

THE HISTORY
OF THE METIS PEOPLE

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AMNSIS DISCUSSION PAPER

February 1, 1979

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I Introduction

The Metis are an historic people with both Indian and white ancestry who were born in Western Canada, that area from the Great Lakes to the Rocky Mountains. Their paternal ancestors were French, Scottish, Irish or English with the mothers being Indian. The Metis Nation developed in the North-West during the fur trade era. At the beginning of the 19th century, two distinct linguistic groups of Metis developed: the French Metis or Bois Brules who spoke French and the English Metis whose language was English. (Most Metis were bilingual.) Many English abandoned their Indian wives and children and went back to England when their service with the Hudson's Bay Company terminated. These families were then adopted by the French Metis, giving an explanation of why so many French-speaking Metis have Scottish, Irish and English names.¹

II The Early Days

The Metis were nomadic. They would have to be on the hunt following the buffalo. The wives prepared the hides for the making of clothes and moccasins. They would also smoke the meat and fish. The Metis were good hunters and very often white travellers, missionaries and surveyors would seek their services as guides.²

Clothes styles of the Metis came from both the Indian and European cultures. Simple European clothing would often be decorated with fringes, tassels, dyed horsehair, coloured shells, etc., which were taken from the Indian culture.³

Family life was very well respected. The Metis lived as one family where peace, hospitality and friendship regulated their life. These people were religious and during this time the dominant religion was Catholic. There was great concern with justice because of the sensitivity to their rights.⁴

As nomadic people, the Metis enjoyed hunting the large herds of buffalo or bison. In hunting such large herds, they had

to organize their hunting parties. This meant that every detail had to be carefully planned. In order that this plan be carried out to its fullest, leaders had to be chosen and rules had to be established. This custom explains why the Metis are able to adapt to different situations. Each camp consisted of ten men, the captain and his soldiers, who shared the scouting duties.⁵

The Council, which was both the governing and court body, set up the rules of the hunt and saw that they were obeyed. These rules formed "The Law of the Prairie" and each captain received these laws. When an important matter arose, the captain's authority was limited for the whole camp's assent was needed.⁶ This patriarchal government operated only in time of the hunt or when there were difficulties and dangers.

For the first 100 years, from 1670 - 1770, the Hudson's Bay Company remained strong in its area north of the Saskatchewan River, but after 1770, there was competition with the North-West Company. By 1804, Simon McTavish, the Scottish founder of the North-West Company, had established trading posts from the Missouri to the Peace River and Hudson Bay. This new company hired French-Canadians and Metis guides and workers who also acted as interpreters. Metis men and women alike guided people like Alexander McKenzie past natural and human dangers in order that they could accomplish in the eyes of the Europeans, remarkable deeds, (for example, they had finally reached a great western river, only to have McKenzie name it after himself).⁷

The French-Canadians and the Metis co-operated with both companies. The Scots relied on these people who knew the country so well. French people mixed and lived as aboriginal people, whereas, the English were harsh to them. A lot of Scottish people learned to speak French and this is why there are so many French place names.⁸

Both the Hudson's Bay and North-West Companies were exploring in hope of extending their rights across Western

Canada. The North-West Company had gone to the gates of the Hudson's Bay Company forts and in reprisal, in 1776, the Hudson's Bay built a fort east of Brandon, one at Portage la Prairie and another at Red River. In 1794, the Hudson's Bay Company started invading the south. Rivalry was at its peak, thus, there was a lot of corruption, crime and murder. Even though the Metis were not a part of this, they would still be victimized.⁹

In 1812, Lord Selkirk came to this country to establish an agricultural settlement in Rupertsland. This meant gaining permission from the Hudson's Bay Company, which he did. He then bought 110,000 square miles of land in the Red River valley from Chief Pequis and began settling colonists whom he provided transportation, free land and the basic necessities. Miles McDonnell became the governor of Assiniboia.

Although the North-West Company greatly opposed this project, the first 283 people came and settled at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers in the spring of 1812. Again, the Metis showed their hospitality by teaching these newcomers how to survive in their country. More settlers came in 1813 and 1815, but some of them were killed in the battle at LaGrenouillere or Seven Oaks one year later.¹⁰

The area of Assiniboia belonged to the North-West Company, so they thought, and they did not approve of the Metis cultivating soil and raising farm animals instead of trapping and hunting. On January 8th, 1814, Governor McDonnell declared that Lord Selkirk was absolute owner of Assiniboia and this gave no one else the right to hunt and fish there; no one could even cut wood there. After the Metis had taught the settlers the means of existence, McDonnell was now taking away their right.¹¹

There was a food shortage in the colony so McDonnell went further and forbade the export of supplies for one year.¹² The commissioned traders of the North-West and their men, the Metis, would not abide by this rule. McDonnell then decided to seize food supplies from the North-West trading posts. The

North-West Company was very angry. They made their men, the Metis, believe that the Hudson's Bay were the ones to blame for they wanted the Metis out of the country. After all, since the Hudson's Bay Company were getting their dividends, they did not bother the aboriginal people.

