobans' grasp of history in remembering the past and its impact on the present state of affairs.

And what about Riel? Most of us have never heard of him. A few remember and care that he came from St. Vital, that he was a man who successfully combined Indian and white blood, and that he was the grandson of two other important Manitobans, Jean Baptiste Lagimodiere and Marie Anne Gaboury. A few carry on the battle over whether he was a hero or traitor, whether he was an idealist betrayed by John A. MacDonald or an insane schemer.

But the "Evovede" as he called himself, was no matter which side one takes, a powerful force in the history of the West. His story is too long and too complex to tell easily here. Some of the greatness of the man can be seen in John Coulter's play about Riel.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> "Centennial song lauds Louis Riel" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 12 December 1966.

<sup>237</sup> "Doctors ask: Was Riel a patriot or psychopath?" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 11 May 1966.

<sup>238</sup> Christopher Dafoe "History and identity" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 7 November 1964.

While this pro-Riel mood was flourishing in the West, in the papers of Central Canada, little was found mentioning Riel. A *Globe and Mail* editorial printed on the Centennial of Confederation focusing on William Lyon Mackenzie King, the long serving Liberal Prime Minister, briefly mentions Riel in passing. "King was one day old when the exiled Louis Riel saw the first of the visions that were to eventually pull him back to Batoche Crossing, disaster, and death by hanging."<sup>239</sup> This comment suggests Riel's mental infirmity was the caused of his own demise, and not any misdeeds by Dominion government. This editorial contrasts with the previous *Free Press* column that calls Riel "a powerful force in the history West". Central and Western Canada appear to have clearly divergent views on Riel's importance in Canadian history. Given the geographic and political origins of Riel's rebellions, this would seem understandable. Riel fought for Western rights, whereas the Dominion government at the time stood primarily for Central Canadian authority. From this viewpoint, one could hypothesize that Riel would be seen as a threat, and thus wrong in his actions by many more English Canadians from Ontario than by Westerners in general. The evidence of anti-Riel feelings from the Central Canada, however, has been too limited to advance this statement as anything more than speculation. More provocative events would have to take place, and more Ontario and Quebec reaction noted before this conclusion can be drawn.

In the late 1960's two events linked to Riel elicited significant responses in both

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<sup>239</sup> "Confederation Day" *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 1 July 1967.



Winnipeg and the East. One was the decision of the Manitoba provincial government to have a statue commissioned to honour Riel as a founder of the province for Manitoba's Centennial. The second was the issuing of a Riel postage stamp by the federal government. The statue received most of the attention in Manitoba, while the stamp raised interest in the East.

A Statue of Riel in Manitoba was not a new concept; however, the placement of such a monument on the grounds of the legislature elicited both positive and negative opinions. Anti-Riel articles such as the one below stated that history did not support the notion that Riel helped found Manitoba.

An opponent of a plan to erect a statue of the 19th century Métis leader Louis Riel on the grounds of the Manitoba legislative buildings (Mr. D.H. Smith), says such recognition would encourage the use of violence as a means of political change. He said the image of Riel currently being put forward cannot be supported by historical facts and he called on Manitobans who oppose Riel's reconstruction as a founder of the province to speak out against the proposal.

He said that his opposition is not to Riel as a colourful character on the stage of Canadian history but to the reconstruction of Riel's image and his contribution to Manitoba's present status on the basis of contemporary concepts and biases.<sup>240</sup>

Little is known of Mr. Smith, other than it was reported in the same article that he was a professional organist and music teacher, and a self-proclaimed student of Canadian history. Being a student of Canadian history it appears he prefers the original English Canadian view of Riel as a traitor over the new interpretation being advanced.

In another article, a person billed as the last surviving participant of the Northwest Rebellion, states that he is against a statue of Riel because he believes Riel did not help form

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<sup>240</sup> "Riel statue would abet violence, says organist" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 25 November 1969.

Manitoba.<sup>241</sup>

Other articles mentioned those persons who opposed Riel or who also contributed to the development of Western Canada and who are now forgotten amid the interest surrounding Riel.<sup>242</sup> These articles state that there are those who should be honoured in place of Riel. One such story identifies a Hudson Bay Company official as a principal candidate to be honoured.

If a statue is to be raised to anyone in Western Canada to commemorate the early years of settlement, it should be to Archibald McDonald, the last of that great group of men who were not mere traders but who administered justice as chief factors of the company of adventurers trading into Hudson Bay, and who preserved the peace and built the bulwarks of our nation in a place where a foreign flag has never waved.<sup>243</sup>

Archibald McDonald's significance in the development of Canada as shown in Western Canadian historical works indicates that he is literally little more than a footnote in its history.<sup>244</sup> While it appears that he was a prominent figure within the Hudson's Bay Company in the early to mid-1800s, there is no mention of any acts that could be construed as heroic. McDonald may have been a valuable employee to the Hudson's Bay Company, but based on what history has recorded of him, his contribution seems minor to the development of the Western Canada.

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<sup>241</sup> "Last survivor speaks out" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 18 April 1970.

<sup>242</sup> Nan Shipley, "On the other hand" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 1 November 1969.

<sup>243</sup> P.H. Gordon, "He knew Louis Riel" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 2 May 1970.

<sup>244</sup> Walter N. Sage, *Sir James Douglas and British Columbia*, (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1930) p. 40.

There were many positive stories on the construction of Riel's statue. Articles, editorials and letters to the editor remarked on the importance of Riel to Manitoba. Not all English Canadians with links back to Red River had a poor opinion of Riel. An article in the *Winnipeg Tribune* pronounced the opinion of a person whose uncle was a prisoner of the Métis in 1870. The uncle was reported to have told his nephew that while he while he was sorry that Scott had been shot, "punishment was severe in those days. Scott's cantankerous opposition might have incited the prisoners to fight. It was like treason against the government."<sup>245</sup>

Further evidence of pro-Riel support came in a review of an archaic biography on the Métis leader. The reprinting of the 1885 biography "The Story of Louis Riel: the Rebel Chief" sparked angry reactions from the press for its anti-Riel views. One article's headline read "Early study of Louis Riel still makes readers see red."<sup>246</sup> A book review of this biography was also published in the *Free Press*, and carried this summation of the work.

This anonymous document first published during the heat of the rebellion of 1885, is a bad book, published at the wrong time. It is historically inaccurate, loaded with Toronto prejudice of the day. It is unfair to Riel, the Roman Catholic clergy, the Métis and the Indians. This reprint lacks an objective modern introduction to guide the uninformed reader, and "Coles - the book people" will have to do much better if they are to match the reprints of Canadiana presented by other Canadian publishers in recent years.<sup>247</sup>

The announcement that the federal government was preparing to issue a stamp with

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<sup>245</sup> "Riel got prisoners sympathy" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 21 February 1970.

<sup>246</sup> "Early Study of Louis Riel still makes readers see red" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 9 May 1970.

