

THE ROOTS OF WESTERN DISCONTENT: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE
WHITE SETTLERS' ROLE IN THE REBELLION OF 1885

By

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ABSTRACT

The 1870 Resistance at Red River and the Saskatchewan Rebellion of 1885 form an important chapter in the history of the Canadian West and are considered pivotal episodes in the development of the region.

Despite the presence and participation of the white settlers in certain aspects of these protest movements, especially in the latter, studies have tended to characterize these events primarily as the result of the actions of Louis Riel and the Metis, relegating the role of the whites to a subordinate position in their analyses. This trend has had important consequences for the interpretation of Western Canadian history. As the idea of Western discontent and distinctive regionalism is fundamental in understanding the history of the region, the focus on the Metis role in protests against the Canadian Government has led to the conclusion that Western discontent grew out of the Metis experience and that it was Western, that is, environmental, in origin.

However, as Western society and culture were shaped to an astonishing degree by the Ontario immigrants of the 1870's and 1880's, any analysis of the roots of Western discontent must also take into account the white settlers' role in the protest movements of the time. This is especially true for the Rebellion of 1885 as large numbers of Ontario settlers were both present in the West and active in agitation against the government prior to the Rebellion.

By placing the general characteristics of the Western white settlers' protest and agitation during the 1870's and 1880's in the context of

protests and rebellions elsewhere in North America, it becomes clear that the settlers' discontent was not the product of the Western identity they shared with the Metis, but rather grew out of the cultural heritage they had brought from Ontario. Although the frontier environment of the West provided reasons for their discontent, it was as "British subjects," not as Westerners, that the settlers protested against the Ottawa government and the "East."

In fact, in the same way that the settlers' Ontario culture became that of the West, their protest tradition, derived from their British heritage, determined the characteristics and persistence of Western discontent. Far from imposing their protest tradition on the white settlers, the Metis revealed, by their use of petitions and their appeals to the "rights of British subjects," that it was they who adapted to the form of protest brought to the West by the Ontario immigrants.

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INTRODUCTION

The historiography of the North-West Rebellion of 1885, from George Stanley's classic study, The Birth of Western Canada,¹ to more recent works such as Prairie Fire by Bob Beal and R.C. Macleod,² has understandably focused its analysis on the actions of the Metis, and especially on the charismatic person of Louis Riel.³ The Metis' dramatic and finally tragic resistance against the white Canadian challenge to their way of life and their survival as a people forms an important chapter in Western Canadian history. However, despite the compelling nature of the Metis' story, theirs was not the only culture to shape the character of the West, nor in the long run, was it the most influential.

Between the Red River Resistance of 1870 and the uprising of 1885, circumstances changed profoundly in the West. Thousands of white settlers, mostly from Ontario, arrived in the region, bringing with them the institutions and values which formed the basis of modern Prairie society. In order to fully understand the significance of the 1885 Rebellion in Western Canadian history, it must be studied from the perspective of the white settlers, as well as from that of the Metis and Indians.

The presence of the white settlers and their involvement in the Rebellion has been at least partly dealt with in articles discussing specific events, such as the trials of the white "rebels", Thomas Scott and W.M. Jackson,⁴ and certain individuals, Jackson, for example,⁵ while larger works on the Rebellion generally devote a chapter or two to the whites' grievances and agitation prior to the uprising.⁶ None of the these studies, however, considers the Rebellion as an event in the

whites' own history nor attempts to provide a conceptual framework by which to understand it from that perspective. Indeed, as George Stanley reveals, historians have been very firm in refusing to consider a focus different from that of their Metis-centred studies. Although willing to characterize the Manitoba farmers' protests of the 1870's and 1880's as "the first manifestation of that struggle between the West and the East which has marred the growth of Canadian unity"⁷ and to identify "an interesting parallel" between the political agitation of the whites in the North-West and the struggle of "Old Canada" to gain representative government and political autonomy for Great Britain, Stanley refuses to explore the possible implications of his observations and warns that "this parallel cannot be pushed too far from the rebellion of 1885, like that of 1869-70, was a **struggle for racial survival and not, like that of 1837, a fight for responsible government.**"⁸

Without necessarily questioning the validity of Stanley's conclusion insofar as the Metis were concerned, this thesis intends to challenge his assumption that the Rebellion can only be satisfactorily interpreted from the perspective of the Metis.

Stanley's observations, ironically, provide clues as to a possible and significant interpretation of the whites' activities during the Rebellion period. If the Westerners' discontent both harkens back to earlier protest movements, such as the Rebellion of 1837, and foreshadows the character of future Western protest, it can be identified as belonging to an historical pattern of protest behaviour, one which has affected the character of the West and the history of the country as a whole.

S.D. Clark suggests a similar interpretation of the 1885 Rebellion in

Movements of Political Protest in Canada, 1640-1840.⁹ In the course of studying the historical antecedents of Alberta's Social Credit movement during the 1930's, Clark became convinced that virtually all North American protest movements, Canadian as well as American, shared a common historical tradition. This included, of course, the Saskatchewan Rebellion of 1885.¹⁰ Through his examination of protest movements in North America up until 1840, Clark argues that, Canada's self-image to the contrary, political protest, even to the point of rebellion, lies as close to the core of Canadian culture as it does to the American. This propensity to discontent and protest, he contends, is a product of the frontier experience shared by both Canada and the United States. The United States embraced the ideal of "backwoods rebellions", and Canada rejected it, he claims, because of the two countries' different circumstances after the American Revolution. According to his theory, frontier protest movements played a positive role in the development of the United States by "freeing the expansive energies of the frontier"¹¹ and thereby achieving the nation's goals, especially that of claiming the continent. In Canada, however, where the demands of **geography had led** to the development of centralized political and economic institutions, backcountry protest threatened the stability of those institutions, and, therefore, Canada's survival as a separate North American state, by rendering the country vulnerable to the American expansionist threat.¹²

Clark's study provides a valuable starting point for understanding the historical context of the Saskatchewan rebellion, both in the general framework he proposes and in his specific observations about Canadian attitudes towards frontier protest and rebellion. However, despite the obvious value of his thesis, Clark's analysis has significant problems,

the solutions to which challenge some important aspects of his conclusions.

By focusing on the frontier as the essential ingredient in the development of North American protest tradition, Clark does not take into account the important role played by values and attitudes inherited from Britain. An examination of the causes of the discontent among people of British heritage in North America, and of the methods they used to express that discontent, reveals that the fundamental elements of their protest tradition were cultural, that is, British, in their origin and inspiration. The protest tradition of the major North American group, therefore, cannot be fully understood as a manifestation of the effects of the frontier, it must also be viewed as the particular response of British settlers to a frontier environment and, therefore, as a product of the British protest tradition. Thus, if the Rebellion of 1885 is considered as a Metis protest, as Clark implies by his use of the term "Riel rebellion",¹³ it cannot be an integral part of the same protest tradition as the American revolution or the uprisings of 1837 in the Canadas. The white settlers, not the Metis, were the cultural inheritors of that tradition.

The second major flaw in Clark's analysis lies in his interpretation of the American response to rebellion. While it does seem true that the United States sought less control over its frontier settlers than did Canada, it cannot be claimed as Clark does that "the constituted authorities of the American political society were never prepared to completely suppress" frontier protest movements.¹⁴ **The American authorities did tolerate the independence of frontier groups as long as their energies were directed towards national goals as removing the**

Indians from the land, but when frontier discontent focused on issues, and began to take measures, which threatened the authority or stability of the government, the Americans acted as quickly as the Canadians to suppress the protest movement and punish those involved. Such was the case for Shays' Rebellion of 1786-7 in Massachusetts¹⁵ and the Pennsylvania Whiskey Rebellion of 1792.¹⁶ In neither instance was there any suggestion that the Washington government either tolerated or approved of the rebels' actions. Moreover, as Pauline Maier has pointed out, the Americans were even less philosophically disposed to **approve of** extra-legal protest after the American Revolution than the British authorities had been during the colonial days. Maier argues that a traditional British concept held that riots and popular protests played a natural and necessary role in a free society as unofficial but influential means of regulating and correcting abuses in the government.¹⁸ **Understandably, this view was shared by American** revolutionary thinkers such as Samuel Adams,¹⁹ and Thomas Jefferson, who stated his preference for "a little rebellion now and then" which would act "like a storm in the atmosphere".²⁰ After the Revolution, the American authorities' attitudes towards rebellion no longer demonstrated the former toleration, at least in theory, of protest and rebellion.

Maier identifies **a number of reasons for this change in perception,** among them the increasing violence of the nineteenth century mob and the realization that popular uprisings, often directed against minorities, threatened individual freedom, as much as any despotic ruler,²¹ but the most important was the change which had occurred in concept of the relationship between the American people and their government. After the American Independence, popular protests began to be seen less as

acceptable criticisms of governmental shortcomings and more as discrediting insults to the republican experiment. While there could be some justification for protest against the power of hereditary rulers, according to American thinking, uprisings against the authority of chosen representatives were unnecessary and immoral.²² With the adoption of the Federal Constitution, considered the peak of political achievement, popular protest, rebellion, even revolution, came to be seen as outmoded and unacceptable means of expressing political discontent.²³ Thus, it can be argued that for the Americans, no less than the Canadians, frontier protest is both demanded by their cultural heritage and environment and yet denied by the physical and philosophical needs of each nation's central government. This is an important point because, according to Clark's argument, the limits which were placed on Canadian protest movements were purely Canadian checks on a protest tradition which flourished freely in the United States. In fact, the protest traditions of both countries, based as they were on the response of British settlers to a frontier environment, were similar in their motives, their methods, and their limitations.

Not only can the Western settlers' involvement in the Rebellion of 1885 be best understood as a manifestation of the British protest tradition, but placing their attitudes and actions within that context provides insight into the forces which have determined the character of the Prairie West and ensured the continued existence of Western discontent within the Canadian Confederation.

In order to situate the settlers' discontent and agitation within the British protest tradition, it is first necessary to study the general characteristics of that tradition, its British roots and especially its

North American manifestations from the 17th to the 19th centuries.

Then, turning to the Prairie West during the 1870's and 1880's, the discussion will consider the origins of the settlers who arrived in the West during those years, the influence they exercised on the development of Western institutions and values, and, most importantly, how the protest tradition which was part of their cultural heritage contributed to the paradox at the base of Western discontent, the hostility of Ontarians against Ontario.

Finally, through an examination of the settlers' discontent and the steps they took to express that discontent during the years prior to the Rebellion, that is, the motives, methods and limitations of their agitation, it will be clear both that the settlers were acting in accord with the protest tradition shown among British groups, and that the characteristics of that tradition explain much about the nature and persistence of Western discontent.

Interestingly enough, despite the white's subordinate role in the Metis-centred historiography of the Rebellion period, the white settlers' agitation and grievances have been fairly extensively covered in studies of the Rebellion, although from the perspective of their effect on the Metis. It is not difficult to reconstruct their activities during the Rebellion period from the secondary sources dealing with the Rebellion. What is lacking from these studies, and therefore from our understanding of the whites' agitation, is an in-depth consideration of the sources and nature of their discontent. All students of the period recognize that the Dominion government's land policy and the Canadian Pacific Railway's monopoly, for example, were major grievances to the **Western settlers**.

What is less understood is the attitudinal background from which those,

and other grievances, emerged. It is important to recognize not only the well-known targets of western discontent but also the values and opinions which constituted their "mentalité", for those underlying assumptions form the basis of the British protest tradition.

As the British protest tradition was revealed as much by the settlers' attitudes as by their actions, it was important to find primary source material which would both report and reflect their opinions. Personal correspondence and diaries suggested themselves as possible sources, but the lack of large numbers on which to base conclusions regarding Western attitudes and the understandably personal focus of those available precluded them from in-depth consideration. Though literate, the western settlers were not literary in the public sense of the pamphleteers of the American Revolution. Their public opinions were expressed formally through memorials and petitions and, of course, through the columns of the Western press. These two sources, especially the latter, will provide the major chronicle of the settlers' discontent during the period in question, the 1870's and early 1880's.

The newspapers proved to be a very valuable source of information both on the concrete questions of what happened and where, and on the more abstract issues of why, and what did people think about events. Because newspapers were published in many communities throughout Manitoba and the Territories, they provide news and opinions from a wide geographical base and form a composite picture of life and thought in the West. As P.B. Waite comments, newspapers recount the popular side of historical events, reflecting popular interests and, albeit imperfectly, popular opinion.²⁴ Moreover, the newspapers of the pre-Confederation period he was studying, like those of the West, did not limit themselves

to merely inform, they also sought "to point issues, to shape policies, to forward causes".²⁵ As the settlers' discontent and agitation was very much a public issue, the newspapers are therefore a natural source of information.