The Metis did not want to lose their land so they went along with the Norwesters in making offers to the colonists to emigrate to Lower Canada. Selkirk's solicitors added to McDonnell's proclamation that anyone caught doing a wrong deed would be treated as an English poacher. The Norwesters got a hold of this letter and it meant war.¹³

The Hudson's Bay Company and the North-West Company began military exercises. This did not appeal to McDonnell's people. McDonnell continued setting regulations. The regulation prohibiting the hunting of buffalo by horseback really annoyed the Metis. The North-West Company tried to win the Metis' support by informing them of Selkirk's plan to force them out of the country. The Metis appealed to Lord Selkirk himself but their spokesman, Lagimodiere still believed that the new settlers were there for a humanitarian reason. The Metis could sense the war to try to destroy the settlement so they had to act together.¹⁴

The Metis reasoned with McDonnell, and a group led by Lagimodiere left for Lower Canada to make Selkirk aware of the threat to his settlement. Selkirk organized a troop at his own expense. Governor Robertson, who had replaced McDonnell, only needed the word to start the war. He would act on revenge to the incident that took place in 1815, killing four Hudson's Bay Company men. The result was the Battle of Seven Oaks in 1816.¹⁵

Now the settlement was in real danger. Selkirk headed a regiment west at which time he negotiated treaties with the Indians and repossessed land and materials from the North-West Company. Then he returned to Montreal only to find that his enemies, under the control of the North-West Company, had denounced him to the authorities. Due to his lack of success in the courts,

he left for his homeland in 1818, (died in 1820).¹⁶

After the rival companies had demonstrated their unfaithfulness, the Metis would not give their support easily. McDonnell was still determined to prohibit the hunting of buffalo by horseback. The Metis would not give up their livelihood and so supported Cameron of the North-West Company. They had also been asked by the Governor-General of Canada about their title to their land. The Canadian government assured the Metis their rights would be protected as long as they supported the North-West Company.¹⁷

The North-West Company had arrested 150 settlers of the Fort Douglas area, who lived on land belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company, and shipped them back to England in the summer of 1815. Then Robertson captured the headquarters of the North-West, Fort Gibraltar, on March 17th, 1816. He went further and seized Fort Pembina. These violent acts resulted in the battle at Seven Oaks on July 19th, 1816.¹⁸

Alexander McDonnell had organized about 50 men, all Metis except for 4 Indians and 6 French-Canadians, to transport pemmican to the canoemen who were coming from Montreal with provisions for the North-West Company. These men were ordered to keep their distance from the Hudson's Bay Company buildings. Robert Semple, who had replaced Miles McDonnell, wanted to prevent the North-West men from meeting. Alexander McDonnell heard about this plan and informed the canoemen. They avoided the Fort Douglas area but were still spotted. Semple and 28 men rushed to meet Cuthbert Grant, Captain of the North-West party. By now, Grant's men had separated but the last 26 men saw Semple coming and sent Francois Boucher to speak to him. Semple tried to seize Boucher's gun and ordered his men to arrest him. Semple then ordered his men to fire. The results were tragic: Semple and 20 of his men were killed, the North-West Company lost one man and four were wounded.¹⁹

Fort Douglas surrendered which gave the North-West

Company control of the Red River. W. B. Celtman was sent by the Governor-General of British North America to look into the events of the battle. His report showed that Semple was at fault and he proposed that the two companies merge. This came about on March 26, 1821.²⁰

III Metis in the Red River Settlement

After the merger of the two rival fur trading companies into the company known as the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821, many of the Metis who had worked for the fur trading rivals were put out of work.²¹ Many returned to Red River to take up farming or become employed in the transportation industry such as freighting.

In 1835, the territory that Selkirk had received was back in the hands of the Hudson's Bay Company. This meant they had the governing power. Money, introduced in the same year, would be given occasionally for furs. The beaver pelt or 'pelu' was the standard value before this. Profits for the aboriginal people were slim. The Metis did receive more than the Indians, therefore, they would trade amongst themselves. When the Hudson's Bay Company knew of this, they forbade anyone to trade with the Indians. They sent armed constables to houses that they suspected of hiding furs which were bought from Indians. Such incidents were threatening revolt.²²

The government of Assiniboia framed a constitution, in 1835, that provided for a council. The people that made up the council were to be appointed, with the President being the Governor appointed by the Hudson's Bay Company.²³ As a result of their first meeting, the colony was divided into four districts each with a magistrate. This brought about a jury system which began on April 28, 1836. Fort Garry was the centre of the colony.