<sup>247</sup> Chris Vickers, "Unfair" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 25 April 1970.

the image of Riel on it sparked even more interest in Riel. While the *Ottawa Citizen* carried the story of the proposed Riel stamp, no letters to the editor or editorials mentioned it. The *Globe and Mail* did print reaction of its readers. There were three letters to the editor against and one for the Riel stamp. The first letter was from a relative of a man killed in the Northwest Rebellion while fighting against the Métis. It is quoted at length for its states the rationalization for the anti-Riel feelings it conveys.

As a small boy I was made aware that as a young man my grandfather had given his life for his country, as they use to say. I remember feeling great sorrow for my own father who was not yet born when a traitors bullet took his father's life - they used terms like "traitor" when I was a schoolboy, and so did my history books.

The problem which now rises is this: when a nation rewrites its history, (The USSR has been in the news recently for having done just that) and the old Bad Guys become Good Guys, what then is the status of the old Good Guys who were charged with the responsibility of undoing the old Bad Guys - a responsibility delegated by the legal national government of the day? Does a reciprocal change in status occur, or do the old Good Guys become non-persons?

I find it just as difficult to regard my grandfather as a traitor as it is to accept the idea that he never existed. This young man was asked to leave his family and his farm in the Qu'appelle Valley along with others, to take up arms against Louis Riel and his followers: he was killed at Batoche in 1885. The government of Canada considered Riel to be an outlaw and a traitor.

Now not content that his wretched life has been immortalized in a highly subsidized opera, that Liberal gang in Ottawa feels compelled to issue a postage stamp to commemorate further Riel's unhappy intrusion on Canadian history. Now does this mean we issue stamps to commemorate the lives of traitors, or does it mean that Riel has been officially cleared of all charges brought against him by the government of Canada?

This is indeed confusing, but it is the status of poor grandfather which is causing me the most concern. If the stamp now establishes Riel as a Good Citizen, would not those who were out to get him, automatically become posthumous Bad Citizens? Do you suppose that it would assist that Liberal gang in Ottawa in there determination to destroy our country's past (to say nothing of its future) if Capt. John French were given a public hanging in effigy, to atone for his misguided actions of 1885? (Signed Francis F.P. French, Toronto.)<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> "Louis Riel" *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 3 November 1969.

This letter provides a glimpse of the reasoning behind some Canadians hatred for Louis Riel. It was the personal affliction he caused which is at the root of hatred. Since the greatest distress for Canadians (especially those from Ontario) was caused by the Northwest Rebellion, references to this event are most commonly mentioned when reasons for why Riel should not be honoured are advanced.

This letter sparked three more letters the following week. One of these letters states that decisions such as the Riel stamp are not based on facts but on the wants of the "noisy minority". It concludes in the following manner. "However, the final decision rests not with 'noisy minorities' or 'scared politicians' but with 'time' and the 'verdict of history', and rest assured Mr. French, these two staunch allies are on your grandfather's side."<sup>249</sup> A member of the business community displayed his displeasure over the Riel stamp by providing the following comments on Riel: "There is little doubt he was deranged, and ultimately a very pitiful picture, but he is hardly the subject for a stamp. I would not permit my firm to buy any stamps that commemorated a murderer and a traitor."<sup>250</sup> The third letter stated that Riel has remained a "colourful" part of our history. The writer of this letter blames the government of John A. MacDonald for the events that in which Riel was involved.<sup>251</sup>

In Winnipeg, there was generally a more positive response to the news that Riel was

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<sup>249</sup> "Louis Riel" *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 17 November 1969.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

to be honoured in a stamp. Even the mayor of Winnipeg at the time publicly lobbied for the stamp. "In a letter to Mr. Kierans (Postmaster-General), the mayor noted that 'because of the renewed interest in Louis Riel's place in the history of this province,... I am sure you would want to give serious consideration to having the first day issue in Winnipeg!'"<sup>252</sup>

The controversy of Riel's life and its significance in shaping the history of Canada was still prominent, but as witnessed in this era, the Manitoba government recognized the significance of Riel for his part in that province's birth by erecting a statue of him at the Legislative grounds. Riel was beginning to be seen by some non-Métis on the Prairies as a champion of western rights, while in the Central Canada, Riel was hardly mentioned at all. When he was to gain greater visibility on a postage stamp in his likeness, feelings of hatred surfaced. As shall be seen in the final period examining Riel in English Canadian newspapers, a further transformation has since occurred in the perceptions that the state and the public hold of Riel.

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<sup>252</sup> "Juba wants stamp" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 16 April 1970.

## 5.5 Late Twentieth Century 1979-1992

In this period, the evolution of Louis Riel's image in English Canadian culture began with his life being nationally popularized. The prominence of Riel had reached new heights, as a major CBC television docu-drama had been recently aired across the country, and it appeared many groups were attempting to exploit Riel's notoriety for their own personal gain.<sup>253</sup>

During this period, the issue of Quebec sovereignty was prominent in the Canadian news media, and with it came stories on the pro-separatist forces, and their linking of Riel's cause with that of the sovereignty issue. When a Canadian Labour Congress convention was held in Winnipeg in 1980, representatives of the Quebec Federation of Labour attended Riel's grave, placing wreaths and some OUI (Yes for Quebec sovereignty) stickers on his headstone. Louis Laberge, president of the Quebec Federation of Labour, made the following remarks on their visit. "Riel asked for then what Quebecers are asking for now. Let's hope we won't end up on a scaffold too."<sup>254</sup>

This event brought about a strongly worded editorial in this same paper several days later. The editor denounced the Quebec labour representatives assertion that Riel's motives were in anyway similar to the Parti Québécois'.

Riel was proposing then that Manitoba should be a province like the others. Mr. Laberge and the Parti Québécois are proposing that Quebec should be a sovereign

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<sup>253</sup> "Coming soon:'Mr.Métis' Louis Riel Doll" *MacLean's*, 9 April 1979.

<sup>254</sup> "Oui backers visit Riel Grave" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 8 May 1980.

state. Riel sought equality of rights between French and English. The parti Québécois seeks to stamp out English wherever it can.

The desecration of Riel's grave stone is offensive to common decency, but the misrepresentation of his political program is an even more outrageous offense to his memory and the origins of Manitoba. The events of the Riel Rebellion have been regularly dragged into political debate in Quebec and Ontario to score partisan points on local politics there, now we have a new chapter to an old story.

However many separatist stickers are plastered on Riel's gravestone, the label will not stick to the man. He has been called a visionary, a traitor, and a lunatic, but he was no separatist. He was probably the most ardent federalist of his time.<sup>255</sup>

It is difficult to determine when examining this editorial whether defending Louis Riel's cause or espousing nationalism over separatism was the main motivation for this piece. During this time period the issue of Quebec sovereignty brought out the nationalistic pride of many English Canadians, especially in Western Canada. The above quote may be a result of such feelings, using Riel as an example of the tactics of the opposition (separatists) to distort history. Regardless of the catalyst for the editorial, the column displays the significance of Riel to Manitobans. No mention is made of Riel's Northwest Rebellion involvement, as this does not directly pertain to Manitoba. In addition, this second rebellion may not have been mentioned because of the difficulty to justifying Riel as an important figure in Manitoba history when he is linked to inciting violence in the Northwest Rebellion.