Waite does argue that the papers must be used with care as an historical source as their opinions were not only meant to persuade, but could be bought and changed as well. He recommends, therefore, that private sources be used as well to counterbalance the problem.²⁶ However, private sources, letters and diaries for example, are as prone to reflect the biases of their writers and readers as are public sources such as newspapers. As Desmond Morton argues, "to write history from official reports and private letters is to give participants a chance to collect themselves, to reflect and to rationalize".²⁷ In other words, there are particular motives, both overt and less obvious, behind the writing of all historical sources, not just newspapers, which must be recognized and understood. The editorial bias **inherent in each** newspaper does not render its information less useful to an historian. In fact, the bias itself reveals insight into the concerns and interests of the editor and the community. Moreover, the Western press, like other 19th century Canadian newspapers, was remarkably frank about its affiliations and basic perspectives. In their introductory issues, it was common for the editors to announce clearly their political beliefs, whether Liberal or Conservative, and the goals of their newspapers.²⁸ Interestingly, whether Liberal or Conservative, for or against the Dominion government, all of the Western papers stated that their overriding concern was to further the interests of their communities and of the West as a whole and, if necessary, to go against their party

affiliation in order to do so.²⁹

Waite's warning that a newspaper could be bought and its opinions changed to reflect those of its buyer rather than its community is, of course, very apt. However, the only firm indication of this possibly occurring to any of the Western papers during the period is far from conclusive. Although Lieutenant-Governor Dewdney wrote to Sir John A. Macdonald on July 23, 1884 to say: "I forget whether I told you that I have arranged to secure the Prince Albert paper, so if any little patronage can be sent them from below it will be appreciated,"³⁰ the Prince Albert Times continued to voice its protest over government policies, even to the point of claiming, in an editorial on January 2, 1885, six months later, that "We do not believe or indulge in bombast, but calmly and deliberately assert that as a people we are, should the worst come to the worst, ready to sacrifice all we possess, even to our lives, as our forefathers did, in defence of our constitutional rights and liberties."³¹ Dewdney's money was perhaps not as well spent as **he might have hoped.**

The Western papers certainly did not reflect the opinions of everyone in their communities. William Henry Jackson's attempt to establish The Voice of the People in opposition to the Conservative Prince Albert Times indicates the frustrations of those seeking to publish views opposed to those of the editors.³² At the very least, however, the papers expressed the opinion of one or two leading men in each community throughout the West; that is, the editors themselves, and as such, would be valuable in determining important Western attitudes. The probability, however, is that the papers reflected the views of a wider group, if not of all residents. As the newspapers were dependent on community support in the

way of advertisements and subscriptions, it is doubtful that they could consistently express opinions contrary to the basic attitudes of their community and still survive economically. Jackson's reformist Voice, for example, did not succeed in establishing a base for itself and disappeared after several issues.³³

The Western press, therefore, despite its biases and its possibly limited constituency, still represents an invaluable source of information about the settlers' activities, opinions and, above all, does so in the context of every-day life in the West. That is, the newspapers provide a background against which to understand the settlers' lives.

Finally, before beginning an examination of the British protest tradition and the Western settlers' place within it, it must be noted that contrary to the usual approach, this study will focus on the Rebellion of 1885 alone, rather than considering its events in **tandem with those** of the 1870 Resistance at Red River.

Given the Metis focus of Rebellion history and historiography which was indicated earlier, the Rebellion of 1885 and the earlier Resistance are naturally linked. They are important events in the history of Metis protest, and they are especially significant dates in the life of Louis Riel. For the Metis, the Rebellion in the North-West was a continuation of the earlier troubles at Red River; the later uprising can only be understood in relation to the 1870 Resistance.

This was not the case for the white settlers of the West. Although it was not unknown for the protesters of the 1880's to claim, as did James Taylor, president of the Manitoba Old Settlers' Association, that "if we would have fair play in this country we must begin with our appeals from the year 1870",³⁴ the fact that the vast majority of the

settlers arrived in the West during the years after 1870 indicates that their protest tradition was developed not from the experiences of Red River, but rather from the heritage they brought with them from Ontario. Because of the larger numbers of people and more developed institutions, newspapers for example, which were present in the West after 1870, this study focuses on the protest and discontent of Western settlers in the decade before the 1885 Rebellion. However, the comments of the "old settlers", and their actions during the Resistance of 1870, suggest that if not direct precursors to the later agitation, they were perhaps similarly the product of the British protest tradition in North America and as such, certainly merit a place in any further study of this topic.

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

¹G.F.C. Stanley, The Birth of Western Canada: a History of the Riel Rebellions, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961).

²Bob Beal and Rod MacLeod, Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1984).

³In fact, almost all major histories of the Rebellion focus primarily on Riel. Some examples include the books by G.F.C. Stanley and Beal and MacLeod cited above, as well as Thomas Flanagan's Louis "David" Riel: 'Prophet of the New World' (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), and others too numerous to mention. For a complete listing, see the extensive bibliography of Beal and MacLeod, especially pages 370-72. Interestingly, one of the few major works not centred on Riel is focused on another Metis, Gabriel Dumont; see George Woodcock, Gabriel Dumont (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1975).

⁴Sandra Bingaman, "The Trials of the 'White rebels,' 1885," Saskatchewan History 25 (Spring 1972): 41-54. See also Wilf Cude, "The Jackson Trial: A Revisionist View," University of British Columbia, 1978. (Mimeographed.)

⁵Recently, there has been considerable interest in the life and career of Willie Jackson, both because of his anomalous position as Riel's white secretary and because of the eccentricities of his character. Among the articles available on Jackson are Louis Duff, "the Amazing Story of the **Winghamite Secretary of Louis Riel**," Western Ontario History Nuggets 22 (1955): 1-37; Donald B. Smith, "William Henry Jackson: Riel's English Disciple," Pelletier-Lathin Memorial Lecture Series, ed. A.S. Lussier (Brandon: University of Brandon, Department of Native Studies, 1980) 47-81; W.J. Cherwinski, "Honoré-Joseph Jaxon, Agitator, Disturber, Producer of Plans to Make Men Think, and Chronic Objector," Canadian Historical Review 46 (June 1965): 122-33.

⁶See, for example, chapters 2, 5 and 6 in Beal and MacLeod, and chapters 12 and 14 in Stanley's Birth of Western Canada.

⁷Stanley, Birth, p. 263.

⁸Ibid., p. 190.

⁹S.D. Clark, Movements of Political Protest in Canada, 1640-1840 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959).

¹⁰Ibid., p. 503.

¹¹Ibid., p. 9.

¹²Clark's basic arguments are laid out in the Introduction to Movements, pp. 4-10.

¹³Ibid., p. 503.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁵D. Szatmary, Shays' Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980). See also George Minot, The History of the Insurrection in Massachusetts in the Year Seventeen Hundred and Eight-Six and the Rebellion Consequent Thereon, 2nd ed. (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970).

¹⁶Dorothy Fennell, "From Rebelliousness to Insurrection: A Social History of the Whiskey Rebellion, 1765-1802" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1981). See also H.M. Brackenridge, History of the Western insurrection in Western Pennsylvania, commonly called the Whiskey insurrection, 1792 (Pittsburgh: W.S. Haven, 1859).

¹⁷Pauline Maier, "Popular Uprisings and Civil Authority in Eighteenth-Century America," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser. 27 (January 1970): 3-35. See also Gordon S. Wood, The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969) pp. 409-13.

¹⁸Maier, "Popular Uprisings," pp. 26-7.

¹⁹Ibid, p. 25.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid, p. 33.

²²Ibid, p. 34.

²³Ibid.

²⁴P.B. Waite, The Life and Times of Confederation, 1864-1867: Politics, Newspapers and the Union of British North America (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), p. 324.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid, p. 4.

²⁷Desmond Morton, ed., Telegrams of the North-West Campaign 1885 (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1972), p. xi.

²⁸"It is needless to say that the Mail in its political views will be Liberal Conservative . . ." (Brandon Daily Mail, Dec. 19, 1882, p. 2). "The Prince Albert Times is Conservative in politics . . ." (Prince Albert Times, Nov. 1, 1882, p. 3).

²⁹The papers quoted in the footnote above, like all others in the West, insist that they will put local interests before Party. The Mail's introduction continues: ". . . but it will not be servile in its support to any party, as questions especially in this Province will be

continually arising that will call for somewhat independent dealing." (Brandon Daily Mail, Dec. 19, 1882, p. 2). Similarly, the Times continues: ". . . if local interests are supposed to be interfered with, however, either here or elsewhere in the North West, I am inclined to think the feelings of the governing powers of whatever politics will not be much considered, the universal and main plank in the North-West platform being interest before party." (Prince Albert Times, No. 1, 1882, p. 3). For a very humorous satire of the Western Press' attempts to cover all angles in **their platforms**, see Qu'Appelle Vidette, Oct. 30, 1884, p. 3, for the column **written** by the correspondent from Leach settlement. Among his claims:

"We favour independence and annexation and at the same time say nothing that will in the least cast a doubt upon our unflinching loyalty to the Dominion and to the empire to which we belong."

"We are ready to assist the Farmers' Union in another anti-emigration resolution, or a rehearsal of their **grievances**, though we believe that the Government of Ottawa has done all in its power for the alleviation of the miseries of the rural contingent, or Sir John would have explained the cause for not doing so."

³⁰Stanley, Birth, p. 442.

³¹Prince Albert Times, Jan. 2, 1885, p. 2.

³²see Earl G. Drake, "Pioneer Journalism in Saskatchewan, 1878-1887: Part One: The Founding of the Territorial Press," Saskatchewan History 5 (Winter 1952): 22.

³³Ibid.

³⁴quoted in Brian McCutcheon, "The Economic and Social Structure of Political Agrarianism in Manitoba" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1974), p. 141. See also statements by W.T. Lonsdale, Ibid.

CHAPTER ONE

The British Protest Tradition in North America:

Roots and Characteristics

In order to place the white settlers' involvement in the Rebellion of 1885 in the context of the British protest tradition, it is helpful to examine other North American manifestations of that tradition. Even a casual student of North American history cannot fail to be struck by the many parallels which exist between events as separated by time and location as the North Carolina Regulation of 1771, the American Revolution, Shays' Rebellion in Massachusetts in 1786-7, Pennsylvania Whiskey Rebellion of 1792, and the "Troubles" of 1837-8 in the Canadas, to name but some of the instances of protest and rebellion in North American history. For the more than casual observer, the similarity between these events in terms of ideology and actions forms a discernible pattern of behaviour which Clark has identified as a North American revolutionary tradition.¹ However, as Pauline Maier has commented about the colonial uprisings in particular, "there was little that was distinctively American" about them.² In fact, the characteristics shared among these various protests and rebellions were derived in large part from the common British heritage of those who took part in them. In order to understand the protest tradition which developed in North America among its British populations, it is first necessary to discuss the cultural inheritance which shaped the character of North American protests, and then to study more specifically the patterns of similarity between the different instances of discontent, protest and rebellion.

The most important elements which contributed to the development of a

protest tradition in North America were the inter-related factors of the British heritage of its earliest, and the most influential settlers, and the frontier conditions of its environment. There has been a longstanding debate, especially in American historiography, over the relative importance of these two influences in shaping the character of the United States in particular, and North America in general. Clark, in his study of North American protest movements, subscribes to the traditional American view that focused on the impact of the frontier, while tending to de-emphasize the possible influence of the immigrants' British culture and traditions.³ Recent historians, however, have advanced arguments to the effect that the settlers' heritage of British laws, customs and institutions has been as least as influential as the frontier in determining the character of North American culture.⁴ As D. L. Smith argues in his thesis on legal and constitutional aspects of American history, "...the ships that brought settlers to America brought something more which was not aboard the ships bringing settlers to South or Central America, French Canada, or even New Amsterdam."⁵ The "something more" which the British colonists brought with them to North America included both the political and cultural expectations which profoundly affected their reaction to the conditions of their new frontier environment and the methods by which they expressed that reaction.

The colonists' most important assumption was that English common law, with its guarantees of the rights and liberties of British subjects, had been transplanted with them to North America. Certainly the wording of the colonial charters allowed for that interpretation by including clauses requiring legal conformity **between the laws of the colony and**

those of England. One such example is found in the Virginia Company's Charter, granted in 1612. The company was empowered to pass laws for the colony with the proviso, "so always, as the same be not contrary to the Laws and Statutes of this our Realm of England."⁶ Similar clauses were included in virtually all the colonial charters⁷ and for the colonists of the 17th and 18th centuries, the implication was clearly that the laws of England were in effect in the North American colonies.

The extent of that belief was reflected in the legislation they passed to govern colonial affairs. Thus, a 1637-8 Act of the Maryland General Assembly guaranteed the "liberties, franchises, and immunities" of freeborn English subjects,⁸ while the Massachusetts Body of Liberties, composed in 1641, upheld the Common Law principles which formed the basis for the concept of "due process of law".⁹ The early colonists legislated their affairs according to English models and in the conviction that, although in North America, they were still under the jurisdiction and protection of English law as guaranteed by the colonial charters.

Believing themselves to be under British law, the North American settlers, from the colonial period to, in Canada, the nineteenth century, expected to enjoy the rights provided for in the Common Law. These included the rights of Habeas Corpus, trial by jury, equal justice, petition and assembly and, perhaps the most important right of all, the corollary of the belief that the people could not be taxed without their consent, the right to be represented on those bodies; whether assemblies, councils, or Parliament itself, which decided the imposed taxation.¹⁰

Further evidence of the importance of the settlers' British background in shaping their protest tradition is provided by the manner in which, whenever their expected rights to justice, personal liberty or

representation in government were threatened or denied, they protested on the grounds of their British heritage. During the colonial period in the United States, the North Carolina Assembly denounced the practice of transporting Americans to England for trial as "highly derogatory to the rights of British subjects..."¹¹ and, half a century later in Upper Canada, Robert Gourlay protested the denial of British rights, claiming that "a British subject in Upper Candaa no longer treads beneath the protective privilege of habeas corpus, nor dare the people choose a commission to carry home a petition to the throne."¹²

One of the most interesting claims to British privileges came from the Lower Canadians. Despite their heritage of French language and culture, at a meeting at St -Denis in 1827 they decried the actions of the colonial government, resolving "that the Canadians, today English born subjects, regard as precious as life and property, the rights, prerogatives, privileges and liberties which are assured to them by this constitution of government."¹³ These appeals to the "rights of British subjects", the "English birth-right", and "the rights of free-born Englishmen", among other similar phrases, occurred frequently in American colonial protests up to and including the early stages of the American Revolution, and of course, continued to be used in Canada until late in the 19th century. The idea of a particular English "birth-right" of popular liberties had been a feature of protests in Britain dating from the 16th and 17th centuries¹⁴ and the use of the concept by North American protesters reveals that they legitimized their protests on the same grounds as had their British predecessors.

While the basis of North American protest movements was provided by the cultural expectations of the British immigrants and the methods they

used to express their discontent were inherited, as we shall see, from the British tradition, the frontier did have a role to play in the occurrence of protests in North America.