Another important event was the coming of the Grey Nuns on June 21, 1841. The first missionaries arrived in 1818. Before the Grey Nuns opened the girls school, the Nolan sisters

(daughters of a former Hudson's Bay officer) had done the work. The Metis wanted their girls educated, thus, sent them to this school.²⁴

By 1843, the population of the Red River settlement was 5,143 with the majority being Metis and French-Canadians. This majority wanted a voice in local affairs. They had representation on the Council early in the history of the Red River. They also had men holding municipal positions. The Hudson's Bay Company knew the Metis were serious. Their petition of 1843 resulted in a distillery being built and the office of Police Sergeant-Major being abolished. In 1845, another petition resulted in all British subjects living in the colony making tax free imports from the United States once a year. The Metis were very concerned about public affairs.²⁵

The Metis were friends with the Sioux and Saukteaux who lived around the Red River area. The Sioux from the Dakota would visit the Saukteaux and the Hudson's Bay Company did not like this. Thus, in 1846, Hudson's Bay officials brought in 500 soldiers. After two years these soldiers were replaced by 150 military reserves who were to enforce respect for the Company.²⁶

The Hudson's Bay Company would not give the Metis any profit on the fur trade which they had asked for in 1835 and 1845. They consulted with Jean-Louis Riel who was a well respected leader of this time, (his son, Louis Riel, followed his footsteps and gained concessions for his people). The Hudson's Bay Company kept enforcing strict trading rules. Finally, in 1837, a petition bearing 977 names, mostly Metis, asking for greater freedom of trade was addressed to the Queen. The Hudson's Bay Company reacted by arresting Metis men whom they said were trading with outsiders.²⁷

The Metis saw that justice was done to these men. They were freed. In the courtroom, Riel Sr. demanded that "henceforth trading be free all over the country, that all hunters and merchants have the right to buy, sell and exchange furs without first obtaining the Company's permission; that in the future

the Company must not meddle with our business transactions. We intend to be free. I proclaim here and now that from this time forward trade is free."²⁸

The Canadian government sent S. J. Dawson and Henry Yonla Hind to report on the North-West expansion in 1858. Dr. John Christian Shultz, William Buckingham and William Caldwell, a few of the first to arrive at the Red River colony, brought a printing press with them. The paper which they printed, *The Nor'Wester*, spoke against the Hudson's Bay Company and the Council of Assiniboia, and this soon disrupted the colony. A military detachment was set up. This disruption paved the way to annexing the North-West to Canada.²⁹

After the Dawson-Hind survey of 1865, London and Ottawa began discussing a Canadian Confederacy and acquiring the North West Territories. The Hudson's Bay Company again pretended to be the owner of these territories. Following the example of the American government buying Alaska (for several million dollars from Russia), the Company, too, asked for an outrageous price. After all, Canada's future was the West.³⁰

On July 1, 1867, the Father of Confederation hoped that the Hudson's Bay Company would cede its rights to the land of the North West for 300,000 pounds. However, the Company reserved certain areas around its trading posts. Even though the land transfer would not come into effect until July 16, 1870, the Honorable William McDougall, (Minister of Public Works in Ottawa), had John A. Snow begin constructing a road from the colony to Upper Canada. This construction did nothing for the economic situation of the colony. The majority of the workers were imported. The Canadian authorities went further and took over the whole settlement. Only then did the West begin to take up arms.³¹

The road from the Lake of the Woods to Red River was not supposed to be built until 1870 and now the authorities were dividing the Metis land into districts and sections. This was

done without consulting the Metis so they began to organize under one leader, Louis David Riel, the son of Jean-Louis Riel.³²

Riel made his first protest against the surveyors at Oak Point in the summer of 1869. He told his people that the whole situation was a misunderstanding. Then he went to Boulton and his men, to explain that they were taking someone else's property without providing sufficient compensation. Boulton only replied that he had to do as Ottawa instructed. There was no bitterness caused. But the Metis decided to put an end to the surveying when the surveyors were about to fix the boundaries to Andre Neault's land at St. Vital. They needed no arms. Riel signalled Jean-Baptiste Ritchot, a huge man, to put his foot on the survey chain then the other men did the same. Work stopped at once. Again Riel asked the surveyors to leave and again they told him that they were just following instructions. The Metis would not tolerate this, thus, forced the surveyors to leave.³³

During this time, the Hudson's Bay Company did not exercise its authority, which it had, until the sale of Hudson's Bay Company land was completed. The majority of its employees were British emigrants, therefore, they were used to changes in authority. On the other hand, the Metis only saw this change as a violation to their land and their rights.

Louis Riel and the Metis delegates, equally French and English, met on November 22, 1869, where Riel proclaimed that they would never allow McDougall, pseudo-Governor, to enter their country. Riel took over Fort Garry peacefully on November 24, 1869; they set up a provisional government. This government would negotiate with the Canadian Authorities. The English representatives were not prepared for this, thus, set another meeting for December 1. Meantime, they proposed that the government be left to the Hudson's Bay Company and a Metis committee be established to deal with McDougall and the Canadian government. However, Dr. Shultz was not informed. He started spreading lies about Riel trying to take provisions from the Canadian government.³⁴

This, Shultz knew, would start a rebellion. He even turned his store into a fort. Riel soon learned what Shultz and these Canadians were planning. Dr. Shultz and his supporters caused a split between the French and the English. They also caused Riel to ignore the proposal made by the English.