During this period it was also noted that Native groups were using Riel as a symbol in the fight for their rights with the federal and provincial governments.<sup>256</sup> The Canadian constitutional negotiations taking place at the time probably brought this story to the fore and

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<sup>255</sup> "Riel not a separatist" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 10 May 1980.

<sup>256</sup> "Riel becomes renewed symbol to Native groups in rights battle" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 16 November 1981.



made it more prominent than it would have otherwise been.

By 1982 there was reference to a Minister of Parliament's motion for a posthumous pardon for Riel. The MP initiating the campaign, Bill Yurko (Independent - Edmonton East), is quoted as saying that Riel's trial was unfair and that a pardon would correct a grave injustice, improve relations between Natives and whites, and help national unity.<sup>257</sup> Political motivations aside, the fact that such a motion was made indicates that at least some of the politicians outside Quebec and Manitoba view Riel sympathetically. The motion would have required unanimous consent of Parliament to pass. It was reported that several Tory MP's refused to consent to the motion, and thus it failed to pass in the house.<sup>258</sup>

The debate over a pardon for Riel lasted about a year, and was basically laid to rest when the Prime Minister at the time, Pierre Trudeau, skirted the issue to avoid political divisiveness by stating that he would not pursue a pardon for Riel, as he had no intention of attempting to rewrite history.<sup>259</sup> This did not stop politicians and the public from espousing Riel's cause; it just meant that at this point, the general political will was not there to justify such a motion.

The Métis and Francophones appeared to be still the main proponents of Riel's cause. This was especially noted in *Montreal Gazette* articles which reported these groups paying

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<sup>257</sup> "MP seeks a pardon for Riel" *Montreal Gazette*, 26 June 1982.

<sup>258</sup> "Riel pardon Denied" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 22 June 1982.

<sup>259</sup> "PM rejects Riel pardon proposal" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 13 October 1983.

homage and defending his memory and their own rights.<sup>260</sup> *Globe and Mail* articles on the other hand, tended to display the conflict of perceptions Canadians have towards Riel. One *Globe and Mail* article which was written on the 115th anniversary of Manitoba's official entrance into confederation and billed as a historical travel article, provides the following description of one of the sites to see in Winnipeg: "A hero/traitors tombstone, Louis Riel the disputed father of Manitoba."<sup>261</sup> A much more detailed and insightful article was written by Mavor Moore, the widely published Canadian writer and actor who portrayed Riel on many occasions in various works. His perceptions of Riel were published in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* and later reprinted in a collection of essays on Riel entitled *Images of Louis Riel in Canadian Culture* (see bibliography for complete reference). His view focuses on the legend or myth surrounding Riel and the effect it has had on Canadian culture.

But why Louis Riel, how did this footnote to minor colonial history make it into the company of William Tell, Robin Hood, and El Cid? Some modern historians would have us believe that our authors and composers, etc. in their desperate compulsion to find a Canadian hero who was neither (a) a sobersides, nor (b) an alcoholic, have pillaged Canadian history, twisting facts to accommodate their fancy, and use Riel (in the words of one writer) "as a vehicle for their own ideas about Canadian culture and politics." Since that is exactly what most historians do, we may put the complaint down to jealousy. But the question remains unanswered.<sup>262</sup>

Moore goes on to state that the Louis Riel that has been created by authors,

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<sup>260</sup> "Métis to pay homage to Riel at annual grave side ceremony" *Montreal Gazette*, 17 November 1983; "Riel's death to be remembered" *Montreal Gazette*, 13 October 1984; "Riel's debt not Paid Métis tell Mulroney" *Montreal Gazette*, 3 November 1983.

<sup>261</sup> "Riel: It all began at St.Boniface" *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 15 June 1985.

<sup>262</sup> Mavor Moore, "Haunted by the ghost of a rebellious upstart" *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 9 March 1985.

dramatists, and other artists in the twentieth century has become more important than the acts of Riel in the 1870's and 1880's. He explains his reasoning for such an opinion in the continuation of the above quote.

I have known Louis for a long time. "Canadian agitator" was the blunt epitaph in the Encyclopedia Britannica in 1950, when I looked him up while preparing to play Louis in John Coulter's epic drama, Riel - the production that started the modern Riel revival. On the opening night six ancient veterans of the second rebellion sat in the front row, some of them in uniform. As I nervously reincarnated their nemesis, I began to realize that they were more nervous than I, and a great light dawned: A symbol is more powerful than the thing for which it stands proxy.

The legend has outgrown the man for the most cogent reason: Riel is more a figure, however major or minor, in North American history - more, even, than a modern Canadian Métis role-model. Like the insignificant Prince of Elsinore who became "Hamlet the Dane" through circumstances beyond his control, Riel has become the personification of some of the great liturgical themes of human kind. None of these themes is tied down to a particular instance; rather each of them sweeps up any instance that vaguely serves its purpose and whirls it into the Zeitgeist.

The young idealist driven mad by constant betrayal at the hands of cynical realists whom the idealist mistakenly trusts. The thinker paralyzed by thinking about what action to take. The half-breed, the member of the "society of neithers" who belongs nowhere except where half-breeds are not welcome. The lunatic who is framed by an unjust "sane" society. The warrior entering battle with a cross (or any other religious symbol) in his hand, instead of a gun (or any other weapon). The leader of a small victimized group that stands in the way of the majority. The petty tyrant given comeuppance by a bigger one. The god-intoxicated human who tries to play God. Whatever he actually was, Louis Riel will serve these themes well enough, and he will be used by them.

There are also universal themes as well as Canadian ones - in brief, the very sort of themes creative Canadians are bound to look for as they seek wider audiences. And they are timeless themes; they applied to Riel's era, apply to our own and will presumably go on applying, no matter what new research tells us about the real Riel. I am sure we will all be fascinated by what the historians find. But from here on, like it or not, its main effect will be to lend wings to the myth.<sup>263</sup>

I have quoted this article at length because it displays the view that Riel's

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

contemporary significance is tied to the interpretations of the him provided by the artistic community, rather than the actual events he was involved in. Its postulation is that Riel is more important now than he ever was in his own lifetime. This view states that Riel was a minor player until the artistic world took Riel and made him into some mythical creature. While it is true that many more English Canadians have been exposed to Riel from artistic expression of his life, he is far from being insignificant in the development of this country. It may also be true that much more has been generated regarding the man's biography since his death, but his actions during his lifetime, without question, dominated the Canadian landscape from coast to coast. Such concentrated media coverage will never again be seen on Riel. All the importance placed on the articles, books, plays, operas, statues, etc. generated in the second half of the twentieth century pale in comparison to the coverage Riel received, and the emotion he generated during his lifetime. Riel's significance to our society has been enhanced by many myth makers and special interest groups but the magnitude of Riel's actions enabled such "myth" to be created about him.

Moore's article touches on what author Gary Boire calls "ratione officii", which is literature that "...constitutes a characteristic anti-colonial genre of resistance, but which also, in its very repetition, spells out a narrative of colonial ambivalence."<sup>264</sup> Boire notes that John Coulter's play *Riel* demonstrates this phenomenon strikingly.