One of the most basic definitions of the term "frontier" is the "borders of civilization", the frontiersman thereby becoming the "one living on or beyond the borders of civilization."¹⁵ Such a definition encapsulates the frontier experience for North American settlers; the fact of separation and isolation from the centre of power and "civilization", whether it be London, the colonial capitals, or later, Washington, D.C. or Ottawa. Thus although the frontier could be designated in physical terms, usually as the more western areas of settlement, it also signified the psychological relationship between a metropolis and its hinterland. For the North American settlers, being on the frontier meant being isolated, and therefore excluded, from the processes of government which were centred in the metropolis. This exclusion was the result of many factors: distance, lack of representation, lack of wealth and influence, and, for the French Canadians, differences of race and language, but the result was common to all North American frontier regions. Those on the frontier were unable to exercise influence over the decisions made in the metropolis and, therefore, had no control over the policies which governed affairs not only in the metropolis, but also on the frontier. For people whose cultural background led them to expect a voice in the government, at least at the local level, the exclusion created by the conditions of the frontier constituted the major source of the resentment which fueled the development of a North American protest tradition.

In the same way that British popular protests often grew from the

needs and interests of a particular community or constituency,¹⁶ North American protests and rebellion were often based on the desire to gain power over local affairs rather than be controlled by the often-distant metropolis whose interests were not necessarily those of the frontier. In rejecting the idea of "virtual representation" (the British claim that the American colonists, though not actually represented in Parliament, were "virtually" represented there by Common's members chosen in England), James Otis spoke in 1765 with the language and vehemence of every North American frontiersman, protesting,

does he know us? Or we him? No. Have we **any** restriction over his conduct? No. Is he bound in duty and interest to preserve our liberty and property? No. Is he acquainted with our circumstances, situation, wants, etc.? No. What then are we to expect from him? Nothing but taxes without end.¹⁷

The drive to protect and further the interests of the frontier community through claiming local control and local autonomy is recognized as a fundamental motivation for the colonial protest which became the American Revolution, but a similar struggle is also apparent in other North American protest movements. The Regulation in North Carolina, for example, was the attempt by those in the more newly settled western part of the province to gain a voice in the provincial government controlled by the eastern planter aristocracy. Overrepresented in the assembly, having one member for every 1700 people in contrast to the west's one member for every 7300 people, the east exercised a disproportionate share of power in the colony.¹⁸ The westerners of North Carolina **organized** to protest and challenge that domination, or, as they expressed it, they intended to "regulate" their own affairs.¹⁹ With the same intention to

control their own affairs, Upper Canadians, at a meeting at Whitby on March 22, 1834, composed resolutions demanding control of public expenditures, an elective legislative council, and the right of the assembly to impeach persons in office;²⁰ while the Montreal delegates to a July 1, 1834 meeting of the Central and Permanent Committee in Lower Canada denounced external interference in colonial affairs, declaring "that this meeting sees with just alarm the repeated instances of the Legislative interference of the British Parliament in the internal affairs of this province, and declares such interference to be contrary to and a violation of, the rights of the Provincial Legislature."²¹ Similarly, the grievances which led finally to the armed insurrection known as Shays' Rebellion included demands for tax reform and tender laws to benefit the economically hard-pressed farmers of Massachusetts, and, most basically, a more equitable balance of power was sought between the frontier "yeomen" and the eastern coastal merchants who controlled the government and economy of Massachusetts.²² In the same way, the Pennsylvania Whiskey Rebellion, ostensibly a protest against a federally imposed excise tax, also brought up issues regarding the granting of local offices, the salaries of public officials, and the government's policies regarding land, Indians, settlement, and trade restrictions on the Mississippi River.²³ The Whiskey Rebellion, like the other North American frontier protests, was basically a protest against the policies of a distant government, in this case, Washington, D.C., a government which took "undue advantage" of its citizens.²⁴

Frontier communities in North America experienced difficulties which were not attributable to government actions, harsh climates and crop failures, for example, but the government was responsible for many

policies which did affect the security and prosperity of those on the frontier; control of the Indians, the distribution of lands and offices, the encouragement of settlement, the imposition of taxes and the control of trade, to give but a few examples of the usually distant government's jurisdiction. Thus, when the frontier settlements experienced hard times, it was natural and often correct for the frontiersman to identify government policy as the source of the problem. His resentment was exacerbated by his inability, as one living on the "borders of civilization", to effect any change in government policy which could improve his situation and redress his grievances. For the North American settlers, British by heritage or by acquired custom, such a situation was intolerable, and protest against it, even to the point of arms, inevitable.

Not only did North American protest movements share a common origin as the response of British settlers to the problems of the frontier environment, as might be expected, they also employed similar methods of protest in their attempts to force the government to respond to their grievances.

Like their British predecessors, North American protest movements were marked by an escalation of the measures the people were willing to take in order to achieve their goals.²⁵ In their early stages, the protesters expressed their grievances through peaceful means such as mass meetings, printed material and petitions. Then, if their protests continued to be ignored or worse, threatened with repression, they began to resort to more violent, but still traditional, measures.

Mass meetings were an important method both of disseminating ideas and deciding on a course of action, and of signaling the government as to

the people's discontent. As early as 1818, Sir Peregrine Maitland, Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, perceived the latter message, reporting to his superiors that he "beheld in the character and address of the town meetings, and convention the seeds of rebellion, hastening to maturity."²⁶ Sir Maitland may have expressed himself in somewhat alarmist terms, but he was not entirely mistaken as to the use of meetings and organizations. As the editorialist of the Correspondent and Advocate made clear by his jubilant tone on Jan. 1, 1835, such gatherings were an important tool in agitation against the government. According to the editorial,

everywhere Branch Alliance Societies are being formed--the eyes of the people are being opened--public opinion is being concentrated--the cause of reform is steadily progressing, strong in the union of its advocates, and official delinquency, turpitude and cupidity will in vain seek for a pretext for further spoliation in imputing to a whole people a disposition to treason ... Let these societies be extended all through the Province (as we have no doubt they will) and there must be an end to delusion and oppression.²⁷

The editorial also reveals that meetings were helpful not only to further the "cause of reform", but also as a "safety in numbers" form of protection against the government's efforts to discredit the cause and those involved in it, in this case by "imputing ... a disposition to treason" to the advocates of reform. Mass meetings, with ends similar to those of the Branch Alliance Societies, were a common feature in all North American protest movements, as one of the first steps in articulating and expressing discontent with the governing authorities and

their policies.²⁸

Perhaps even more effective than the mass meetings as a method of legal and non-violent protest was the use of printed material such as pamphlets, broadsheets and newspapers, to both express discontent and to advocate measures of redress. John Adams illustrated the central role of printed material as an instrument of change in a letter to Jefferson some years after the American Revolution. He stated that "the records of thirteen legislatures, the pamphlets, newspapers in all the colonies, ought to be consulted during that period to ascertain the steps by which the public opinion was enlightened and informed concerning the authority of Parliament over the colonies."²⁹ This view regarding the power of writers and of the press was not held by protesters alone; the government shared their view to the extent of holding newspaper editors and pamphlet writers responsible for the people's discontent. Dalhousie, reporting to the Secretary of State on the situation in Lower Canada in 1827, claimed that, "two mischievous newspapers in Quebec and Montreal, well known to be under the direction of Nelson (sic) at the first mentioned, and Papineau and Viger at the **latter place, have endeavoured to stir up** discontent and excitement by falsehoods too absurd to mention."³⁰

During the period of non-violent protest, a significant feature of North American protest movements was the widespread use of petitions, in which grievances were enumerated and redress requested. This practice is important in defining the protest tradition of the North American settlers because it reveals the essential characteristics of that tradition: the role played by the settlers' British heritage and the powerless position in which the frontier groups found themselves.

The right of British subjects to petition the Crown and Parliament

for the redress of grievances dated from the time of the Magna Carta and its antecedents and, as the basis from which legislation was enacted, was at least partially responsible for all of the other legal rights granted to Britons by Parliamentary legislation.³¹ Petitioning, long an unwritten custom, was formalized as a right in 1699, in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution, when England's House of Commons resolved, "that it is the inherent right of every commoner in England to prepare and present petitions to the House of Commons in the case of grievance and the House of Commons to receive the same."³² The right to petition, and its necessary corollary, the right to assemble in order to draw up petitions, were among the rights and liberties the North American settlers assumed had been transplanted with them to the new continent and they made extensive use of it in order to make their grievances known to the governing authorities.³³ So seriously did the frontier people throughout North America take their right to petition, that the manner in which the government treated their petitions became a grievance in itself. The protest which became Shays' Rebellion was fueled by what the Massachusetts **yeomen** called the "supreme contempt" with which the General Court had treated their petitions,³⁴ while the discontent in Upper Canada became more pronounced after Mackenzie's fruitless attempt to bring the colony's grievance petitions to the attention of the Imperial government during 1832-3.³⁵ The American **colonists who had resolved at the Stamp Act Congress in New York, "that it is the right of the British subjects in these colonies to petition the king or either house of parliament"**³⁶ listed disregard for the colonial petitions as one of their primary grievances against Britain when drawing up the Declaration of Independence.³⁷

Not only did the claim to petition as a legal right, and an angry reaction when their contents were ignored, illustrate the British heritage of the North American settlers, but it also testified to their political position within their colonies and countries. As writers of constitutional history agree, "the original purpose of the public petition [was] to voice the grievances of those classes which were denied parliamentary representation..."³⁸ North American settlers were denied access to power, either completely, as in the case of American colonists and the British Parliament, or effectively, as was the case everywhere in North America during colonial times where the frontiersman, even if adequately represented on elected bodies, saw his legislation overturned and his assemblies prorogued by the action of the royal governor. Even after the establishment of republican government in the United States and creation of representative institutions in Canada, frontier populations were still typically underrepresented or otherwise excluded from the exercise of political power. The petition was and remained the natural weapon of protest for North Americans to turn to in order to express their grievances. In fact, the concept of the right to petition was so basic to the British colonists and settlers' culture that petitions composed in the numerous North American protests were remarkably similar in their use of the specialized petition form, despite the different times and places in which the petitions were written.³⁹

Should their petitions and other peaceful forms of protest be ignored by the government or other authorities, the people of the North American backcountry would begin to employ more violent measures in order to win redress of their grievances.⁴⁰ These measures could include threats and attacks against persons and property, often government officials and

government property, disruption of administrative procedures, and even outright rebellion against an unpopular authority. Interestingly enough, despite the violence of these actions, they are more properly classified as extra-legal rather than illegal methods. As stated earlier, popular protests in the British tradition, as well as those of other nations, were rooted in the needs and interests of the community.⁴¹ Those who mounted a protest against conditions and policies which threatened the well-being of the community were seen as acting to effect "natural justice" whether that be the fixing of food prices in rural England or rioting against the encroachments of impressment gangs in New England seaports. As Pauline Maier argues, "where a mob took upon itself the defense of the community, it benefited from a certain popular legitimacy even when the strict legality of its action was in doubt, particularly among a people taught that the legitimacy of law itself depended upon its defense of the public welfare."⁴²

Not only was the North American protester "legitimizing notion of right"⁴³ available to them through their British heritage, so too were the extra-legal methods they used to achieve their goals. The use of disguises such as blackened faces and women's clothing, was a feature of British protests, as was ritualized violence against individuals, tarring and feathering, for example and violent attacks against persons and property.⁴⁴ Thus, in the early stages of the protest which was to become the Pennsylvania Whiskey Rebellion federal excise collectors were tarred and feathered by blackened men.⁴⁵ In the same manner, before the organization of the "Regulation" period in North Carolina, angry farmers whipped and threatened government surveyors at the "War of Sugar Creek",⁴⁶ while three years later, during the height of the "Regulation"

in 1768, government officials were whipped and government property was destroyed by those involved in the Hillsborough Riot.⁴⁷ Similar attacks, or threats of attack, were part of all the protest movements in North America, the Boston Tea Party being perhaps the most famous example. The actions of the protesters at this stage of the movement, and the motives for their threats, are illustrated in Gosford's report to the Secretary of State on the situation in Lower Canada in 1837. He wrote,

the object of the leaders appears now to be to put down the authority of the government by compelling those who hold commissions under it, in the magistracy or the militia, to throw them up; for this purpose large bodies of men in disguise visit at night those who are loyal or disapprove of their proceedings, and by threats of personal violence and destruction of property force them to send in their resignations, and extort from them promises to **join the ranks of the patriots, as they term themselves.**⁴⁸

His observations are supported by Dorothy Fennell's argument that the Whiskey rebels were operating in a political tradition which claimed that legal authority was over-ruled when its representatives were forced to resign or to otherwise do less than the office entailed.⁴⁹

From threats and attacks on individuals, frontier protesters turned to more out-right defiance of the government. The disruption of the judicial system was central to this stage of backwoods protest, exemplified by prison rescues and court-stoppings. For example, during the agitation which preceded the outbreak of Shays' Rebellion in Massachusetts, 1500 farmers stopped the court of Common Pleas, while a further 300 **stopped the debtor court at Worcester.**⁵⁰ The North Carolina

Regulators also impeded court proceedings during the Hillsborough Riot of 1769 and earlier, the local militia had been called out to prevent any attempts to effect prison rescues of arrested Regulators.⁵¹

Ironically, the next stage in the escalation of popular protests usually occurred at the instigation of the authorities rather than at that of the protestors. Despite the violence of their methods, it was rare for those involved in protest movements to have begun their agitation with anything more than redress of grievances and reform of **abuses in mind.**

As North Carolinian George Sims claimed in his "Nutbrush Address" of June 6, 1765, it was "not our mode, or form of Government, nor yet the body of our laws, that we are quarreling with, but with the malpractice of the Offices of our Country Courts, and the **abuses which we suffer by those empowered to manage public affairs.**"⁵²

Although some of the leaders of protest movements did have a firm idea of their goals, and were prepared to resort to arms to achieve them, the leaders of the American Revolution, for example, many of those who took to arms had never wanted to do more than force the government to grant them their rights and redress their grievances. At the prospect of overturning the government and its institutions, Daniel Shays, after whom the Shaysite rebels of Massachusetts were named, probably spoke for the majority of frontier rebels when he confessed to a friend that he "knew no more what government to set up than he knew of the dimensions of eternity" and that he "was sorry he ever engaged in the scrape, but he had his hand to the plough and could not now look back."⁵³ It was the government's actions which typically transformed a goal-oriented, reform-minded protest movement into an open insurrection. The arrival of

government forces intent on surpressing the agitation led to pitched battles such as that between the militia and the Regulators at Great Almanac Creek in North Carolina on May 16, 1771.⁵⁴ Although Mackenzie and a small group of men had decided to rebel, the executive council's December 2 decision to arrest Mackenzie and muster two militia regiments precipitated the outbreak of rebellion in Upper Canda.⁵⁵ Similarly, in the western part of Upper Canada, Charles Duncombe decided to lead his followers in revolt as he believed that he too was about to be arrested.⁵⁶

From the foregoing review of various North American protest movements, it is clear that the similarities between them form a distinctive pattern of behaviour, a tradition of frontier protest.