McDougall was trying to enter the country by the U.S.A. boundary and with the severe weather conditions, he had to act quickly. He wanted Ottawa to announce the transfer of land so as to gain the loyalist's side and put Riel on the spot. McDougall then drew up a Proclamation stating that the Canadian government now had possession of Assiniboia. Colonel Dennis had copies printed then posted at the Fort. Riel acted by presenting their List of Rights. Their list included the form of legislature, methods of election, disposition of land, building of schools, roads and railways, levying of taxes, the recruitment of an army for the country's defence, etc. Also, both languages, French and English, were to be official for all documents of the legislature and treaties had to be arranged between the Indians of the Territories and the government.³⁵

In the meantime, McDougall had crossed the boundary and nailed a copy of the Proclamation on a fence post, (night of November 30). He then proceeded to make himself governor by doing anything possible that would go against Riel. Colonel Dennis, McDougall's Lieutenant-Governor, was even authorized to attack the Metis, fire on them, and drive them out of their shelter and take their possessions (horses, cows, etc.). The Metis did nothing. With McDougall trying to get in as governor, McTavish had no power, therefore, the country was under the provisional government. During this time, Shultz and his 44 men were armed and occupying a warehouse. This was a threat to the Fort. Riel ordered them to leave but Shultz refused so the Metis surrounded the warehouse--Shultz surrendered and they were taken prisoners.³⁶

McDougall was still not allowed to enter the country. Snow and Colonel Dennis had both left the country. Dr. Shultz

continued working undercover against Riel. Shultz' men would not be released until Riel was sure of his ally with the English settlers. Delegates from different parishes were invited to Fort Garry to discuss the List of Rights. This made McDougall realize that Riel was a legitimate representative of his people. He invited Riel to Pembina on December 13th to discuss their claims but McDougall threatened them, if he was not allowed into their country. This invitation was ignored. McDougall resigned on December 18th and his Proclamation was officially confirmed illegal. The people of the Red River once again had peace.³⁷

Right after Christmas, 1869, two commissioners arrived at Pembina from Ottawa. On December 27th, Donald A. Smith, the Canadian commissioner, and his brother-in-law, also a Hudson's Bay employee, arrived. If these commissioners could not approve the List of Rights, they could let Ottawa know that the people wanted to negotiate. Riel called a general assembly for January 19th so that Smith could bring forth the documents from the Canadian government. These four documents contained promises but they were indefinite as were McDougall's promises about the government transfer.³⁸

Forty delegates, half French and half English, were elected to decide how an agreement could be made. The meeting was held on January 25, 1870. Again, Smith repeated the promises but neither the assembly nor Smith had the authority to make final decisions. All of the people had a voice in dealing with the Canadian government. The English first consulted with McTavish. When they asked McTavish if he was governor and if he would continue to be one, he replied, "For the love of God, form a government. I no longer have either power or authority", (he died a few weeks later).³⁹

The French and English did not hesitate in forming the provisional government of Rupertsland (January 25, 1870). An executive was elected of which Louis Riel was unanimously chosen

President; Thomas Bunn - Secretary; W. O'Donoghue - Treasurer; James Ross - Chief Justice; A. C. Bannatyne - Postmaster; Ambrose-Dydime Lepine - Assistant General; Louis Schmidt - Assistant Secretary.

The convention revised the List of Rights and three delegates; Father Ritchot, Judge Black and Alfred Scott, were chosen to submit this list to Ottawa.⁴⁰ The convention, consisting of the 40 delegates, met with Smith on February 9, 1870. Smith made it appear that the Canadian government would approve most of the Rights. A Council of twelve French-speaking and twelve English-speaking men was set up by the Provisional government. The government would be in charge of the actions of the Justice of Peace, the magistrates and the Constables, Riel was elected President and delegates were also chosen to go to Ottawa.

The next day, February 10th, Fort Garry heard that 150 armed men were on their way from Portage la Prairie to attack Fort Garry and to free Shultz and other prisoners. Shultz, who had escaped January 23rd, was directing two other groups of men at Headingly and St. Pierre. Donald Smith, who was sent to keep the country at peace, tried to remain neutral.⁴¹

On February 14th, Shultz and about 300 men were sighted. Riel wanted no bloodshed so he informed the English people that he would release the prisoners. It was then that the English made it clear that they would overthrow the Provisional government. Riel lined the Fort's walls with his 500 men. While Riel was preparing for the attack, a prisoner--Norbert Parisien--escaped. He was seen but Andre Nault ordered his men not to shoot. Parisien only got as far as Headingly where he was seen by Colonel Hugh Sutherland who approached him. He thought he was being hunted, thus shot Sutherland. He then fled and hid in the bush across the river but was soon found and beaten by Thomas Scott and his helpers. Parisien died six days later.⁴²