In this limited sense the play constitutes a powerful, but ambiguous protest against historical injustice; the intermingling of Native, French Canadian and Irish concerns seeks - sometimes unsuccessfully - not so much to appropriate a Native presence or

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<sup>264</sup> Gary Boire, "'Ratione officii': Representing Law in Postcolonial Literatures," *Mosaic* 27/4, (1994): 199.

a Native cause, as to re-historicize authoritarian configurations which would divide - and therefore defuse - resistant utterances in their entirety. Coulter does blur the borders amongst ethnic margins, but he does so in the conviction that these margins themselves are politicized cultural constructions designed to preclude a revolutionary class solidarity.<sup>265</sup>

What Boire is saying here is that an author, playwright, or other artist is influenced by the colonial laws which have shaped the post-colonial environment within which we live today. Even when a writer consciously takes a stand opposite these colonial constructs, the constructs themselves mould the way in which the argument is constructed.

Possibly another example of this colonial influence upon contemporary authors was a gathering held at Guelph University in Ontario which debated the significance of Riel and what he stands for today in our society.<sup>266</sup> There were no resolutions reached at this conference on what Riel stands for, but all seemed to agree that Riel is difficult to define. Others wished to show that Riel as the "First great champion of western rights"<sup>267</sup> This emphasizes the irreconcilable loyalist and Western Canadian views on the subject.

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid.: 208.

<sup>266</sup> "Cultural trial fails to pin down Riel - Métis messiah eludes jury on new charges" *Globe and Mail*, 18 November 1985; Mavor Moore, "Canadians need heroes, and Riel fits the bill" *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 23 November 1985.

<sup>267</sup> Don Braid, "Riel was more than simply a Métis leader" *Montreal Gazette*, 20 November 1985.

For the centennial of Riel's execution, the *Free Press* published an article on how Riel's image has evolved in that time period.

The years since the second world war have seen a growing lexicon of books, plays, opera, dance, and choral works taking Riel the man and the symbol as their subject. The once dominant Anglo culture has faded while ethnic groups have enjoyed a renaissance. The Schreyer government is credited with ensuring native people had a high profile during the 1970 Manitoba centennial celebrations, bringing Riel to the fore. Where before the Second World War there were virtually no artistic representations of Riel, after the war he became a prime subject as both man and symbol, particularly by dramatists who often saw him as a vehicle of their own ideas about Canadian politics and culture.<sup>268</sup>

This mention of the lack of English Canadian cultural domination being instrumental to the Riel resurgence is ironic since much of what has been advanced has been done by English language authors. It must be noted however, that these contemporary English Canadian authors have been writing in a much more culturally diverse society than their predecessors. This diversity may provide an outlook on society that had previously been suppressed by the domination of English Canadian culture.

The quest to have Riel recognized officially by a ruling authority, be it provincial or federal government, continued beyond this point in time. The Métis were now front and centre in this pursuit to have Riel officially honoured. This time the goal was not to have Riel pardoned for his acts in 1885, but rather to have him recognized as a Father of Confederation, for his part in bringing Manitoba into the Dominion. "The resolution would recognize Riel, who ushered Manitoba into provincehood in 1870, as a Father of

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<sup>268</sup> Doug Whiteway, "The year of Riel - New emphasis" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 19 February 1985; Mavor Moore refers to the above article in his previously mentioned March 9th column.

Confederation, much in the same way as John A. MacDonald and Joey Smallwood, who led Newfoundland into Confederation.<sup>269</sup> The Métis lobbying appeared to have the support of several western MP's.

Riel's legacy continued to grow at least partially because of the Métis agitation, and prompted this article which appeared as a "Special to the *Winnipeg Free Press*" on its editorial page.

Is this Riel business getting out of hand? Have we reached the saturation point in the matter of honouring the Immortal Memory? I only ask because it appears that several new statues of the "father of Manitoba" will soon sprout like mushrooms in various locations around the city. Few mortals, other than Queen Victoria and Robbie Burns, have been so lavishly commemorated by a grateful public. Nobody can call Mr. Riel Canada's forgotten hero. But have we really done enough to make amends for that unfortunate and ill-advised hanging in Regina? There has been talk for some years about a full pardon, although many of us feel that Mr. Riel never did anything that he needed to be pardoned for. A full pardon to John A. MacDonald might be worth thinking about if we are intent on Christmas gestures, but it is more likely that further honours and accolades will be showered upon Mr. Riel before the enthusiasm for the great exovede cools down.<sup>270</sup>

More literature continued to be written, plays produced,<sup>271</sup> and statues erected, all which attempted to justify or explain Riel's actions and provide a greater understanding of the man. By the late 1980's, a resolution was being advanced by the Tory party's Aboriginal caucus urging the party to recognize Riel as a Father of Confederation.<sup>272</sup> The fact that the

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<sup>269</sup> "In the centenary year of Louis Riel's death, the Métis people look to revitalize culture - Recognition sought for Riel's role" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 16 November 1985.

<sup>270</sup> Christopher Dafoe, "An abundance of Louis Riels" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 26 April 1986.

<sup>271</sup> "Riel play aims to right wrongs" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 5 March 1987.

<sup>272</sup> "Tories urged to recognize Riel as a Father of Confederation" *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 28 August 1989.

federal government was a Tory government suggested that such a move would enhance support for the Conservatives in regions they felt their political strength was weakening. Previously, many Conservative MP's generally did not favour such recognition of Riel.

The public opinion on Riel being officially recognized appeared mixed, or rather this was the impression the *Globe and Mail's* letters to the editor gave of the situation. One letter was printed against such recognition, while another was in favour of it. The positive letter said that Riel's provisional government of 1870 was legitimate and that he should be recognized accordingly.<sup>273</sup> The anti-Riel letter stated the following.

If history is about to go into reverse gear and Louis Riel is to be recognized as a Father of Confederation, as your front page article of August 28 suggests, then a major divide in Canadian history is obliterated, and can be subsumed in one word: Rielpolitik. (Signed Brian Thrippleton, Oakville, Ontario.)<sup>274</sup>

By the 1990's it was clear that two Riels were emerging in English Canadian culture. One was a Riel that could be seen as a founder of Manitoba, and the other as the leader of the Northwest Rebellion. In an article published in the *Free Press* and then later in the *Globe and Mail*, Riel is referred to as a founder of Manitoba, to be honoured as such, but also that his actions in the 1885 rebellion are not viewed as favourably as his activities in 1869-70.<sup>275</sup>

Finally, in the Spring of 1992, the House of Commons passed a resolution officially honouring Riel. The *Free Press* headline read "After 107 years, Commons motion to honour

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<sup>273</sup> Michael Manning, "Riel recognition" *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 5 September 1989.

<sup>274</sup> "It's the Riel thing" *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 2 September 1989.

<sup>275</sup> Eric Wells, "Louis Riel belongs to all of us" and "Riel: Heritage versus History" *Winnipeg Free Press* and *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 14 January 1992 and 12 March 1992, respectively.