However, although these North American protests did frequently occur in the "backcountry", that is, in areas distant from the centres of power and influence, the frontier was not the most important influence in determining the character of the protests. The role of the frontier was that of a catalyst; its isolation and hardships created conditions against which people of British origin were bound to protest. As Lefler and Powell explain 18th century discontent in North Carolina, "an English heritage predominated and leaders trained in the ideals of English government were unwilling in this isolated frontier situation to see principles sacrificed."⁵⁷ The issue was power, at least over the matters which affected the well-being of the frontier communities, and the **protesters** claimed that power on the basis of their status as "free-born Englishmen" and the "birthright of liberty" to which they were therefore entitled.

If their British heritage provided them with the motivation and justification for their protest movements, it also contributed to the

form taken by the North American settlers' protests. In their character as movements acting in the community's interest to obtain redress of grievances and some measure of local control, and in the methods, both peaceful and violent, they used to achieve their goals, the North American protests had much in common with popular protests in Britain and in fact, elsewhere in Europe.

This then is the context in which the discontent and agitation of the white settlers of the Prairie West during the years prior to the Rebellion of 1885 must be placed. Far from being uniquely a product of North America's frontier environment, its protest tradition was very much based on the British heritage of the settlers and colonists who populated both Canada and the United States. After the American Revolution, American protests of necessity took on a somewhat different character, especially in the terms the protesters used to justify their actions, but fundamentally, rebellions such as Shays' in Massachusetts and the Whiskey Rebellion in Pennsylvania continued to reflect the characteristics brought to America by British colonists. In Canada, on the other hand, the lack of any definite break with Great Britain allowed Canadian protesters to continue to claim the "rights of British subjects" in a manner reminiscent of the American colonists, until the latter half of the 19th century.

Before examining the nature of the Western settlers' agitation and drawing parallels between the nature of their protests and those elsewhere in North America, it is first necessary to discuss the origins of those settlers and the culture they brought with them to the West.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

¹Clark, Movements, pp. 3-10.

²Maier, "Popular Uprisings," p. 15.

³Clark, Movements, p. 4.

⁴Historians who recognize the role of the colonists' shared British heritage in the development of America include George Dargo, who remarks in Roots of the Republic: A New Perspective on Early American Constitutionalism (New York: Praeger, 1974) that although Turnerites emphasized the difference between British and American law, "more recent writers have tended to point to the parallels and similarities between American common law or local law." (p. 53). M.J.H. Heale in The Making of American Politics, 1750-1850 (London: Longman, 1977) similarly argues both that "Americans owed their representative institutions in no small part to their English origins, and selected strands of English constitutional thought continued to condition American political assumptions until well into the nineteenth century," (p. vi) and that "It was 'as Englishmen' that the colonists first resisted the sinister encroachments of the British government, and in a sense, the Revolution was begun in an attempt to defend the political ideas and institutions taken from England." (p. 29). See also William Simpson, Vision and Reality: The Evolution of American Government (London: John Murray, 1978) and George S. Wood, The Creation.

⁵Don L. Smith, "The Right to Petition for Redress of Grievances: Constitutional Development and Interpretations" (Ph.D. dissertation, Texas Tech University, 1971; Ann Arbor: UMI 1973), p. 53.

⁶Dargo, Roots, p. 54.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 58.

⁹Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 64. See also D.L. Smith, "Right to Petition," p. 58.

¹¹Hugh Lefler and William Powell, Colonial North Carolina: A History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), p. 252.

¹²quoted in David Earle, The Family Compact: Aristocracy or Oligarchy? (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1967), p. 47.

¹³quoted in Clark, Movements, p. 263.

¹⁴George Rudé, The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730-1848 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), p. 229.

¹⁵definitions from the Concise Oxford Dictionary.

¹⁶There are many studies, both specific and general, on British protest movements. Some of the more prominent include Rudé's The Crowd in History and Captain Swing (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969), written with E.J. Hobsbawm. E.P. Thompson also deals with the subject in The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Penguin, 1968) and in "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," Past and Present 50 (1971): 76-136, as does J.C. Harrison in The Common People: A History from the Norman Conquest to the Present (London: Croom Helm, 1984). Further references are available in the excellent notes and select bibliography of John Stevenson's Popular Disturbances in England, 1700-1870 (London: Longman, 1979). For the idea that traditional British protest movements grew from the needs of the community, see Stevenson, pages 47-50, where he describes popular disturbances and the local community, and pages 309-11 where he details the "defensive" nature of English popular disturbances. Also important in understanding the community nature of the protests is E.P. Thompson's concept of the "moral economy" of the crowd. He argues that English popular disturbances were traditionally based on a "legitimizing notion," that they were "informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs; and, in general, that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community." (Thompson, "Moral Economy," p. 78).

¹⁷quoted in Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967) 169.

¹⁸Lefler and Powell, Colonial North Carolina, p. 217-18.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 231.

²⁰quoted in Clark, Movements, p. 359.

²¹Ibid., p. 281-2.

²²Szatmary, Shays' Rebellion, p. 38-43.

²³Fennell, "From Rebelliousness," pp. 177-85.

²⁴Ibid., p. 178.

²⁵Although Stevenson remarks that violence sometimes did occur in the initial stages of disturbances such as in the Liverpool Sailors' strike of 1775, where the first action was to disable the ships in the river (Popular Disturbances, p. 130), it was also characteristic that those engaged in protests would only resort to violence after having used the channels of petition to Parliament and appeals to local magistrates (Ibid., p. 131), as was the case in the West County weavers' dispute in 1738-40. Similarly, George Rudé points out that even though peaceful forms of protest such as petitioning and mass demonstrations were employed by protesters, they turned to violence when "denied all means of peaceful agitation to secure a redress of grievance" and because "experience taught that a sudden attack was more likely to secure results than prolonged agitation by peaceful means" (Crowd in History, pp. 239-40). The latter point was especially true for those outside of large cities.

²⁶quoted in Clark, Movements , p. 343.

²⁷Ibid., p. 365.

²⁸Mass meetings occurred during the early stages of nearly every North American protest movement. For examples in North Carolina, see Lefler and Powell, Colonial North Carolina, p. 229; for Shays' Rebellion, see Szatmary, Shays' Rebellion, pp. 38-40; for the Whiskey Rebellion see Sherman Day, Historical Collections of the State of Pennsylvania containing a copious selection of the most interesting facts, traditions, biographical sketches, anecdotes, etc., relating to its History and Antiquities both General and Local with Topographical Descriptions of every county and all the larger towns in the state (Long Island: Ira Friedman, 1969), pp. 671-6.

²⁹quoted in Bailyn, Ideological Origins, p. 1.

³⁰quoted in Clark, Movements, p. 261.

³¹Smith, "Right to Petition," p. 2.

³²Norman Wilding and Philip Laundy, An Encyclopedia of Parliament, 3rd ed. (London: Cassell, 1968), p. 551.

³³Smith, "Right to Petition," p. 52, p. 57.

³⁴Szatmary, Shays' Rebellion, p. 57.

³⁵Clark, Movements, p. 357.

³⁶Smith, "Right to Petition," p. 61.

³⁷Ibid., p. 57.

³⁸Wilding and Laundy, Encyclopedia, p. 552.

³⁹In his study, Popular Influence Upon Public Policy: Petitioning in Eighteenth-Century Virginia (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1979), Raymond Bailey describes the widespread use of petitions in Virginia to present public opinion on a wide variety of matters but argues that "by far the most important use of petitions was to present local needs, requests and grievances to the lower house of the legislature," (p. 23). It was as an expression of needs and desires that protesters used petitions in the first stages of their movements. Arising from similar goals, the petitions throughout North America were remarkably similar. For an example of a colonial American petition, the people of Orange County, North Carolina to Governor William Tyron, dated May 15, 1771, see Appendix 1.

⁴⁰Maier, "Popular Uprisings," p. 15.

⁴¹see note 16. It is important to note that the characteristics here described as elements of the British protest tradition also belong to the protest tradition of other countries. However, as the argument is that

North American protests are marked by culture as much as by environment, and as the cultural heritage of the groups under study was British, their protest tradition is also labelled as British in origin. For a discussion of the similarities between popular protest in England and France, see Rudé, The Crowd in History.

⁴²Maier, "Popular Uprisings," p. 25.

⁴³Thompson, English Working Class, p. 68.

⁴⁴see Fennell, "From Rebelliousness," p. 8. **Blackened** faces and other forms of disguise were characteristic of the direct action phase of British protests. Men with blackened faces fired farmers' ricks at night during the Swing riots (Harrison, Common People, p. 251) while similarly disguised men pulled down gates in the Rebecca movement in Wales (Rudé, The Crowd in History, p. 159). The ritualized violence that Fennell identifies in the Whiskey Rebellion had its counterpart in the "community justice" meted out in Britain. Individuals who provoked the community would be subjected to a "skimmington," a type of charivari, or other actions such as being stripped, ducked under a pump or forced to run a gauntlet (see Stevenson, Popular Disturbances, pp. 48-9).

⁴⁵Fennell, "From Rebelliousness," p. 44.

⁴⁶Lefler and Powell, Colonial North Carolina, p. 229.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 233-4.

⁴⁸quoted in Clark, Movements, p. 306.

⁴⁹Fennell, "From Rebelliousness," p. 12.

⁵⁰Szatmary, Shays' Rebellion, p. 58. This is reminiscent of the famous Sayer Trial of 1849 in Red River. Although Guillaume Sayer and three other men were convicted of dealing in furs and thus breaking the Hudson's Bay Company's monopoly, they were dismissed due to the presence of three hundred armed Metis, led by Louis Riel père who surrounded the courthouse (see Stanley, Birth, p. 47). Direct action was not a unique feature of British protesters.

⁵¹Lefler and Powell, Colonial North Carolina, pp. 233-4.

⁵²Ibid., p. 228-9.

⁵³Szatmary, Shays' Rebellion, p. 97.

⁵⁴Lefler and Powell, Colonial North Carolina, p. 237.

⁵⁵Colin Read, The Rising in Western Upper Canada, 1837-8: The Duncombe Revolt and After (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 82.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 85.

⁵⁷Lefler and Powell, Colonial North Carolina, p. 190.

CHAPTER TWO

Ontario Settled the West: The Paradox of Western Discontent

This history of the Prairie West is built on a basic, and at first consideration, very puzzling paradox. On the one hand, there is the generally agreed upon conclusion that Ontario, through its emigrants, shaped the society which developed in the West after 1870. Thus, W.L. Morton argues that "old Canada was extraordinarily successful in making the Prairie West Canadian,"¹ while E.H. Oliver points out that the social institutions of the West: the schools, churches, judicial system, municipal organization, even the licence (sic) control of liquor, were "all imported ready made from Ontario."² In a complex article based on Louis Hartz's theory of cultural "fragmentation", J.E. Rea explores the effects of Ontario immigration on Manitoba and, maintaining that Manitoba in turn settled the North-West Territories, he extends his conclusion **that** "Manitoba...was reborn in the image of Ontario" to apply to the Prairie West as a whole.³

On the other hand, despite the widespread agreement that Ontario settled and shaped the West, the evidence of contemporary sources testifies not only that a regional consciousness developed surprisingly quickly among the Western settlers but also that that consciousness was largely characterized by hostility towards the "East" in general, and Ontario in particular.

Through an examination of the Prairie West's connection with Ontario, and its frequently expressed hostility towards the East, this chapter will attempt to expose the logic beneath the paradox of Western Canadian history. To do so is to gain understanding into the general question of

the nature of Western culture and society, and into the more specific issue of the white settlers' involvement in the protest which culminated in the Rebellion of 1885.

The most concrete support of the contention that Ontario settled the West lies in the census figures taken by the census of 1881, which included Manitoba and parts of the North-West Territories,⁴ and by the Department of Agriculture's partial census of the North-West Territories compiled in 1885.⁵

In the years following the Resistance of 1870, and the transfer of Manitoba to Canada, a time when the white population of the area was almost negligible, the single largest group of white settlers to arrive in the province were those born in Ontario. As is apparent in Table I below, by 1881, 19,125, or 29% of Manitoba's 65,955 people were those born in Ontario. These people comprised the single largest group among the population of Manitoba, being slightly larger than that made up of those born in Manitoba at 18,020, or 27.3% of the total population. The preponderance of the Ontario born is even more striking when it is remembered that the total of those born in Manitoba would also include a large percentage of Indian and Metis people.

From the information provided in the census, it is difficult to determine the ethnic background of the Manitoba born, but it is important to at least attempt to determine the proportion of white and native people among the Manitoba born as it is the white population that figures in the current argument.