Dr. Shultz was now recognized as the English leader. The English wrote a letter to Riel stating their refusal to

recognize the Provisional government. They also accused Riel for the death of Sutherland. Riel's message to them was that they would fight if necessary but what they really wanted was peace and their rights recognized. The English then decided against the attack. However, Riel was not informed, thus, O'Donoghue with 30 riders took 48 armed rebels as prisoners.⁴³

Boulton, the leader, and his three lieutenants were condemned to death and this news was made known to the colony. Riel had to make the Canadian government understand that the Red River inhabitants were serious about protecting their rights. He decided that Boulton alone would pay the penalty for treason. However, Boulton was given a pardon but not until he promised not to take up arms against the Provisional government. Smith also had to promise to make the English people understand that what the new government of the colony really wanted was protection for their people and their property. Shultz had also returned to Ontario.⁴⁴

Thomas Scott, an Orangeman, was one of the 48 prisoners. He was arrested twice and because Riel had pardoned Boulton, he thought the leader and his councillors could easily be frightened. Scott's behavior continued to be violent until finally the councillors, not Riel, set his trial before the military tribunal for March 3rd. He was to be executed the next day.

On March 9th, Bishop Tache landed at Fort Garry. He soon found out that Ottawa knew nothing of the events of the colony. As commissioner, he sent a letter to the Canadian Secretary of State explaining the split between the English and French, the need to form the Provisional government and the List of Rights that would be presented to the Canadian government. Even though Tache had spoken for the Canadian government on granting the Red River people their rights, Riel and his council would not lay down their arms until they received an official acceptance.⁴⁵

Father Ritchot and Alfred H. Scott were the two

delegates that were sent to Ottawa. They were arrested for taking part in the murder of Thomas Scott but the charges were dismissed by a magistrate in Ottawa who claimed the Canadian government had no jurisdiction. Sir John A. Macdonald and Sir Georges-Etienne Cartier met with the delegates but the Prime Minister kept the promises to a minimum for fear of the Orangemen, a powerful party.⁴⁶ It was not until May 3rd that the negotiations had ended. The Manitoba Act was passed on May 3rd and was sanctioned by the Governor-General on May 12th. However, there was no mention of amnesty. The Canadian government had convinced Ritchot and Scott that this came under the jurisdiction of the Imperial government. The delegates made the mistake of accepting his verbal promise.⁴⁷

On June 24th, the terms offered by Ottawa were accepted by Riel and his advisors. Three days later, when the New Province had not received the documents granting amnesty, Bishop Tache left for Ottawa. He was not allowed to see the Governor-General. During this time, a military expedition under the leadership of Colonel Wolseley was sent to Fort Garry. Again, Bishop Tache was flattered into accepting only a verbal promise. This time he was convinced that Wolseley was sent on a mission of peace to make preparations for the new Lieutenant-Governor's arrival, Mr. Archibald.⁴⁸

When the Indians found out that Wolseley actually wanted to get rid of Riel and his men, they warned Riel. The chief of the Lake of the Woods suggested that they, together, could destroy Wolseley and his men by dropping logs on them while they were directing themselves over the rapids of the Winnipeg River. But Riel thought his friends were exaggerating and relied on the promises made to Father Ritchot and Bishop Tache.⁴⁹

Riel finally realized that these promises were a hoax but it was too late. On August 25th, he met with the council to set up the duties of the soldiers and guards. Next day he had the Fort evacuated. Riel then visited Bishop Tache. To him he said as he pointed to the soldiers who were running here and

there: "Do you believe now Monseigneur that they have come on a peace mission. And don't you think we are running a great risk of being hanged, thanks to the lack of precaution on the part of those to whom we entrusted our interests and those who held themselves responsible for them."⁵⁰

The Metis leader said, "What happens now matters little. The Manitoba Act has assured Metis rights, their religion and their language. That's what I wanted. My mission is ended."⁵¹ Riel did not leave the country immediately. In the summer of 1874, Wilfrid Laurier had met him in Montreal.⁵²

Donald Smith governed the colony until Mr. Archibald arrived September 3, 1870.

IV Metis Settlements Outside of Red River

The Metis from Red River were hunters, traders, freighters and farmers and so they moved to communities near the lakes and rivers which were close to such places as Edmonton, Batoche, Calgary, Prince Albert, The Pas, the Red River area and the trading posts. These sites were so chosen because of good transportation routes plus they provided fresh water, fish and access to game on a year round basis. River lots were established to grow vegetables and small amounts of grain and hay for the livestock. The elders stayed behind to tend to farm duties while the parents went out hunting for their winter supplies, (meat, hides, tallow, bones and other animal products). Any surplus meat was prepared and made into pemmican which could be sold to traders.⁵³

Cabins were built both at the hunting site and on the river lots where they stayed for the winter. These cabins were made of logs. Clay and hay were mixed with mud to plug the holes between the logs. After this mud insulation was dry, white lime would be applied to make it look white and clean.⁵⁴

Government authorities found the Metis living peacefully with their own government, this was either the Buffalo

Hunters' Council or in some communities such as St. Laurent and St. Albert, they also had local governments. The Metis could not be left in this condition so the Canadian government, coming from a rich and mature civilization, made it their business to try and take their land any way they could.