Riel"<sup>276</sup> The Constitutional Affairs Minister, Joe Clark, was referred to in this article. "Clark said his motion is of tremendous symbolic significance for the Métis people and will acknowledge Riel's work in 1870 in negotiating Manitoba's entry into Confederation."<sup>277</sup>

Other papers had articles of a similar nature, although each had their own slant to the story. The *Gazette's* headline on the subject stated "Parliament to apologize- sort of - for hanging Riel 107 years ago today"<sup>278</sup> suggests that the motion was half-hearted in its substance. An editorial printed several days later provides some insight into the meaning of this headline.

Until Tuesday, the official view expressed by the federal government was more closely aligned with the history most Canadian children are still taught: that Riel was a mad revolutionary who was justly hanged for his crimes. But by burnishing the memory of Riel, by noting his contribution to the creation of Manitoba (although stopping short of calling him a Father of Confederation) Mr. Clark has made an honourable gesture that can help serve as a bridge across these gulfs.<sup>279</sup>

The *Citizen* proclaimed "Riel hailed as hero: Parliament to honour Métis leader hanged for treason - traitor to hero"<sup>280</sup> The use of the words *treason* and *traitor* in the headline suggests some resentment for such recognition. Two letters to the editor were noted, and both are disgusted by the federal government's actions. One letter, while acknowledging Riel's contribution to Manitoba's creation, states that his involvement in 1885

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<sup>276</sup> "After 107 years, Commons motion to honour Riel" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 10 March 1992.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 10 March 1992.

<sup>279</sup> "Recognition for Riel" *Montreal Gazette*, 13 March 1992.

<sup>280</sup> "Riel hailed as hero" *Ottawa Citizen*, 10 March 1992.

still makes him guilty of treason.

Judging history by applying contemporary value judgements endorsed by special interest groups is preposterous. Thankfully Riel has not been granted a pardon either from his conviction or his sentence: however, this would now appear to be inevitable as history continues to be distorted and rewritten to suit current tastes. (Signed Allan Wigney, Ottawa.)<sup>281</sup>

The other letter was more emphatic in stating that Riel was a traitor and an example of what happens to those who attempt sedition or treasonous acts against Canada.<sup>282</sup> As for the *Globe and Mail*, it ran a story several months later which still emphasized the irreconcilable views on Riel as "martyr, traitor, madman or saint".<sup>283</sup>

Shortly after the federal government's recognition of Riel, the provincial government of Manitoba, also officially recognized Riel as founder of Manitoba.<sup>284</sup> Thus Riel was acknowledged for his place in Manitoba, and thus Canadian history for his part in 1869-70. But as for the Northwest Rebellion of 1885, no such praise is given, at least not up to this point in time.

The recasting of Louis Riel in English Canadian culture continues, even after the formal recognition provided in 1992. A statue replacing the original 1970 figure on the grounds of the Manitoba Legislature is in the works, thus keeping his image in print, at least in Manitoba.

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<sup>281</sup> "Back to Batoche" *Ottawa Citizen*, 20 March 1992.

<sup>282</sup> George Phillips, *Ottawa Citizen*, 20 March 1992.

<sup>283</sup> "Louis Riel - Was he martyr, traitor, madman or Saint? *Toronto Globe*, 11 July 1992.

<sup>284</sup> "Riel officially honoured after long wait" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 23 May 1992.

## 5.6 Summary

What has been gleaned from this analysis of Riel over a century and a quarter? Through 1869 to 1885, more was written of Riel in the English Canadian newspapers than in any other time period. Because English Canadians were the ones most threatened by Riel's activities during this period, one would expect that the articles and commentary emanating from these sources would be biased against Riel's cause. This is true in many instances as the examples provided clearly indicate an anti-Riel sentiment. It has also been shown that there was in this period much factual information that was presented relatively impartially. As well, there was to a somewhat lesser extent, sympathetic stories printed on Riel's and the Métis' activities.

Something that was surprising to this analyst was the extent to which political affiliation determined what was to be emphasized in a newspaper. The Conservative press, when a Tory federal government ruled, noticeably downplayed Riel's actions and minimized the seriousness of the situation, until the happenings became impossible to ignore. When the problem became a crisis, these papers called upon loyal Canadians to support the government in dealing with the trouble-makers. The Liberal press (the *Globe* and *Manitoba Free Press*) printed stories often sensationalizing events and attempted to make the Tory government look inept. When conflict broke out, the Liberal press was the first to blame the ruling Tory government in Ottawa for being the cause of the strife. Editorials were very open in their criticism of opposition political parties and the publications that supported them. Ongoing feuds appeared to exist between editors from papers with opposing political views. This

view of the partisan press in this period echoes Douglas Fetherling's book *The Rise of the Canadian Newspaper*, in which that author states of this era "Editors were politicians by nature; in addition, some politicians were editors by trade."<sup>285</sup>

Riel was principally portrayed as the villain, although some ventured to defend the Métis rebellions as an outcome of government mismanagement in the West. Articles did surface, even in the Ontario press, that provided a somewhat positive image of Riel, although these articles were generally few and far between. During the actual rebellions, before any bloodshed was reported, Riel received partial support from the Liberal press. However, after hostilities turned violent, the Liberal press was the first to call for military intervention to be used to settle the matter. This quick turn of events was probably the result of Canadian loyalty taking priority over minority rights, which seems rational given that the majority of one's readers or constituents were from English Canadian bastions.

This predominantly anti-Riel attitude in the press continued to prevail in the early 1900's. There was very little mention of Riel in the English press of this era, and what was mentioned of him was basically negative. As remarked in the quotes presented in this analysis, many English Canadians were taught that Riel was a bad person, who rebelled against constituted Dominion authority, and was rightly punished for his transgressions. The historical accounts found in the papers were often distorted or falsified to provide a more palatable version of events for the English Canadians in Ontario and those who settled in the West after this period.

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<sup>285</sup> Douglas Fetherling, *The Rise of the Canadian Newspaper* (Don Mills, Ont.: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 39.

Towards the end of the 1930's, a major shift was beginning to occur in the way Riel was perceived by the press. More sympathetic articles began to surface as the Métis version of events in 1869-70 and 1885 were published in the English language newspapers, especially in Winnipeg. Riel was perceived as a curiosity of sorts, as there were now two irreconcilable views of him. One, the old loyal Canadian image of him as a rebel and traitor, and the other Riel as a martyr and hero (if only to one particular group in society). It was clear that the coverage in the press of the Métis convictions towards Riel as a hero eventually had an effect on the established dogma that Riel was a villain; a questioning of the soundness of this perception began to occur. The rationale for either a pro-Riel or anti-Riel belief system was now required because of the promotion in English Canadian publications of an alternative to the loyalist perspective.

The need to demonstrate that Riel was either "good" or "bad" spawned a re-investigation into his life and the events that occurred during that period. Facts had to be obtained in order to justify either side of the argument, and thus more interest in Riel was generated. This analysis does not uncover why Métis views became more popular in English Canadian press during the 1930's. It appears that a more liberal view on history was evolving with regard to this subject matter. Articles first appeared to question the widely held belief that Riel had anti-loyalist intentions<sup>286</sup>, and then later seemed to suggest that it was the Dominion that was at fault during the 1870's and 1880's<sup>287</sup>, not the Métis leader.