One method of determining the number of native people among the Manitoba born is to extrapolate from the information given elsewhere in the 1881 census. Table III of the 1881 Census, on the Origins of the

Table I

Birthplace of the Manitoba Population, 1881

	MANITOBA	NORTHWEST TERRITORIES	ONTARIO	QUEBEC	MARITIMES	BRITISH COLUMBIA	BRITISH ISLES	USA	EUROPE	OTHER
SUB-TOTAL	18,020	6,422	19,125	4,085	1,315	25	8,161	1,752	6,097	850
PERCENT OF TOTAL POP.	27.3	9.7	29.0	6.2	2.1	0.04	12.3	2.7	9.2	1.3
PERCENT OF NON NATIVE-BORN POP.	--	13.4	40	8.5	2.7	0.05	17	3.7	12.7	1.8
PERCENT OF NON NATIVE-BORN AND NON N.W.T.-BORN	--	--	46	10	3.1	0.06	20	4.2	14.7	2.0

Total Population of Manitoba (1881): 65,955

Source: Census of Canada, 1881.

People,⁶ shows that 6,767, or 10.3% of Manitoba's population gave their origin as Indian. (No category existed for the Metis population.) Subtracting this same percentage, 10.3, from the total of the Manitoba born, 18,020, produces the conclusion that 1,750 of the Manitoba born were Indian and, therefore, that 16,270 people were in fact white. Using the new total of 16,270, the white Manitoba-born made up 24.7% of Manitoba's population, that is, less than that made up by the Ontario born.

The problems of this rough method of arriving at the ethnic make-up of the Manitoba born are obvious; there is no information regarding the Metis and mixed-blood people; people might be of Indian origin but have been born in the North-West Territories and, above all, the number given for those of Indian origin seems very small. However, given these problems, and others, and especially realizing that the number of Indian and Metis people among the Manitoba born might be considerably higher than 10.3% of the total, the dominant numerical position of the Ontario born among Manitoba's white population in 1881 is abundantly clear.⁷ Even more importantly, among those groups born outside of the Prairie West, that is, Manitoba and the North-West Territories, the Ontario born comprise a dramatic 46% of the total, as compared to the 20% comprised by the next largest group, those born in the British Isles.

According to the census of 1881, the composition of the North-West's population must have been very similar to that of Manitoba ten years previously. The totals of those born outside of the Territories were negligible. As Table II reveals, 2.6% of the Territories' 56,446 people were Manitoba born, 0.9% were born in Ontario, and even smaller numbers were born elsewhere. By 1885, however, the situation in the North-West

Table II

Birthplace of the North-West Population Other than Native Born, 1881 and 1885

	MANITOBA		ONTARIO		QUEBEC		MARITIMES		BRITISH ISLES		USA		EUROPE	
	1881	1885	1881	1885	1881	1885	1881	1885	1881	1885	1881	1885	1881	1885
ASSINIBOIA		1,013		6,967		717		615		5,635		481		365
SASKATCHEWAN		1,624		722		147		47		359		106		27
ALBERTA		507		1,137		476		233		1,164		420		170
TOTAL	1,450	3,144	517	8,823	101	1,340	28	895	296	7,158	116	1,007	27	562
PERCENTAGES OF TOTAL POP.	2.6	6.5	0.9	18.3	0.2	2.8	0.05	1.9	0.5	14.8	0.2	2.1	0.04	1.7
PERCENTAGES OF NON NATIVE-BORN POP.	31.1	13.6	11	38.1	2.7	5.8	0.6	3.9	6.4	30.9	2.5	4.4	0.6	2.4

Total Population of the North-West Territories (1881): 56,446
(1885): 48,317

Sources: Census of the 3 provisional districts 1884-5; Census of Canada 1891.

had greatly changed, and the partial census taken in 1884-5 reveals the nature of that change.

Large numbers of immigrants had arrived in the North-West since 1881 and, as in Manitoba four years earlier, the largest group among the newcomers was that of those born in Ontario. Again as shown in Table II, by 1885, 8,823, or 18.3% of the Territories' population of 48,317 had been born in Ontario, the next largest non native-born group being that of those born in the British Isles at 14.8% of the total population. The dominance of the Ontario-born among the non native-born population is clear cut when it is remembered that the group from the British Isles in fact included four different nationalities, the Irish, Scots, Welsh, and English and was therefore not as homogeneous a group as the Ontario born.

In the censuses dealing with the North-West Territories as in the Manitoba census discussed earlier, the information given is not sufficient to determine the ethnic composition of the populations born in various areas. From Table III of the 1884-5 census, on the Origins of the People,⁸ it is possible to discover the ethnic origins of the whole population of the North-West, but except by an unsatisfactory application of ethnic percentages, it is not possible to determine, for example, how many of the North-West residents born in Manitoba were Indian, how many were Metis, and how many white.

In order to support the contention that Ontario settled the West, however, it is necessary to point out that the white population born in the North-West prior to 1885 was negligible. In the 1885 census of the North-West Territories, 28,313 people stated that they had been born in the Prairie West, 25,169 in the North-West, and 3,144 in Manitoba (see Table II). At the same time, 20,170 of the North-West residents gave

their ethnic origin as Indian, and a further 4,848 identified themselves as Metis and half-breeds.⁹ As it is unlikely that these people had been born elsewhere than in the West, the inference is clear that the vast majority of the native-born in the North-West were Indian and Metis; a very small number were white.

Even given the analytical problems presented by the census figures, it is clear that the Ontario-born comprised the single largest non native-born group in Manitoba in 1881 and in the North-West Territories in 1885. It is to be expected, therefore, that the Ontario influence on the culture and society which developed in the West would be both strong and pervasive.

It was not only the census figures which testified to a large number of Ontario people among the residents of the West; the newspaper columns of the provincial and territorial press also affirmed the presence of the Ontarians and the connection between the West and Ontario.

During the late 1870's and early 1880's, the Western papers frequently reported the arrival of newcomers from Ontario. Often the information was presented in a matter of fact fashion, as in the July 8, 1884 edition of the Winnipeg Daily Free Press which reported that "quite a number of immigrants have gone to Riding Mountain for settlement. The advance party of a colony from Prince Edward County, Ontario, went up last week."¹⁰ The same edition contained a short note from the Emerson correspondent stating that "a number of good farmers from Ontario have joined the colony."¹¹ Sometimes, however, the reports had a more colourful flavour, as in the Saskatchewan Herald's account of Ontario settlers arriving in the Qu'Appelle area. "The craze that from time to time seizes the people of Ontario and leads them to flock to a particular

section of country with a force equal to the instinct that controls the migration of birds of passage, is a wonder to all who witness it."¹² Not only does the above quotation support the contention that Ontario immigrants were numerous and noticeable in the West, it also clearly suggests a negative impression of the Ontarians, an attitude which will be examined more closely later in this chapter. As well as by reporting the arrival of Ontario settlers in the West, the newspapers revealed the West's connection with the East in general, and Ontario in particular through frequent references to friends and relatives in the East.

For example, in an article on the Ontario members of the militia regiments of 1837, the Prince Albert Times made particular reference to those officers with relatives in Prince Albert: Mr. Emmanuel Waggoner, the father of D.J. Waggoner, the Crown Timber Agent; Mr. Allan N. McLean, the uncle of Mrs. Sproat; and, notably, Sir John A. Macdonald, possibly because of Hugh John Macdonald's sojourn in the West.¹³ A similar item appeared some ten years earlier in the Winnipeg Daily Free Press on the occasion of the Orange Parade. The Press reported "from Ontario, from outlying sections of the Province they came, and meeting the old stand-bys of the city, made a pretty good muster of the 1st Ontario rifles..."¹⁴

The newspapers also viewed Eastern friends and relatives as prospective supporters of Western interests and possible allies in the Western fight against Eastern policies. The Prince Albert Times urged "friends in the East" to lobby for weekly mail service to Prince Albert"¹⁵ and argued that in order to persuade Eastern public opinion in favour of the Hudson's Bay rail route, the North-West residents must use their "private correspondence" with "friends and relatives" in the

East.¹⁶ With a similar view to marshalling Eastern support for Western interests, the Calgary Herald praised the work of Rev. John Mclean, Methodist missionary among the Blood Indians, and hoped that "this reference may call the attention of some of the friends in the Eastern provinces to as worthy an object as their donations were ever donated to."¹⁷

The newspapers of the West did not contain merely oblique references to the Ontario origins and connections of the region's most dominant group, they also directly stated that it was Ontario immigrants who were settling the West.

The Prince Albert Times explained the West's opposition to the view that it was the property of the East on the grounds that "Ontario's children" were settling the West,¹⁸ while an 1884 edition of the same paper quoted with approval from an editorial in the Toronto Telegram which claimed that "the majority of them [North-West residents] are men who learned the lesson of political liberty and the rights of the citizen in Ontario's schools..."¹⁹ The Edmonton Bulletin drew a more specific conclusion regarding the provenance of the North-West's population in an editorial on the 1882 Dominion elections. Describing the breakdown of the vote in Ontario, the editor maintained that "the country districts stood about equal, for and against, but in the western part, whence the principal immigration to the North-West comes, the vote was largely against the government."²⁰

The evidence provided by the census figures of 1881 and 1885 and the information, both inferential and direct, given in the newspapers of Manitoba and the North-West during the 1870's and early 1880's, clearly supports the contention that Ontario settled the West.

As the Ontarians comprised the single largest group to arrive in the West during the 1870's and 1880's, it is not surprising that they also exercised the strongest influence on the development of white society which was emerging in the West during this period. The culture that the settlers brought with them from Ontario revealed itself both in the concrete form of the institutions which were established in the West and also in the more abstract form of the people's values and attitudes.

The North-West Mounted Police, established in 1873, was perhaps the quintessential symbol of Ontario's influence over the West. As R.C. Macleod remarks "the North-West Mounted Police succeeded so well in transplanting Eastern Canadian institutions and ideas to the West that they became a part of the fabric of Western identity."²¹ The North-West Mounted Police's role in claiming and maintaining the West as a protégé of Ontario operated on two levels; through the express goals of the Force, and by the less specific but perhaps more profound effect its members had on Western society.

As the purpose of the North-West Mounted Police was to establish Canadian ownership of the West, especially in view of possible American challenges to that ownership, by its very definition the Force was the personification of Federal, that is, Eastern, control over the development of the West. The values that the Mounted Police represented and the institutions they protected were those of Ontario.

Part of the Mounted Police's proven effectiveness in imparting and maintaining Ontario's culture in the West was because the Force was not merely a foreign institution imposed on the people of the West, although that opinion was argued in the West from time to time,²² it was also an integral part of Western society. North-West Mounted Police officers,

trained at the Royal Military College in Kingston and well-connected in the East, became social leaders in Western society.²³ Perhaps more importantly, the sons of Ontario farmers who made up the rank and file of the Police, commonly left the Force to remain in the West as part of the farming community. As Sam Steele remarked of these men,

They seldom remained in the force for more than one term of service. They had come from the east to make homes for themselves and, as soon as their time expired, took their discharges and settled down to farming or business pursuits, generally in the vicinity of one of the police posts.²⁴

The North-West Mounted Police, therefore, not only served as a visible symbol of Ontario's presence in the West, it also acted as a conduit of immigration from Ontario which made the goals of the Force a reality. Other Western institutions, less unique than the North-West Mounted Police, but equally basic to social development, were also indicative of the strong Ontario influence in the West. Schools, churches, the judicial system, and others were all patterned on and nourished by their prototypes in Ontario.

Although dual-confessional church controlled school systems were instituted in both Manitoba and the North-West, they were eroded, first in Manitoba and then in the Territories, under pressure from the increasingly English-speaking, Protestant population of the West. The 1892 "Haultain School Ordinance" which gave the control of the school system to the Territorial government made official the unofficial drift of policy which had been occurring in the North-West since the mid-1880's.²⁵ In the same way, the resolution of the Manitoba Schools Question reflected the changing nature of Manitoba society from one of

English and French equality to one dominated by Protestant settlers from Ontario.²⁶ In both regions, the Ontario school system was the ideal to be followed, as shown by a 1884 editorial in the Prince Albert Times in which the school laws of both Ontario and Manitoba, patterned after Ontario's law, were praised and the Territories urged to follow these superior models.²⁷

Like schools, churches were an important social influence in the West during the 1870's and 80's and, also like the school system, the Western churches were strongly linked to their counterparts in Ontario. The denominations, Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican, and others were those of Ontario, and the ministers, almost to a man it seemed, were from Ontario. This last point was well illustrated by the July 9, 1874 edition of the Winnipeg Daily Free Press which reported that the "Reverend Peter Campbell, who has been in charge of the Victoria Wesleyan Mission, Saskatchewan, for the past six years, is now in the city with his family, on his way home to Ontario."²⁸ This same edition went on to inform its readers that at a meeting of the Manitoba Presbytery at Knox church, calls were received and sustained for ministers from Ontario.²⁹

Other Western institutions, both official, like the judiciary and the municipal system, and unofficial, like the Mutual Marriage Aid Association of Canada, head office in Hamilton, Ontario,³⁰ were Ontario forms transplanted virtually unchanged to Manitoba and the North-West. Ontario's cultural influence pervaded all of the West's institutions, shaped its culture, and even determined the form of its buildings. Describing the public buildings built in Battleford in the late 1870's, Walter Hildebrandt comments that "the buildings at Battleford reflect the desire of eastern architects in Ottawa to see the West develop as an

extension of Ontarian Canada."³¹

Considering the preponderent numbers of the Ontario-born among the Western population and the reproduction of Ontario institutions in the West, it is a logical assumption that Ontario values were also transplanted to Manitoba and the North-West. In fact, it is an assumption shared by both historians and by the evidence of contemporary sources. Frank Underhill comments, in a study of Upper Canadian radical opinion, that through emmigration to the Prairies, the attitudes he discerns in Ontario during the 1850's and 1860's, especially in Western Ontario, became the attitudes of the Prairie West.³² According to Underhill, the values and opinions Ontarians brought to the West included support for the development of the North-West, and especially, support for farming interests and an agricultural economy. Big business, railroad interests, and "Eastern interests", in this case the bankers of Montreal, were viewed negatively by the Upper Canadians during the 1850's and 1860's,³³ as they were two and three decades later by the Western Canadians.