In 1872, when treaties were being negotiated with the Indians at Lake Qu'Appelle, the Metis let it be known that they did not want to lose their land. The Lieutenant-Governor told them that the negotiations would begin after they finished with the Indians. The same year, the government allocated the land to the Manitoba Metis, the land that had been granted to them under the Manitoba Act. The Metis of the North-West believed they should receive land but the government made no attempt to grant this. In 1877, the Metis began sending petitions to Ottawa. The government even denied receiving some of these petitions.⁵⁵

Some 200 French-Canadian Metis families, who lived in the South Saskatchewan River area, would not support Confederacy. They had their own government headed by Gabriel Dumont. The Metis of the south branch of the Saskatchewan could not get their river lots surveyed. When the land grant was requested, the government's reaction was to take away their lots, pastures and woodlots and make them pay \$2 an acre for it. St. Louis de Langevin, a Metis parish, was sold to the Prince Albert Colonization Company.⁵⁶

The government had been unfaithful in carrying out the distribution of land with the Manitoba Metis. They took their time distributing the land instead of granting the Metis titles and patents. The Metis received no protection or justice. With the government getting rid of the Metis any way possible, it is no wonder that the Metis rebelled.

V The Development of a Rebellion

The revolutionary struggle of 1885 as well as the Red River Rebellion of 1869 - 70 are historically known as the

'Riel Rebellions' which is not only misleading but incorrect. Louis Riel was not solely responsible for the hostilities; he only became involved in the latter part of the 1885 Rebellion. "The discontent that resulted in the Rebellion of 1885 had developed over the past two decades between the aboriginal people of the North-West and the industrialists and governing authorities in Ottawa. More precisely, the western interests included most everyone--local merchants, farmers, settlers, workers; Indians and Metis. Their demands of the Federal government centered upon economic and land reforms that clashed with the interests of ambitious Federal and British rulers."⁵⁷

After the rebellion of 1870, the Federal government claimed that their authority extended to include the North-West. The Mounted Police were to keep the peace and the newly organized North West Council was to be responsible for the local government. However, they did not consider the power and interests of the people in the area. These people insisted that the North-West Council, an appointed council consisting of three members and a Lieutenant-Governor, be made responsible to them. Ottawa tried to keep them quiet by including more members and at the same time, the power of the Council was reduced to increase the power of the Lieutenant-Governor.⁵⁸ This had been practised before on unknowing Indian Councils.

Thus, by 1880, many of the plains Indians had been confined on reserves under R.N.W.M.P. The Indians represented about 65 percent of the population in the North-West, the Metis about one quarter and the whites, 10 percent. The Metis still had local native councils. At St. Laurent, there was a five member council and a president. The Metis, approximately 800, in the St. Laurent area became highly organized and very involved in local politics.⁵⁹

The white settlers and merchants had gone to the North-West on Ottawa's promise that the C.P.R. would pass through Prince Albert and Battleford. Their dreams were shattered and

their livelihood uncertain when C.P.R. officials abruptly changed the main line to the Regina route. The people once again gathered to become involved in the political movement. By 1881, 2,000 Prince Albert area residents were advocating redress of the community's grievances.

Many land speculators and companies had lost large amounts of money when the C.P.R. route was changed. Grants of land came easy for the railway. For example, in one transaction 17 million acres were gifted to the C.P.R., even though some of the woodlots were already promised to settlers.⁶¹ These acts of injustice were done without consulting people of the Northwest.

The farmers were also discontented because of poor harvest, high cost of machinery and transportation rates and the low prices they received for their goods. The North-West land boom had collapsed. C.P.R. construction had come to a standstill because of no Federal monies. Immigration slowed to a trickle, as western markets rapidly declined. Moreover, government of the region was under the authority of Lieutenant-Governor Dewdney who would not allow local involvement in political and economic decisions. The people had no voice, therefore, discontent increased and dissatisfaction multiplied, with the center of agitation being Prince Albert.⁶²

Following the economic collapse of 1882, white settlers began to petition for better conditions. They presented this demand to the Macdonald administration on several occasions. These requests were ignored each time and as a result, they became aggravated. The Settlers' and Farmers' Union was organized.