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<sup>286</sup> "Was Riel a rebel against rule of Queen Victoria in year 1870?" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 15 January 1930.

<sup>287</sup> "When 'prejudice' goes" *Winnipeg Tribune*, 3 February 1955.

This view may have developed from a growing resentment towards British colonialism and the maltreatment of Aboriginal people at the hands of the federal government. This more dynamic outlook on Canadian history continued into later periods.

The 1950's and 1960's saw sustained interest in the question of Riel's significance to Canadian history. The question of Riel as a patriot or traitor was posed once again, but by this time sufficient information had been gathered to determine that Riel was a complex individual who would not easily be placed into either category. Riel's persona took on a tragic quality, partially from the fact that his own life was filled with hardship and grief and partially from the unreconciled perceptions Canadians held of him.

By the end of the 1960's, while official recognition for his contributions still eluded him, Riel was honoured in many ways through statues and a postage stamp that featured his likeness. No government openly stated that Riel's legacy should be honoured, but through erecting statues and issuing stamps of Riel, the government conveyed the message that Riel is a significant part of Canadian history. The opposition to honouring Riel was still evident, but serious inroads had been made in the loyal Canadian view that Riel's acts were injurious to the Dominion. It would take approximately twenty years however, before governments would officially recognize his contribution to Canada.

The 1980' and 1990's saw government lobbied most forcefully by Métis, other Native groups, and elected government officials, who demanded Riel be pardoned or at least recognized for his meaningful service to his people and his country. The pardon was not agreed to as it was said it would rewrite history, and falsify the facts. In addition, a pardon was viewed as a forgiving of one's transgressions, and many native groups did not believe

Riel had committed any crime by standing up to Canadian authority.

It was not until 1992 that the federal government officially recognized Riel as a significant contributor to Canadian history. The government's approach was to honour Riel for his involvement at Red River in 1869-70, which resulted in the creation of Manitoba as a province. The Manitoba government soon after also acknowledged Riel as a founder of Manitoba. No mention was made of Riel's involvement in the Northwest Rebellion, or the fact that he was hanged for treason.

Those against honouring Riel for his achievements, seemed to cede the point that he contributed to Manitoba's creation, but cite his involvement in the Northwest Rebellion and his execution for such seditious acts as ample proof that he does not deserve to be honoured. Riel will remain a controversial figure in Canadian history as long as the Northwest Rebellion and Riel's involvement in it are viewed as anti-Canadian. It may take several decades before this event is re-evaluated to the degree required to have Riel honoured or at least forgiven for his actions in 1885. Through the course of time changes in perception have occurred that would have been unfathomable 50 or 100 years previous. In the future new interpretations in the socio-cultural history of Canada may emerge that will champion a pro-(or anti-Riel) sentiment into the service of some other cause. Perhaps one day we will see Riel's likeness on Canadian currency. It may seem improbable today, but in the future the perceptions may evolve sufficiently to make this a reality.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

This thesis has shown the main character traits of the heroic individual, described Riel's life in contemporary English Canadian literature, and illustrated the transformation of English Canadian society's perceptions of Riel. These three segments provide a basic understanding of heroism and demonstrate, using a genuine historical figure as an example, the hero's development within society. The social context for the perception of Riel as a villain and later as a hero has also been discussed in this work. This section examines the qualities Riel demonstrated to the Métis who originally saw him as heroic and attempts to demonstrate how the English Canadian population over the course of a century has come to recognize him as heroic as well. The findings from this analysis are summarized and offered in these concluding pages.

### **6.1 Riel's Heroic Qualities**

This thesis presents heroism in the context of societal perceptions and analyses the evolution of one particular historical figure. Individuals who attain great notoriety for their acts of bravery, great achievement, or responsibility become heroes. Those who display charisma increase their chances of being considered heroic. Riel's charisma, emphasized strongly in the Northwest Rebellion, provides a glimpse of the power an individual can wield when motivated to act.

English literature has shown that the four elements identified as comprising the heroic individual (bravery, great achievement, responsibility, and charisma) are all present in Riel.



Riel's early life and behaviour (before 1869) did not clearly foreshadow that he had the potential to become a heroic figure. His intelligence and educational background were above average for the time, and this contributed to him being recognized by the Métis as a potentially good leader.

During the Red River Rebellion, Riel showed his intelligence and charismatic demeanour in leading the Métis by demanding what he and other settlers considered fair treatment from the Dominion government. His charisma was displayed in his ability to hold an audience while he stated the means by which the Métis could attain their goals. He also showed a responsibility to his own people, in that he was willing to fight for their rights and become the leader of the provisional government, even though he was only 25 years old. His greatest achievement was forcing the federal government to recognize the Red River settlement and surrounding area as a province. The Dominion government had originally planned to make it a territory. This gave the Metis greater right to the land off which they lived, and allowed the citizens of the new province to vote on who their political representatives would be. This achievement would later be considered as Riel's most significant act by English Canadians. His status as a founding father of Manitoba would not be seen as an ethnocentric act of gaining privileges for the Métis, but as a great step for the democratic rights of the citizens of Red River and the current province of Manitoba.

During the years between the Red River and Northwest Rebellions, Riel was elected three times as a Member of Parliament, although pressure from Ontario prevented him from taking his seat in the House of Commons. This electoral success illustrated the devotion the citizens of the Provencher riding had for him. After being exiled from Canada, he eventually

settled in Montana and became active in fighting for the rights of the Métis in that territory. His responsibility to his people is shown once again by this action. Riel's loyalty to the Métis caused him to leave the relative security of Montana and venture to Saskatchewan and assist the settlers' rights movement. His charisma motivated hundreds of Metis and Aboriginals to take up arms and initiate hostilities against the Dominion. In the end, Riel showed bravery in facing the Canadian authorities after the Northwest Rebellion collapsed. He knew he risked his life in giving himself up but was confident he was right and could be legally exonerated for the actions he undertook.

These qualities of responsibility, charisma, great achievement, and to a certain extent bravery, all contributed to Riel being viewed as a heroic figure by the Métis. While he may not have consistently displayed all these qualities during the course of his life, much of the public as well as governments today recognize that his action, especially at Red River in 1869-70 contributed positively to the creation of Manitoba as a province. The events of the Northwest Rebellion appear to still influence much of the English literature on Riel. This is probably due to the assessment by English Canadians that Riel's defiance of Canadian authority led to bloodshed and no significant gains for the Métis or Native Indians. If the basic English Canadian perspective evolves to the point where the Northwest Rebellion is seen as a stand by autonomous Native and Métis communities to hold on to the last vestiges of their culture against the encroachment and domination of European civilization, then Riel's actions in this matter will be identified as a heroic. While this opinion may appear in print in some Canadian literature (mostly from authors of Aboriginal ancestry), it has not assumed a dominant position in the minds of most Canadians.

Riel has been most widely embraced in English Canadian literature in the second half of the twentieth century. As shown in this thesis, interest has been sparked by the introduction of the Métis viewpoint into mainstream English language publications.