As well as frontier and somewhat "True Grit" values, the West also inherited from Ontario a firm view of itself as a "British" country, as J.E. Rea argues.³⁴ The assertion is amply supported by the words of a contemporary writer, Charles Mair, who assured prospective British immigrants to the North-West that "...here you are under your own flag, and in the midst of a people more attached to the Empire, perhaps, than you are in England."³⁵

As the Prairie West was the recipient of large numbers of Ontario immigrants who brought their institutions and values to the new society in the West, it can be truly claimed that Ontario created the West in

its own image. A paradox arises, however, from the realization that the West, far from forming an undifferentiated extension of Ontario, in fact developed a sense of itself as a separate identity, based in large part on hostility towards Ontario and the East.

A negative attitude towards Ontario developed in the West a surprisingly short time after the arrival of immigrants from Ontario and was expressed by the Ontarians themselves. By the late 1870's and early 1880's the provincial and territorial press, almost without exception edited by Ontarians,³⁶ often served as a vehicle to air the West's hostility towards Ontario.

The West's dislike of Ontario was fueled both by grievances against specific policies of the Ottawa government, which served as a major impetus of the protest movement of the 1870's and early 1880's and will be discussed in the next chapter, and by a more generalized resentment of Ontario's perceived attitude towards the West.

People in the West, and particularly in the North-West, were especially angered by the Eastern attitude that the West was somehow owned by Ontario. An editorial in the Prince Albert Times argued that those of Ontario's children who were settling the West were opposed to the view of the North-West Territory as property,³⁷ while the Edmonton Bulletin similarly claimed that "the old idea that Canada purchased the North-West and therefore may do as she likes with her own, is played out."³⁸

When Ontario was not considering the West as its property, Westerners felt, it was begrudging the West its rightful share of power in the country and also of its revenues, and actively working against the interests of the West. The Edmonton Bulletin was optimistic that the

Montreal Gazette's use of a favourable article on the North-West sent them by the Bulletin was an "encouraging sign...that the eastern cities [were] beginning to realize that upon the development of the North-West their increase of commercial prosperity [depended]." "Once this idea is adopted," the article continued,

we may look to see the country at large and particularly the North-West progress at an incomparably more rapid rate than under the old plan of looking upon this part of the country as separate from and in antagonism to the rest, of decrying it on every occasion, and especially of objecting to the expenditure of public money in it upon even the most necessary public works, as a waste of funds that belonged of rights to the eastern provinces.³⁹

Despite the optimism of this April 4, 1883 editorial, the "old plan" still seemed to be in effect in November of the same year when the Calgary Weekly Herald felt obliged to strongly deny the report of a Montreal paper, "invariably hostile to the North-west interests", that the North West was rife with financial embarrassments and banking losses.⁴⁰ Similarly, the October 18, 1884 edition of the Bulletin itself commented on an article in the Toronto World regarding the mistake of building more rail lines in the North-West that "as a specimen brick of the ideas of North-West necessities prevalent in Ontario, the above is worth preserving and studying over- but not for any other reason."⁴¹

As well as believing that Ontario opposed and thwarted the development of the West, the Western settlers also resented Ontario's ignorance about the West, and its patronizing attitude. The Prince Albert Times, reporting on Senator Cavell's 1883 visit to the West,

commented that "as a rule our public men below do not understand Manitoba and the North West,"⁴² while the Calgary Weekly Herald highlighted "the supreme state of ignorance which exists among the eastern Province people on North-West geography," by relating the anecdote of a Montreal firm which sent an invoice to Medicine Hat, Newfoundland.⁴³

Even when given favourable reviews in the East, Westerners were quick to notice the patronage beneath the praise. The Edmonton Bulletin thanked the Brockville Recorder for its report that "a file of the Edmonton Bulletin, one of the smallest and neatest printed newspapers published in Canada, although printed in the North-West Territories, is now before us", but wondered "what is there remarkable about a paper being neatly printed in the North-West Territory?"⁴⁴

Residents of the West retaliated against Ontario's perceived negative view of the West by equally negative characterizations of Ontarians and Ontario. The Westerners' critical attitude towards Ontarians was apparent in statements like that which appeared in the Manitoba Free Press on January 5, 1880. The paper declared that "Tanner's Crossing, at the Little Saskatchewan, will hereafter be known as Minnedosa - the Indian for swiftly flowing water. It is a wonder some lunatic from Ontario didn't want to name the place after the place he had left."⁴⁵ Similarly, as was mentioned earlier in the chapter, there was a definitely negative connotation to the Saskatchewan Herald's depiction of Ontario settlers acting in a manner strongly suggestive of the behaviour of "birds of passage" in migration.⁴⁶

Ontario, like the Ontarians, also came in for criticism from Westerners, often being compared unfavourably with the West. According to the newspapers of the West, Ontario was crime-ridden, narrow-minded,

prone to factional quarreling, and had a worse climate to boot. The West was clearly superior to Ontario in these and other areas. "The crime of rape", stated the Edmonton Bulletin, "seems to be very common in Ontario. Not a mail arrives but chronicles one or more cases."⁴⁷ "Eighteen inches of snow in Toronto", sniffed the Calgary Weekly Herald, "and yet papers there attack the climate of the Northwest."⁴⁸

Ontario was portrayed as especially inferior to the West in terms of the nature of society, prejudiced and constricted compared to the new society in the West. The Calgary Weekly Herald opposed the formation of political parties in the West on the grounds that "the Northwest majority ignores totally the party strifes that have arisen through the political parties in the east. The causes which created these parties do not here exist."⁴⁹

A similar view of the natures of Eastern and Western societies was expressed in two church-related matters. In the first, Lawrence Clarke, in a farewell letter to James Sieveright, the retiring Presbyterian pastor of Prince Albert, declared that "it matters not what uncandid criticism you might have been subjected to elsewhere, by the narrow minded, who cannot rise out of the rut of Eastern apathy and provincialism."⁵⁰ Clarke went on to say that Sieveright had "cast off the hide-bound prejudices of the East."⁵¹ In the second instance, "Ixion", of the Winnipeg Siftings, thanked Bishop Algoma for his rebuke of a reportedly anti-Catholic sermon by Bishop McLean of Saskatchewan, and hoped "that your scathing remarks may reach the ears of those of your eastern brethren who may wish to come to our free and tolerant society to air their narrow-minded eloquence."⁵²

Given the West's professed views of Ontario and Ontarians, it was

with complacency, rather than surprise, that the Winnipeg Daily Free Press could report that John Ralston of the Little Saskatchewan Colony stated "that he couldn't live in Ontario now, after having seen this province",⁵³ and the Edmonton Bulletin could assert that "the disadvantage of being short of timber is more than counter balanced by the many other advantages it [the West] possesses over the Eastern Provinces."⁵⁴

The resentment and hostility towards Ontario and Ontarians which was widespread in the West during the 1870's and 1880's seems paradoxical in view of the fact that Ontario settled the West and shaped its society. In other words, the white Westerners who felt and expressed dislike of the East, were themselves recently arrived from Ontario. The contradiction apparent in their attitude, however, is explainable, and the explanation forms an important part of our understanding of the white settlers of the West, their involvement in the Rebellion of 1885, and the nature of their relationship with Eastern Canada.

Ironically, the white settlers of the Prairie West developed and expressed hostility towards Ontario and the "East" because of, not in spite of, their Ontario heritage. As Ontarians, as British subjects, the settlers expected to enjoy the same rights that had been theirs in Ontario, especially the right to a voice in the government whose decisions affected the well-being of their community. Like the earlier protests of the American colonists against the British Parliament, the Western settlers' discontent was based on the premise that they were part of the same culture and society and were therefore entitled to the same rights as those closer to the centre of power, whether London or Ottawa. The very quickness with which newly arrived Ontario immigrants to the

West developed an antipathy towards Ontario demonstrates that the propensity to protest against the problems of the frontier was not an attitude which grew out of long Western experience but rather was part of the immigrants' cultural heritage. The Ontarians brought the tradition of protest to the West; the frontier provided the grievances which demanded that they put it into action.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

¹W.L. Morton, "The Bias of Prairie Politics," Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada 3rd ser. 49 (June 1955): 57.

²E.H. Oliver, "The Settlement of Saskatchewan to 1914," Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada 3rd ser. 29 (1926): 64.

³J.E. Rea, "The Roots of Prairie Society," Prairie Perspectives 1, ed. David Gagan (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970): 46-57.

⁴Canada, Department of Agriculture, Census of Canada, 1880-81, (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger and Co., 1882-3). (All further 1881 census information taken from this source.)

⁵Canada, Department of Agriculture, Census of the Three Provisional Districts of the North-West Territories, 1884-5 (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger and Co., 1886). (All further 1884-5 census information taken from this source.)

⁶Census of Canada, 1880-81, Vol. I., Table III, pp. 269-297.

⁷Solutions to the demographic problems presented in ascertaining the ethnic make-up of Manitoba and the North-West Territories were discussed with Dr. James Huzel, University of British Columbia, Department of History, Fall 1984.

⁸Census of the Three Provisional Districts, Table III, 10-11.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Winnipeg Daily Free Press, July 8, 1874, p. 3.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Saskatchewan Herald, July 22, 1882, p. 2. Some further examples of reports of Ontario immigration include the Manitoba Daily Free Press, July 23, 1874, p. 3. Reporting on Prospect Place settlement near Rat Portage, the Press states that "the inhabitants are mostly from the County of Wellington and from Middlesex in Ontario, and are truly an intelligent and industrious class of people, and as a whole have come to this country with considerable means, having had good farms in Ontario, but in considerations for their family emigrated to this find (sic) province." Other examples: The Winnipeg Daily Times, April 12, 1879, p. 4 and April 14, 1879, p. 2.; Saskatchewan Herald, Jan. 12, 1880, p. 2., which mentions that a total of 1,834 immigrants from the Ottawa Valley arrived in Manitoba during the last season; Prince Albert Times, Nov. 1, 1882, p. 6; Regina Leader, March 1, 1883, March 22, 1883, Aug. 21, 1884, p. 1, Feb. 24, 1885, p. 4. In fact, notices about Ontario immigration appeared frequently in all the Western papers, especially as part of the "Local News" columns. L.H. Thomas remarks about this immigration that although Europeans began to arrive at this time, the Ontarians and

British made an impact on public life in the region because, as British subjects, "they did not have to acquire citizenship and familiarity with the constitution before participating in public life." (see L.H. Thomas, The Struggle for Responsible Government in the North-West Territories, 1870-97, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), p. 104.

¹³Prince Albert Times, Feb. 8, 1884, p. 2.

¹⁴Winnipeg Daily Free Press, July 14, 1874, p. 2.

¹⁵Prince Albert Times, Nov. 22, 1882, p. 2.

¹⁶Ibid., Feb. 6, 1885, p. 2.

¹⁷Calgary Weekly Herald, Dec. 9, 1883, p. 4. Like the notices of Ontario immigration to the West, other connections between Ontario and the West were often reported as small items in "Local News" columns. It was common to report travels and visits between the West and Ontario. The Manitoba Daily Free Press item of July 24, 1874, for example, informed its readers that "Stewart Mulkins, well known here, is at present in Kingston, Ontario but has sent word that he will shortly be here again" (p. 3). Commercial travellers also received notices, as the West's great ambition was to attract "the attentions of capitalists in the east" (Saskatchewan Herald, Jan. 26, 1880, p. 2). Thus, the Manitoba Daily Free Press reported that "Mr. D.D. Mason, representing R. Wilkes and Co. of Toronto, will arrive per first boat, with samples" (July 16, 1874, p. 3), and the Edmonton Bulletin described the visit of "Mr. Jas. Turner, the well-known whole-sale grocer of Hamilton, Montreal and Winnipeg, who was here on a visit to his son, and left by the North-West, takes some samples of farm produce with him to demonstrate to eastern people that at least such things will grow here" (Sept. 9, 1883, p. 2).

¹⁸Prince Albert Times, Dec. 6, 1882, p. 2.

¹⁹Ibid., Jan. 11, 1884, p. 6.

²⁰Edmonton Bulletin, Aug. 5, 1882, p. 2. See also an article from the Toronto Telegram quoted in the Manitoba Daily Free Press, Nov. 4, 1882, p. 8.

²¹R.C. MacLeod, "Canadianizing the West: The North-West Mounted Police as Agents of the National Policy, 1873-1905," Essays on Western History in Honour of L.G. Thomas, ed. L.H. Thomas (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1976), p. 102.

²²Prince Albert Times, Jan. 18, 1884, p. 6. Letter from "Facts" on the telegraph office dispute and the role of Captain Antrobus and the North-West Mounted Police: ". . . we find ourselves a free people threatened by military rule; to be governed by the muzzle of a rifle that was sent into this country to protect, not to molest us."

²³MacLeod, "Canadianizing the West," p. 106.

²⁴S.B. Steele, Forty years in Canada; reminiscences of the great North-West, with some account of his service in South Africa, by Colonel S.B. Steele . . . late of the N.W.M. Police, ed. by Mollie Glenn Niblett, with an introduction by J.G. Colmer. (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1915; reprint ed. Toronto: Coles, 1973), pp. 96-7.

²⁵N.G. McDonald, "David G. Goggin, Promoter of National Schools," Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West, ed. D.C. Jones et al. (Calgary, Alberta: Detselig Enterprises, 1979), pp. 14-15.

²⁶For more information on the extensive issue of the Manitoba Schools Question, see Lovell Clark, ed., The Manitoba School Question: Majority Rule or Minority Rights (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1968) for a listing of primary sources and historiographic selections of the issue. W.L. Morton also deals with the topic in Chapter 10 of Manitoba: A History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957). He argues that the abolition of the dual system in Manitoba reflected the efforts of Manitoba's Protestant Ontario settlers to not only recreate Ontario's institutions in the West, but to improve upon them (p. 250).

²⁷Prince Albert Times, Feb. 8, 1884, p. 2.

²⁸Winnipeg Daily Free Press, July 9, 1874, p. 3.