The construction of a telegraph line between Humboldt and Prince Albert prompted the Indians to stop construction on their lands in 1883. There was also conflict between a few wealthy leaders and the people of Prince Albert. When the town committee had the poles moved to a neutral site, one of the wealthy men charged those who had removed the poles. The judge

had the case adjourned when the six defendants came to court accompanied by 300 local supporters, many of whom were armed. The town was in a near-riot state for the next ten days until the six accused reappeared in court. Police reinforcements had not yet arrived so the judge dismissed the charges. Feelings of resentment towards the Mounted Police and the Hudson's Bay Company continued to grow.⁶³

By 1884, the people of the North-West were politically and organizationally prepared for revolution against their own Federal government. Most groups talked of cessation from Canada and annexation to the United States. However, their revolution lacked leadership which could provide systematic organization of the various forces into one integrated force. So in the spring of 1884, a delegation was sent to get Louis Riel from St. Peter's Mission in Montana.⁶⁴ It would be simple to project him into another leadership role just as he had assumed in Manitoba.

Riel had already been discredited and condemned in Ontario for the execution of Thomas Scott so Macdonald now had the perfect scapegoat if there were hostilities.⁶⁵

The developments over the two years, prior to the rebellion, focused on five main issues: the monopoly of the C.P.R., the corruption of land speculators and sales, the denial of local responsible government, the unfair price system for farmers and the treatment of the Metis and Indians. In short, all issues revolved around the C.P.R. The Federal government prepared to go to war with her own citizens over the building of the railway and the so-called North West Rebellion was actually such a war. In view of the Ottawa/C.P.R. terms, the Government of Canada had a large investment in the North-West. Besides giving them (C.P.R.) millions of dollars from the public treasury, several Federal cabinet ministers and their friends granted themselves millions of acres of the most fertile land in the North-West. Some shareholders in the C.P.R. and directors of

the large land companies also held cabinet posts and other influential positions in the Macdonald government. Settlers of the North-West were aware of this corruption and looked on Ottawa as a foreign government. They came to resent this ruling clique and voted them out of office at the first opportunity. The basic struggle was a display of power by England and Ottawa to peacefully settle the North-West in order to establish a British Nation.⁶⁶

VI Aftermath of the Rebellion of 1885

Ottawa's 5,000 troops spent over three months marching throughout the North West Territories displaying their military might.⁶⁷ They invaded peaceful communities, forcing them to defend themselves. The news media gave wide publicity to small military encounters and highlighted the racial issues. The military expedition had completed its mission and brought the North-West under Ottawa's control as result of its attack on Batoche. This attack was necessary to make sure the Canadians believed that Ottawa had put an end to the Metis and Indian uprisings. The volunteer soldiers were also determined to kill the savages. The final victory would impress upon the North-West people that they were fully under Ottawa's control. So the troops and police began closing in on the Prince Albert area.⁶⁸

The Metis were in no position to conduct a successful rebellion. At the most Riel could only call upon 4 or 500 Metis. The government claimed many of the Metis opposed fighting and took up arms only under pressure. Also, being spring time, they were in a desperate condition--no food, supplies, guns or ammunition.⁶⁹

Enemy spies were aware of this situation. Yet, thousands of troops shelled the farmhouses of Batoche endangering the lives of women and children.⁷⁰ Indeed, "General Middleton ... seems to have had a penchant for shelling the houses where it was known that the Metis had gathered their women and children."⁷¹ The Metis were geniuses in native warfare (for example, a couple of men sneaked up to the cannons and jammed the hinge mechanisms

so that the barrels of the guns were locked in a position facing skyward). However, it was the gatling gun, a new American gun being tested in Canada, that defeated the Metis.⁷²

Riel decided to surrender but not Dumont. These leaders would carry the entire responsibility for the rebellion. Dumont fled to the United States but Riel turned himself in to Middleton on May 15th, 1885.

Several Metis and Indian heroes were judicially murdered, imprisoned or exiled, while Middleton and his soldiers received medals, pensions and gifts of cash and land.⁷³ Macdonald claimed that Ottawa was forced to put an end to the Metis uprising which was over land, but the Metis wanted only 160 acres per family, one-half of what Ottawa gave to each soldier.

The social and economic factors which had led to the rebellion were completely lost sight of in the maze of political, religious and racial disputes which followed the condemnation of Riel.⁷⁴

The trial of Louis Riel was highlighted and prolonged for four main reasons: Firstly, it diverted attention away from the actual economic and political issues that led to the rebellion; secondly, by blaming one person, the Federal government was able to hide the fact that the struggle was between the ruling class of Ottawa and the settlers, farmers and workers of the Northwest. The aboriginal people were one faction of the latter group. Thirdly, the trial heightened racism toward the Metis and the Indians. Fourthly, it publicized Riel as a dangerous leader, capable of mobilizing a Metis and Indian force. The religious insanity of Riel and his supposed natural savageness was also brought into the trial.⁷⁵

The sentence of death brought forth protest from the French-Canadians and approval from the English-Canadians. Macdonald realized that he would have to take act immediately if he wanted to retain his political strength in Quebec. He had

two alternatives; one, to release Riel and grant a general amnesty, and two, to hang Riel. The first alternative would have to be rejected since Ontario (especially the Orangemen) were screaming for the blood of Thomas Scott's murderer. The second one would have to be carried out by making special appeals to the Quebecois in order to alienate their sympathies for the Metis. It was then that the scheme to exaggerate Riel's anti-Church ideas were invented.⁷⁶ The evidence came from the priests of the Northwest.