It is not clear what caused this promulgation of the Métis perspective. The answer would require further study beyond the scope of this research. A weakening of the Anglo-Saxon belief systems due to the influx of immigrants from non-British territories may have influenced this trend. As well, the resurgence in the Native and Métis rights movement regarding land claims and self-government, may have contributed to the resurgence of interest in Riel. The growing support for an anti-colonial interpretation of Canadian history, leading to a more liberal analysis of events, may have also had an effect. The general detachment most of us today have regarding the events of 1870 and 1885 provides more *objectivity* in viewing that time period. There are no persons living today who were directly involved in either of these instances, and only distant relatives still claim lineage to the participants. It is quite possible that a combination of these and other factors brought about Riel's re-introduction and re-interpretation by English Canadian culture.

Today Riel is regarded as a founder of Manitoba, and a hero in the minds of many English Canadians. The events that took place in 1870 have now come to be acknowledged as key to Manitoba's formation as a province. Riel was a prominent player in the affairs of the Red River settlement, and is remembered as such. Perhaps the need to understand our origins elevated Riel to the status of a founder in Western Canadian culture.

The newspapers researched provide a very public account of the type of information available to English Canadians in the past and present. While the party politics of the 19th

century are no longer relevant to today's articles on Riel, politics in general still play an important role in the way Riel is received by the public. For example, if the presiding government recognized the achievements of Riel as good for the state, the population could be persuaded to do likewise. The exact opposite occurred to Riel's image between 1870 and 1930. The ruling authority officially proclaimed Riel a traitor and a criminal, and with very little material published in English to contradict this stance, these labels became engrained in the minds of several generations of English Canadians. Today, politicians realize that recognizing all of Riel's acts as positive events in the history of Canada could cause rifts within their own political parties as well as the general public. The risk to political security is too great to chance open acceptance of Riel as a founding father of the Dominion. In Eric Hobsbawm's book *Bandits*, the author refers to "social bandits" in the following terms:

The point about social bandits is that they are peasant outlaws whom the lord and the state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported.<sup>288</sup>

This description would certainly apply to Riel, although to associate the term bandit with the Métis leader may not be politically correct at this point in time. Even in death, Riel is admired by his people, and with their support over the past century, he has been elevated to a much greater stature within Canadian culture. More than any other figure in Canadian history, Riel has crossed over from being an ethnic icon to the Métis, Aboriginals, and French Canadians to mainstream icon of the entire Canadian population, representing

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<sup>288</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, (New York: Random House Inc., 1981) p. 17.

Western Canadian autonomy and championing minority rights. Perhaps the outcome of Native and Métis land and self-government claims will assist in determining whether Riel was a "social bandit" or if the Government of Canada has been unjust in its treatment of Aboriginals.

## **6.2 The Social Development of Heroism**

This final section illustrates how this thesis has contributed to understanding heroism as a social phenomenon and analyze the social process that has occurred which has made Riel heroic to English Canadians. In order for Riel to be considered heroic, he must have possessed some or all of the heroic qualities previously mentioned (i.e bravery, great achievement, responsibility, and charisma), first displaying them to the Métis and then to other groups.

Riel was not generally considered heroic by English Canadians, at least not in any of the publications reviewed, twenty-five years after his death. Articles of a pro-Riel nature do not surface until the 1930's, and it is assumed that the process by which Riel came to be viewed as a heroic figure by English Canadians occurred sometime after 1930. Prior to this time, very little was written on Riel in English Canadian news publications, and most of it was negative in its description of the Métis leader.

After 1930, with more and more being published on Riel and a growing awareness among English Canadians, authors and artists began researching Riel and producing books, plays, ballets and film on his life in an effort to express their opinion of who they imagined

him to be. With these new interpretations surfacing on Riel's significance, the public's perception of him was affected as well. Some reacted positively and came to see him as a figure deserving heroic consideration. Others, harbouring the sentiment of previous generations of English Canadians, reminded the public of the bloodshed and anguish Riel caused to Canadian settlers, especially in the Northwest Rebellion.

From this analysis, it appears that the heroic quality Riel exhibits to English Canadians is the achievement of bringing the Red River settlement under Dominion rule as the Province of Manitoba. This agreement provided citizens with more rights than would otherwise have been available under the terms unilaterally decided by the federal government prior to 1870. This accomplishment is seen by English Canadians as beneficial to more than just one particular segment of the population (i.e. the Métis). Riel's actions carry heroic significance to non-Métis because they benefitted most settlers at Red River. Today, English Canadians can identify Riel's achievement as assisting Manitobans and Western Canadians. This identification is closely associated with Hegel's view that the heroic character's responsibility is motivated by national pride, or in this case regional pride. In this instance, however, it is not Riel's motivation for his actions being considered but rather the perceptions of those granting him heroic status. Those who identify Riel as a role model for political and economic policy making, seek to resist the federal and Central Canadian domination. They see Riel's early resistance to such forces inspiring their own acts. Western Canadians see Riel as supporting their right to self-government, and this, at least in part, makes him heroic. Another aspect of Riel being considered heroic is the fact that he stood up to a "formidable opponent", the federal government, and extracted an agreement to provide the settlers of the

Red River region with rights similar to those in the other provinces of the Dominion. Many Western Canadians can empathize with Riel's conflict with Ottawa, as they have experienced the Central Canadian bias in federal policies themselves, and they admire him for battling and succeeding over those in Central Canada.

Thus the process by which Riel has come to be viewed as heroic by English Canadians is understood through the re-interpretation of Riel's actions. This was encouraged through the introduction of perspectives not fitting the conventional English Canadian view that he was a traitor. Beginning in the 1930's, articles on Riel were printed in major English language publications. They were controversial for their time and caused renewed interest in Riel. As this occurred, traditional English Canadian views began to be re-evaluated. This interest spawned the previously mentioned historical pieces, biographies, and the artistic expression (plays, ballets, films, and statues) that allowed Riel's actions to be more widely known than previously in English Canada.

Once Riel had gained "renewed" notoriety, the English Canadian public began to develop an opinion of him where no opinion or only a weakly supported opinion had previously existed. This occurred because very little information on Riel was available for them to form an opinion prior to 1930. For many English Canadians this was their first formal introduction to Riel, and they took these re-interpreted accounts at face value. Much of what has been published since the 1930's has not been antagonistic towards Riel's cause and public perception has been swayed by the historical accounts and artistic interpretations which are sympathetic in nature. Those who still oppose Riel's claim to any historic significance generally are holding views passed down through kinship ties with those directly

affected by Riel and the Metis actions in 1870 or 1885. Riel is a villain to these individuals because their ancestors fought against the Métis, and Riel must remain a sinister character in order to preserve the ancestors' honour. It is this need which determines their interpretation of the historical significance of Riel. Hegel's view that kinship ties are a motivation for heroism, is displayed not in the actor, but in the audience's reasoning for holding individuals as heroic. The reason more people do not hold such views is because the negative images of Riel have not prominently appeared in publications or artistic renderings since the early 1900's.

