

Prat de la Riba

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Editorial / April 18, 2006

Now that we will have the new Statute, it is worth recalling Enric Prat de la Riba. This public figure seems to have been forgotten, as if he had never existed. In fact, Catalonia today would not be what it is without his intellectual, political and institutional contribution, and his way of doing things.

It is worth recalling that although he was aware that the *Mancomunitat* experiment was a very limited instrument of administration, he was determined to take advantage of the opportunity and reaped as much as possible from it. He also worked to dignify it. In many respects, he turned it into a genuine and prestigious form of government, so that Catalans would embrace it with affection, trust, and respect. This is a lesson we cannot afford to forget, especially at present.

That was his achievement. He instilled in people the feeling they were building a country in an orderly, peaceful and ambitious manner. He involved everyone who wanted to participate in this task. He set up institutions such as the Institute of Catalan Studies, the School of Local Administration, the Library of Catalonia, the Agricultural School, the Library School, the Nursing School, the School of Industrial Directors, and many others.

He normalised the Catalan language and gave priority to its defence and use. He laid the doctrinal and intellectual groundwork for Catalanism. He made Catalonia the focus of his administrative action. He introduced the idea of excellence to his many initiatives and thereby contributed to the prestige of this country. He firmly established Catalonia's cultural and scientific presence in Europe. He earned the respect of everyone, including those who did not agree with many of his ideas.

Why does such an eminent statesman appear to have never existed? We still live with many of his legacies. Catalonia would be far better off if it took into account more often his example of leadership, of generating trust and self-respect and of building a country.