²⁹Ibid. For further references to the connections between the Protestant denominations in the West and the church organizations of Ontario, see R.J. McDonald, "The Presbyterian Church in Saskatchewan in The Nineteenth Century," Saskatchewan History 4 (Fall 1951): 93-101, and Frederick Passmore, "Methodist Memories of Saskatchewan," Saskatchewan History 8 (Winter 1955): 11-16. Both articles discuss the Ontario origins of the Western churches, especially in terms of their ministers. As the newspapers indicate, there seems to have been a constant flow of clergy between Ontario, Manitoba, and the Territories.

³⁰Brandon Daily Mail, Dec. 19, 1882, p. 4.

³¹Walter Hildebrandt, "Public Buildings in Battleford, 1876-1878," Saskatchewan History 35 (Winter 1982): 23. On the subject of the Ontarians' imposition of physical forms on the Western environment, see also Greg Thomas and Ian Clarke, "The Garrison Mentality and the Canadian West," Prairie Forum 4 (Spring 1979): 83-104. Arguing that Ontario farmers "set out to create a West in their own image, and achieved considerable success" (p. 85), Thomas and Clarke discuss the Ontarians' use of traditional closed-off farmsteads in the West and the resulting separation from open prairie (p. 98).

³²F.H. Underhill, "Some Aspects of Upper Canadian Radical Opinion in the Decade Before Confederation," Canadian Historical Association Report (1927): 46-61.

³³Underhill, "Some Aspects".

³⁴Rea, "Roots of Prairie Society," p. 48.

³⁵Prince Albert Times, June 6, 1883, p. 4.

³⁶Earl Drake, "Pioneer Journalism in Saskatchewan, 1878-1887: Part II: Some Characteristics of the Territorial Press," Saskatchewan History 5 (Spring 1952): 41. As many of the Territorial editors came to the North-West by way of Manitoba, it suggests that the Manitoba editors too can be classed as Ontarian in origin.

³⁷Prince Albert Times, June 6, 1883, p. 4. See also the Times for Dec. 6, 1882, p. 2.

³⁸Edmonton Bulletin, Oct. 25, 1884, p. 2.

³⁹Ibid., April 4, 1883, p. 2.

⁴⁰Calgary Weekly Herald, Nov. 30, 1883, p. 3.

⁴¹Edmonton Bulletin, Oct. 18, 1884, p. 2. Western editorialists used strong language to express their concern that the East was retarding the development of the West. In an 1883 article on the new Dominion Land Act, the Prince Albert Times stated ruefully that "Sir Charles Tupper says we must suffer if necessary in the interests of Canada as a whole, and we are beginning to realize the meaning of his words" (June 6, 1883, p. 2). The Qu'Appelle Vidette expressed its distrust of Eastern intentions regarding the West in even stronger terms. In an article on the proposed Hudson's Bay Railroute, the Vidette hoped that the route would be approved and developed by the Government, "that is, provided the Opposition in the House of Commons and the influence of interested parties in Ontario and Quebec do not strangle it in its birth" (Nov. 20, 1884, p. 2).

⁴²Prince Albert Times, Aug. 23, 1883, p. 5.

⁴³Calgary Weekly Herald, Dec. 1, 1883, p. 3.

⁴⁴Edmonton Bulletin, April 4, 1883, p. 1. The ignorance of the Eastern press and people regarding the West was a continuing annoyance to Westerners. Further examples of that annoyance appeared in the Edmonton Bulletin, Feb. 28, 1881, p. 3; Fort MacLeod Gazette, Dec. 14, 1882, p. 2; and the Saskatchewan Herald, Jan. 26, 1880, p. 2. The Brandon Daily Mail ascribed outright hostility to the West on the part of the Eastern press, claiming "Eastern journals, especially a few Ontario dailies are ever-ready to find fault with the Northwest as though it was a foreign country and those pioneering it and filling up the **illimitable wilderness** were "furriners" (Brandon Daily Mail, Dec. 26, 1882, p. 2).

⁴⁵Manitoba Free Press, Jan. 5, 1880, p. 1.

⁴⁶Saskatchewan Herald, July 22, 1882, p. 2. Further examples of negative comments about Ontario and Ontarians are to be found in the Winnipeg Daily Times, Sept. 4, 1874, p. 3; the Saskatchewan Herald, June 13, 1879, p. 2 and Feb. 28, 1881, p. 1; and the Calgary Herald, Jan. 30, 1884, p. 2 and June 25, 1884, p. 1. This last article detailed the account of a know-it-all newcomer, one of the "wise men from the East," being put in his place by an old-timer.

⁴⁷Edmonton Bulletin, Oct. 18, 1884, p. 2.

⁴⁸Calgary Weekly Herald, Nov. 20, 1883, p. 3.

⁴⁹Ibid., Oct. 29, 1884, p. 2.

⁵⁰Prince Albert Times, Sept. 19, 1883, p. 2.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid., Aug. 29, 1884, p. 1.

⁵³Winnipeg Daily Free Press, July 11, 1874, p. 3.

⁵⁴Edmonton Bulletin, March 11, 1881, p. 2.

CHAPTER THREE

Protest in the West: Roots and Characteristics

Although the North-West white settlers' hostility towards Ontario and the Dominion Government during the 1870's and 1880's seems paradoxical in that many of those settlers were themselves lately come from Ontario and were engaged in recreating the West the image of the society they had left, in fact the nature of the relationship between the Prairie West and central Canada was an inevitable product of the settlers' cultural background. A study of the reasons behind the settlers' discontent with Ottawa and the "East", and of the methods they used to express their dissatisfaction, reveals that their behaviour can be explained as manifestations of the protest tradition which was defined in Chapter One as the response of people of British heritage to the conditions of the North American frontier.

In order to study the Western settlers' protest and agitation during the 1870's and early 1880's, this discussion will focus on the region known as the North-West Territories, that is, the present day provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta, during the decade before the outbreak of the Rebellion of 1885, a formative period in the history of Western Canada. The term "Prairie West" will also be used to designate the area under study, including therefore, the province of Manitoba, for although that region enjoyed certain privileges such as provincial status and parliamentary representation which were denied to the Territories, it also shared in many of the North-West's grievances against Ottawa. In the view of those in the Prairie West, Manitoba and the North-West had "a natural, if unwritten alliance" against the "Eastern provinces".¹

As the purpose of this discussion is to discern an overall pattern in the opinions and actions of the North-West settlers, the Prairie West therefore has been studied as a more or less **homogeneous whole, rather** than as a collection of distinctive parts. This is not to deny the differences between the various communities in the North-West and Manitoba, but rather to focus on the common elements of thought and behaviour which occurred throughout the West during the period in question. Dealing with general theories of necessity demands that details and variations be subordinated to the larger theme. Thus, in tracing the existence and influence of a British tradition of popular protest among the Western settlers this paper is not seeking to present a complete and detailed study of conditions in the North-West circa 1880, but rather is attempting to construct a general framework on which more specific studies could be built.

The North-West settlers' background, a combination of British tradition and Ontario experience, provided them with political assumptions and cultural expectations which made protest against the frontier conditions of the North-West inevitable. Like the colonists who left England for America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the settlers who came to the North-West from Ontario, Manitoba and Great Britain itself brought with them a heritage of "something more"² than that brought by other immigrants. For the North-West settlers, the "something more" was a strong sense of entitlement to political and legal rights and guarantees, an entitlement they claimed on the basis of their own achievements and status, and especially, on the basis of their British heritage.

In arguing for political rights, particularly the right to be

represented in Parliament, and to therefore not be taxed without consent, the residents of the North-West emphasized their contribution to the Canadian nation. The members of the North-West Council expressed the belief that "the success of the North-West Territories is of such importance to the whole Dominion that the time has arrived when representation for the Territories should be had in Parliament."³

The Prince Albert Times stated the case even more bluntly. "There is now a large and increasing population in the Territories," it argued, "contributing liberally to the revenues of the Dominion. That they should be **disenfranchised** is both unjust and impolitic."⁴

That sense of injustice was exacerbated by the settlers' perception that, as Canadians, they were not receiving their due from the Dominion government. "All that we require," argued the MacLeod Gazette "is that we receive the same privileges and be treated the same as other provinces."⁵ The settlers' expectations of their rights as Canadians was the theme of an editorial from the Edmonton Bulletin on the issue of squatters' rights in the North-West. "Considering that they as Canadians had a right to share in the public land and trusting that their government would see that they got justice," the Bulletin stated, "the settlers had settled on unsurveyed lands only to discover they had no legal rights to the land."⁶

Even more fundamental to the claim of rights and redress than their contributions to the country or their Canadian citizenship was the settlers' argument that they were entitled to the granting of their demands on the grounds that they were British subjects. After the American War of Independence, such claims understandably disappeared from the vocabulary of American frontier protest movements, but for Canadians,

still linked to Britain, the mustering of the British heritage remained a commonly used device.

According to the Prince Albert Times, the "public mind" of the North-West was agitated in early 1883 by the question of "how and when we are to be treated like our fellow subjects in every part of the great and (saving our own North-West) free Empire of Great Britain,"⁷ while later in the year the same paper argued that "In their request for representation the people of the Territories are demanding only the ordinary rights of British subjects, and should have the sympathy and support of all Canadians."⁸ A similar sentiment was expressed by the Calgary Weekly Herald which claimed that in seeking redress for their numerous grievances, the residents of the North-West should take measures to demand the rights of British subjects.⁹ Meanwhile, the resolutions framed by the Alberta Settlers' Rights Association in April 1885, introduced a slightly different claim, that of the "rights and privileges of free men"¹⁰ but still considered those as synonymous with the "rights of a British subject."¹¹

Throughout the North-West in the years prior to the Rebellion of 1885, the white settlers expressed their discontent with the Dominion government and its policies in terms of their British rights and privileges. It is important to discuss what was meant when they claimed, as did the settlers meeting at the Lindsay schoolhouse on March 23, 1885, "that we have come to this country in good faith that we would have our rights respected as British subjects."¹²

The "rights" to which the settlers felt entitled, and which they believed were being denied to them, ranged from demands as specific as parliamentary representation to issues as general as the settlers' desire

to exercise control over their local affairs. In fact, both the specific and general rights demanded by the settlers were manifestations of the same fundamental characteristic of North American frontier peoples, the refusal to be governed by a distant authority over whose decisions the frontiersmen could exercise little or no control.

Throughout the North-West during the early 1880's, editorials and petitions reflected the settlers' desire to exercise control over their own affairs, often demanding both representation in Ottawa and the granting of power and revenues to local government. An editorial in the Calgary Herald of November 12, 1884 entitled "Our Needs" was typical of the views expressed in the Territorial press. Of the four needs the Herald identified as important to the North-West, three were directly related to the issue of political power: power to be given the local government, the local government to have the local revenues to carry out its ordinances and representation in Parliament to be given to the North-West.¹³

The Prince Albert Times had expressed a similar emphasis on the importance of local control in a 1883 editorial which promised sweeping improvements to follow the granting of local autonomy. "If the rights of the settlers in the Territories to manage their own local affairs were once accorded them," the editorialist declared,

many of their present disadvantages would be swept away and the general dissatisfaction which pervades the public mind with respect to the crude and ill-digested laws and orders-in-council which are continually being enacted at Ottawa would dwindle into insignificance when once the people found that so many of the so-called smaller grievances were being redressed.¹⁴

Although the Edmonton Bulletin agreed that the North-West needed to control its own affairs, it warned that local governments alone would not remedy the problems created by the fact that "the natural resources of the country, land timber and minerals, are entirely in the hands of the general Government."¹⁵ "As long as these matters are in the hands of men at Ottawa," the editorial continued, "every effort should be made to secure influence there."¹⁶ As a means of exercising power, the Bulletin argued, representation in Parliament would be more effective than "any number of petty capitals and mock governments" erected in the Territories.¹⁷

The majority of white settlers who arrived in the North-West during the 1870's and early 1880's had come from places, like Ontario and Manitoba, where they were used to exercising at least the basic political right of voting for a Parliamentary representative. Basing their arguments both on their previous experience and, especially, on their British heritage, the North-West settlers agitated for a greater voice in controlling their affairs, whether by Parliamentary representative, local government power over resources, or preferably both.

Despite their parliamentary representation, however, Manitobans were aware that they still lacked power over affairs of concern to them, as shown by the disallowance of their railway charters in 1882.¹⁸ For them, agitation centred on the issue of "Provincial Rights", rights they believed were being unconstitutionally denied to them by the Ottawa government.¹⁹ For all Westerners, the basic issue was the same as it had been in earlier North American protest movements, power to control the affairs of their community, rather than be controlled by the policies of the far-off metropolis.

The settlers who came to the North-West during the 1870's and 1880's protested against the policies of the Dominion government and against the power of the "East" in general on the basis of their British heritage. As elsewhere in North America, however, the conditions of the frontier contributed to the settlers' discontent and created the need for protest.

Some realities of the frontier, the often bitter climate of the West, and its periodic crop failures, for example, could be viewed as natural hardships, beyond the control of government, but even though willing to admit as much,²⁰ the Western settlers believed that their already difficult existence was rendered more so by the actions, and inaction, of the Ottawa government. In the Prairie West as elsewhere on the North American frontier, protest was fueled by the perception that the government was "too far away to properly act"²¹ and that the power structure of the country denied the frontier people the capacity to act on their own behalf. The settlers' drive to improve their conditions, and their frustration at the government's apparent unwillingness to help them to do so, if not to actually hinder them, is revealed by an examination of the main problems of the North-West frontier as seen by the settlers: the lack of institutions, especially educational and judicial, the isolation of the area and the settlers' inability to control their own affairs, especially regarding the disposition of lands and offices.