Today English Canadians see Riel's heroic significance based on the creation of Manitoba as a province and his responsibility to Western Canada which he showed by fighting for the rights of the settlers present at Red River before 1870. These settlers rights can only be seen to be protected by Riel if he is viewed as a hero, not a villain. Those settlers who arrived after Manitoba was created would have their rights safe-guarded by Ottawa, and thus would not see the significance in viewing Riel as the protector of land rights. The material interests of Aboriginal persons, Métis, and the later settlers rest on the validity of the Dominion's claim to the land through conquest. The settlers whose property was based on the federal and provincial survey of land have no *material* basis to support Riel or the Métis. The outcome of the Manitoba Métis Federation's (MMF) current land claims rests in the courts' decision, and they may determine the future significance of Riel in Canadian history. If the MMF are victorious in this battle, then Riel will be seen as the person who initiated the process that culminated in this achievement. His heroic stature in English Canadian culture will be increased. However, if these land claims are not recognized



as valid, then Riel's significance in Canadian history may be diminished and he may revert back to being a hero only to the Métis.

This analysis of heroism has sought to understand the social process in the formation of a hero. What has been uncovered is that heroism is comprised of several qualities and that some or all of them must be present for a group to consider an individual as heroic. Other authors have provided understandings of heroism that focus on one or two of these qualities (Carlyle, Hegel, Weber, etc.) or seek to explain heroism as the method the society uses to impart a feeling of self-worth among its members (Becker). None of these approaches could be separately used to identify the reasons for English Canadians embracing Riel as a hero, where previously he was considered a traitor or was unknown.

Through the use of the four heroic qualities and the case study approach which focused on a Canadian historical figure, this thesis has determined that the development of a hero in a society is based not only on the existence of heroic qualities in an individual as observed by some group, but also on the contradictory images of the individual as a villain (or the lack of such images). If such negative images are not prevalent, then the development of the individual into the hero can occur within society. In Riel's case, the qualities the Métis held of him began to be openly promoted during the 1930's and continue on to this day. With no strong support for anti-Riel images, or the advancement of heroes whom the public could consider in opposition to Riel (e.g. Middleton, Wolseley, MacDonald), Riel's popularity has grown. Perhaps Hegel's definition of "institutionalized forms of action" applies to these English Canadian figures, as each was acting within his prescribed position in society (i.e. general or prime minister). These individuals did not step outside the bounds

of their roles or perform any acts considered extraordinary for their occupation. Riel, however, is considered by many English Canadians to be the founder of Manitoba, and this can be directly attributed to the image of him portrayed in the new wave of literature and artistic interpretations produced since 1930. These English Canadians' perceive the images of Riel advanced by the post-1930's interpretations as accurate descriptions of the man. This acceptance is probably because present society has had little direct experience with the consequences of Riel's actions, and these consequences have not been as well publicized as the new interpretations.

This analysis was to uncover insight into why English Canadians now perceive Riel's actions as heroic. What has been found is that the English speaking Canadian public had a severely limited knowledge of Riel prior to 1930, and that this lack of awareness enhanced the ability of sympathetic accounts of Riel to gain notoriety and often acceptance. Authors and playwrights such as Joseph Kinsey Howard, E.B. Osler, Thomas Flanagan, John Coulter and John Hirsch, and actors such as Mavor Moore and Bruno Gerussi, coming from culturally diverse backgrounds (Coulter - an Irish expatriate; Hirsch - of Hungarian/Jewish descent; Gerussi - of Greek ethnicity; Howard - an American writer) have had a great influence on how we perceive Riel today. Not inhibited by the loyal English Canadian view that Riel was a traitor, they produced or performed works that confronted the time-worn images of Riel as a criminal or traitor, and replaced them with a complex personality that was both heroic and tragic. English Canadians, once exposed to these generally sympathetic accounts of Riel's motivations and actions, began to perceive Riel from a perspective other than that of the previously dominant English Canadian view.

With Riel now seen primarily through these post-1930's interpretations, the public has generally accepted them as accurate. None of these perspectives portray Riel in a particularly positive fashion regarding the Northwest Rebellion. In these accounts his sanity is brought into question and he is seen as causing unnecessary bloodshed. This may be the reason Riel is only considered heroic by English Canadians with regard to his actions stemming from the Red River Rebellion.

This analysis of heroism has shown that the public perception of events that originally defined the individual as a hero to a group (in Riel's case the Métis) do not necessarily need to be experienced or even completely understood to produce the perception that that person is heroic. What is required is the generation of positive accounts and the lack of negative images which disprove the individual's claim of heroism. What heroism English Canadians today equate with Riel is based essentially on the interpretations advanced since 1930. There is no need to have a detailed understanding of his life to be able to judge him as heroic. Multiple perspectives on an individual's actions may in fact cloud the issue of one's heroism, not enhance it. What is needed is for one view to come to dominate public perception, and today the post-1930's interpretation has come to be that dominant perspective on Riel. Perhaps once the current Métis land claim issues are settled and a legal decision handed down, another interpretation on the heroic significance of Riel will come to dominate English Canadian culture.

Perhaps more than anything else, this thesis has shown the social changes which have occurred in Canadian culture between 1869 and the present. Canada has changed from a country being dominated by English colonial values and a highly politically influenced press,

to a diverse and liberal culture, more willing to examine alternative versions of history. The need to have heroes, for the Métis - Riel, and for the Canadian loyalists - those who stood for colonial values and opposed Riel, has played a significant role in the development of Canada's sense of culture. The general Canadian public, that is, those who hold no strong affiliation with either the Métis or the Canadian loyalists' views are the most susceptible to the re-interpretation of Riel which has occurred since 1930. This general Canadian public, in search of heroes it could call its own, examined both the loyalist and Métis versions of events, and appears to have recognized Riel as a heroic individual because of a more general change in the perception of the legitimacy of colonial rule over the past several centuries. The political climate has also changed in this country, from the traditional conservative convictions to a more liberal doctrine in managing the state, shown in the re-interpretation of Riel over the past 60 years.

This examination of Riel in Canadian culture has provided one with a view of both sides of the heroic/villain process, from a loyalist perspective which was generally active in down-playing Riel's significance and branding him an enemy of the Dominion, to the Métis view which basically garnished Riel with praise as a hero whose deeds were for the benefit of all Métis. As one side seeks to promote its own heroes, it may, at the same time may denigrate the other side's heroes. The other side functions in a similar manner in promoting its own heroes. The audience's need to extol certain qualities or values brings about the process of creating individuals which exhibit these qualities, who become the heroes.

The audience therefore gives the hero his power, and the hero in turn provides the audience with a personified example the qualities or values aimed at sustaining the group.

Loyalists promoting colonial values of a strong central government and a Protestant lifestyle, must deride Riel, or their own heroes, who extol the loyalist virtues will lose significance and weaken the loyalist group's cohesiveness. The Métis have enjoyed support among English Canadians, because one of their heroes has been adopted as a Canadian cultural hero; his actions being perceived as benefitting many Canadians, especially those in Western Canada. It is this general Canadian population, the group between the Métis and the loyalists, that will determine Riel's future significance in Canadian culture. It is the audience that decides the importance of an individual's actions, using as a measure the ability of the individual to fulfil the group's need for heroic transcendence.

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