This scheme was not totally successful because Riel never attacked the authority of the Church in any way. "What was written reflected the upsurge of political passion all for a predetermined goal." This goal was the alienation of the Quebecois from the Metis cause.⁷⁷

An attempt was also made to show that Riel betrayed his very own people. This added to the humiliation and disorganization of the Metis people. The hanging of Riel and eight other Indians was a warning to all leaders that any further resistance against the Ottawa regime would be dealt with in the same violent way.⁷⁸

FOOTNOTES

1. Tremaudan, Ch. 1, p. 1.
2. Tremaudan, Ch. 1, p. 3; Sealey and Kirkness, p. 43.
3. Tremaudan, Ch. 1, p. 2.
4. Tremaudan, Ch. 1, p. 7.
5. Ibid.
6. Tremaudan, Ch. 1, p. 8; 'The Laws of the Prairies', Vol. 17, AMNSIS Library.
7. Tremaudan, Ch. 2, p. 13.
8. Tremaudan, Ch. 2, p. 14.
9. Tremaudan, Ch. 2, p. 15.
10. Tremaudan, Ch. 2, p. 17.
11. Tremaudan, Ch. 2, p. 18.
12. Tremaudan, Ch. 2, p. 19.
13. Tremaudan, Ch. 2, p. 22.
14. Stanley, Birth of Western Canada, p. 11.
15. Tremaudan, Ch. 2, p. 25.
16. Ibid.
17. Tremaudan, Ch. 3, p. 29.
18. Tremaudan, Ch. 3, p. 31.
19. Tremaudan, Ch. 3, p. 32; Sealey and Kirkness, p. 45.
20. Tremaudan, Ch. 3, p. 35.
21. Sealey and Kirkness, p. 45.
22. Tremaudan, Ch. 3, p. 35.
23. Tremaudan, Ch. 3, p. 36.
24. Tremaudan, Ch. 3, p. 37.
25. Tremaudan, Ch. 2, p. 39.
26. 'Early Manitoba History', Vol. 50, AMNSIS Library.
27. Tremaudan, Ch. 2, p. 40.
28. Tremaudan, Ch. 2, p. 42.
29. Tremaudan, Ch. 5, p. 12.
30. Tremaudan, Ch. 5, p. 17.
31. Sessional Papers, 1870; Vol. 1, AMNSIS Library.
32. Charlebois, p. 14 - 23.
33. Tremaudan, Ch. 5, p. 23.

34. Tremaudan, Ch. 7, p. 40.
35. Tremaudan, Ch. 7, p. 43.
36. Tremaudan, Ch. 7, p. 45.
37. Tremaudan, Ch. 7, p. 47.
38. Tremaudan, Ch. 7, p. 50.
39. Tremaudan, Ch. 7, p. 55.
40. Tremaudan, Ch. 8, p. 69 - 71.
41. Sessional Papers, 1870; Vol. 1, AMNSIS Library; Smith's Report to Macdonald.
42. Tremaudan, Ch. 8, p. 59.
43. Tremaudan, Ch. 8, p. 61.
44. Tremaudan, Ch. 8, p. 63.
45. Stanley, Louis Riel, ch. 8.
46. Tremaudan, Ch. 9, p. 74.
47. Tremaudan, Ch. 9, p. 76.
48. Tremaudan, Ch. 9, p. 78; Sealey and Kirkness, p. 48.
49. Tremaudan, Ch. 9, p. 79.
50. Tremaudan, Ch. 6, p. 83.
51. Ibid.
52. Charlebois, p. 108.
53. Tremaudan, Ch. 1, p. 3.
54. Tremaudan, Ch. 1, p. 4.
55. Charlebois, p. 127.
56. King, p. 1.
57. King, p. 3.
58. Ibid.
59. King, p. 3.
60. King, p. 4.
61. Ibid.
62. King, p. 4.
63. King, p. 6.
64. King, p. 7.
65. Stanley, Birth of Western Canada, p. 380.
66. King, p. 13.
67. Tremaudan, Ch. 10, p. 132.
68. King, p. 53.

69. Stanley, Birth of Western Canada, p. 332.
70. Charlebois, p. 196.
71. King, p. 54.
72. Ibid.
73. Charlebois, p. 199.
74. Stanley, Birth of Western Canada, p. 389.
75. King, p. 57.
76. King, p. 59.
77. Stanley, Birth of Western Canada, p. 42.
78. Charlebois, p. 205 - 214.

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