One of the conditions of frontier life which the North-West settlers sought the hardest to remedy was the lack of institutions in the Territories. The establishment of public schools was a priority for the residents of the North-West, as schools were an embodiment of the desire for personal and family improvement which had caused them to leave "older

and more densely populated districts" for the new country.²² However, despite the public meetings held and the committees appointed to discuss the matter, the problem remained that the towns and settlements of the North-West lacked the necessary funds to construct school buildings and pay teachers' salaries. Some monies were raised by public subscription, but the settlers were not content to rely on charity to provide what they considered to be a necessity and a right.

The settlers' opinion of what the government's role should be in the matter was made clear in an editorial in the Edmonton Bulletin of 1881, in which the editorialist argued, "Of course it is expected that the government aid towards the payment of a teacher's salary will be forthcoming,"²³ but in fact, government money was not provided for Edmonton schools at that point, nor elsewhere in the Territories without much agitation from the residents of the North-West. Their resentment of the situation was heightened by their view that the Dominion government was "hardly penurious," having in fact a seven million dollar surplus, "a very large part of which was wrung from the settlers of the North-West ...".²⁴

While the lack of schools frustrated their expectations of a better life for their children in the North-West, the deficiencies of the region's judicial system created problems for the settlers' daily life. As the residents of the North-West had access to a judge and court only when a stipendiary magistrate passed through their town on his circuit, there was considerable delay and inconvenience in the administration of justice. Thus, the demand for additional stipendiary magistrates, resident judges, and the other trappings of an established judicial system appeared often in the newspaper editorials and memorials from the

North-West. As the Prince Albert Times claimed, the lack of an efficient judicial system was especially intolerable for "those who have, until their arrival here, lived where the legal machinery works with utmost regularity."²⁵

In the same way that they believed that the government was responsible for providing them with the basic institutions of Canadian culture, the North-West settlers also felt that the government should take action to remedy another frontier difficulty, that of isolation, both from other areas of the North-West and from central Canada itself. Nowhere was their attitude clearer than on the issue of mail delivery in the North-West. The importance of frequent and dependable mail service in the Territories was strongly presented by an 1878 Saskatchewan Herald editorial arguing to have Battleford made the area's mail exchange point. Such a decision, the editorial claimed, "will tend towards increasing the business facilities of our merchants, render the work of governing the country lighter, and help to bind closer the ties of friendship between the lonely pioneers of the West and their friends "at home" by practically bringing them three weeks closer together."²⁶

However clear the need for "prompt and certain delivery of the mail,"²⁷ the settlers felt that the government was far from responsive to the situation. Demands for a weekly mail service appeared regularly in the editorial columns of the Prince Albert Times²⁸ until it was finally granted in June 1883,²⁹ while in Calgary, the residents were angered by a series of mail thefts for which neither the government nor the CPR, the mail carrier, was willing to take responsibility.³⁰

The advent of the telegraph system, while putting the North-West into closer communication with the East, created its own dissatisfactions

among the settlers. Those places that were served by the telegraph line, such as Edmonton, found it to be as unreliable as the mail service, and, as with the mail, blamed the government for the problems with the line: its location, its disrepair and the high tariff charged to use it. The Edmonton Bulletin hoped that when the Government took over operation of the line that "this line which was built with the people's money will be run for the people's benefit," but the tone of the editorial lacked conviction.³¹

Although the difficulties the settlers encountered in trying to establish the basic institutions of "civilized communities"³² in the North-West and in combatting the isolation of the region were sources of dissatisfaction with the Dominion Government, the major cause of discontent with the government was the fact that the residents of the North-West did not have the power to determine their own local affairs. Thus, not only were they excluded from the bodies which made national decisions, government policies and regulations also prevented them from making decisions which would directly affect their own welfare and future. The resentment this state of affairs engendered among the North-West settlers is very apparent in their attitude towards the classic frontier issue: the disposition of lands and offices.

Much has been written in the historiography of the Prairie West regarding the land questions of the 1870's and 1880's,³³ and it is not the intention of this paper to discuss in depth the various facts of the subject, but rather to focus on the settlers' reaction to the land problems, especially as they affected the settlers' view of the government.

For the settlers, the most serious land problem in the North-West

during the 1870's and early 1880's was the lack of an official survey of the land. Without such a survey, no North-West settler could claim legal title to the land he had settled and improved on, and as a squatter, was subject to claim-jumping by unscrupulous individuals or to eviction by the government itself. Moreover, even if the settlers succeeded in remaining on their land, they were unable to borrow much needed cash for seed and equipment against their lands as, in fact, they did not have legal title to the land. As squatters, therefore, the North-West settlers lived in a state of uncertainty in which, as the Edmonton Bulletin pointed out "disputes are continually taking place, which there are no means of deciding in the absence of any title to the lands."³⁴

The settlers' insecurity, and therefore their sense of grievance against the government, was compounded by the Dominion Government's practice of reserving sections of land for itself, either for eventual public use such as school property or for lease to private interests such as colonization companies and the Canadian Pacific Railway. Often, given the absence of a survey, the government would choose sections of land already settled, intending to evict the "squatters." The settlers reacted strongly to this threat. "Let no one imagine," warned the Bulletin, "that those who have, amid the greatest difficulties and hardships, made homes for themselves in this country, will tamely submit to the confiscation of the fruits of their labour because the Government was not energetic enough to have the land surveyed in time."³⁵

Not only did the Dominion government's land policies cause the North-West settlers to worry about their current security and well-being, it also raised doubts about the future prospects of the country. In a letter to the MacLeod Gazette, "Nor'-West" spoke for many by asking, "why

is this fine country shut up entirely against the settlers, and given to a few individuals, to the detriment of the many?" "Literally," he concluded, "the country is coralled and the gate shut."³⁶

While control of the land was probably the most important issue for those on the North-West frontier, they also expressed considerable resentment about the presence and practices of Government officials in the Territories as the officials were a reminder to them that decisions which affected them were made in Ottawa, and enforced by "Easterners."

Sometimes the North-West settlers expressed their feelings about the government and its officials with the dry humour aparent in a local news item from Edmonton which remarked that, "Nothing has been done in the way of lumbering this fall yet, as everyone is waiting for the arrival of the timber inspector, not knowing what Ottawa lunacy he may be commissioned to carry out."³⁷

More often, however, the officials were described in less amused and more hostile terms, as in a long letter from a "Calgarian" detailing the incompetence of the local Indian Agents. The government officials, he claimed, were those who, having failed in business, "go to Sir John hungry, and he sends them to the North West Territory, as far away from Ottawa as he can get them, hoping no doubt never to see their hungry faces again, and we pay the bill."³⁸

Specific instances of dishonesty and incompetence on the part of officials reinforced the settlers' bad opinion of them, as in the case of Captain Allen, the Indian agent at Cypress Hills. After being dismissed from the Police Force for fraud, and from a private firm for dishonesty and robbery of the Indians, "he was then appointed Indian Agent through the influence of a relative in the Government, and some weeks ago was

fined by Col. McLeod twenty dollars for housebreaking, barely escaping imprisonment for a lengthy term."³⁹

Even when both competent and honest, the government officials were still resented as a class by the settlers for two important reasons. The first was that the majority of officials were perceived to be Easterners, as revealed by the above quotations, and the North West settlers believed strongly that "all positions of trust in the North West Territories should be filled by residents of the locality in which such services are required."⁴⁰ Secondly, and most importantly, the officials' job was to enforce the often unpopular policies of the Dominion Government. The Crown timber agents in particular were resented as their duties consisted of collecting taxes on wood cut by the settlers on their own property. Because the settlers had no legal claim to their land in the absence of a survey, the wood officially belonged to the Dominion government and as such could be taxed. The settlers' opinion of this state of affairs was revealed in a letter from "No Grumbler" which argued that, "our Crown Timber Agent should be stopped from taking wood contracts, and depriving the poor settler of making an honest penny in the winter months . . ."⁴¹ Government officials were an embodiment of a distant government whose policies nevertheless affected the settlers' lives in the North-West.

Like other frontier groups in North America, the settlers who came to the North-West during the 1870's and 1880's encountered difficulties in the conditions of life. Not only was the country lacking in the **basic** institutions the settlers expected, such as schools and legal machinery, and suffering from the isolation from the centre of decision making and power which was characteristic of the frontier, the settlers also believed that their situation was worsened by the Government's policies,

especially concerning land and the use of resources such as wood. The settlers' attitude towards the government was well expressed in an editorial in the Bulletin regarding the timber law but speaking also of other issues, "Settlers think it hard that when they have come so far to make their homes the government should follow them, not with surveys and public works, but with fines and imprisonment for using the natural advantages of the country, the existence of which were the cause of their coming here."⁴²

As people of British heritage and experience, the North-West settlers were not content to "think it hard," but rather actively protested against the government, especially against the lack of representation and the lack of local control which made them powerless to improve their situation. In their reaction to the conditions of the frontier, especially the exclusion from political power, the Western settlers were acting in the protest tradition common to North Americans of British heritage. In the same way in which their reactions placed them in that tradition, so too did the methods they used to express their discontent.

As was characteristic of frontier protest movements throughout North America, the residents of the West began expressing their discontent with the Dominion government through the traditional and legal means of public meetings, petitions and delegations, organizations such as the Settlers' Rights Association, and editorial opinion in the columns of the Western press.

Public meetings were a common feature of life in the Prairie West during the period in question, and while protest was not always on the agenda, the object of the meetings was often to press the government into action for the community's benefit. Western needs, from better mail

service through the construction of branch lines and a rail route to the Hudson's Bay to the abolition of timber taxes were presented and discussed at public meetings during the early 1880's. The tone of these meetings was often sharp and to the point, as evidenced by the Vidette's report that public meetings were held at Fort Qu'Appelle and Qu'Appelle Station "for the purpose of enforcing upon the Dominion Government the necessity of removing all obstacles from the path of those seeking to build branch lines in Manitoba and the North West Territories."⁴³

While it is difficult to determine the exact numbers of those present at public meetings, certain comments in the newspapers indicate that not all meetings were large or significant. The Saskatchewan Herald's report that few farmers attended a meeting in the Battleford area on January 13, 1885 was perhaps coloured by the paper's editorial opinion which denied "that there is any excitement in this district on account of their 'grievances' or that the hardships under which our farmers labor are greater than those that would follow a partial failure of crops."⁴⁴ There is no mistaking the wistful tone of the Times, however, which remarked that "the attendance was not as large as could have been wished" at a public meeting held at Prince Albert to discuss sending delegates to Ottawa to address the government with the areas' "wants and requirements."⁴⁵

Despite the varying degrees of attendance, the public meetings were very important in the development of protest and agitation in the West as it was from these meetings that other forms of protest took shape. Committees were formed to draw up petitions, delegates chosen to visit Ottawa, and organizations such as Farmers' Unions and Settlers' Rights Associations formed to better press for redress of grievances.

At the Farmers' Union convention held in Winnipeg on December 19, 1883, for example, Charles Stewart presented a solution to the region's grievances in a resolution calling for Manitoba's secession from Canada and the formation of a new western confederation.⁴⁶ Despite the radicalism of this suggestion, a more significant event occurred at a public meeting held at the Lindsay School House, near Prince Albert, on May 14, 1884. There, "Canadians from Ontario" joined with French and English half-breeds in setting out their grievances, and in appointing a **delegation** to visit Louis Riel in Montana for "consultation."⁴⁷

Like the public meetings which often engendered them, petitions and their close relative, delegations, were methods of protest traditionally used by North American frontier groups to express their discontent. The residents of the Prairie West agreed with the idea discussed in Chapter One of this paper, that the petition was the means by which the disenfranchised could voice their grievances. As G.H. Harper wrote to the Saskatchewan Herald, ". . . nothing can be gained either at Regina or Ottawa excepting by repeated and continued asking, the earlier the people of Battleford adopt the 'and your petitioners will ever pray' system the more likely they are to have their demands granted--sometime."⁴⁸ The Battleford residents, like those elsewhere in the West, did employ the 'and your petitioners will ever pray' system in order to voice their grievances, and, as the example given in Appendix 2 illustrates, they were careful to phrase their petition according to the traditional form. This form, set in Britain since the 17th century, included the designation of the parties to the petition, followed by the substance, and concluded with a "prayer".⁴⁹

However, although the Western settlers were familiar with the form of

petitions, and used them extensively to bring their grievances to the government's attention, they shared Mr. Harper's cynicism regarding the government's readiness to respond. As it had been for the American colonists of the eighteenth century, the perception that the government was ignoring their petitions became a grievance in itself to the residents of the West. The Bulletin, for example, commented in an editorial on the need for a land survey, that "This is a matter of which there can be no two opinions, and petition after petition has been sent to Ottawa on the subject, of which not the least notice has been taken."⁵¹ The escalation of the protest movement in the West from the stage of public meetings and petition writing to that of organization for the purpose of agitation against the government can be traced to the frustration the settlers experienced at the treatment of their petitions. In the fall of 1883, the Prince Albert Times called for settlers to organize against the government, threatening that "such an organization would also imply some more specific purpose than the redrafting of petitions which like their predecessors would in all probability be consigned to the wastebasket."⁵²

Organization to protect and promote their interests was not directed by the Western settlers solely against the government. The residents of Edmonton decided to organize themselves into a vigilance society, for protection against the serious claim-jumping problem which was happening in Edmonton in 1881 and 1882.⁵³ Of the one hundred people who attended a meeting on the subject, forty-seven joined the society.⁵⁴ By 1883, however, a large number of organizations were formed throughout the Territories and Manitoba which were based on opposition to the government. Their names, 'Farmers' Union,' 'Settlers' League,'

'Settlers' Rights Association,' to give some examples, reveal their character and purpose. The directors of the 'Agricultural Society' which met at Pocha School House near Prince Albert in May of 1884 declared that "farmers' interests are all alike and that union is strength,"⁵⁵ but the drive to organize included other North-West residents as well, as newspaper editorials called on influential people and "leading men . . . to give their aid and support to the movement,"⁵⁶ that is, to the formation of Settlers' Unions and like organizations.

The fundamental reason for the organization of Settlers' Leagues and Farmers' Unions was the same as that which had motivated the Western settlers to write petitions and send delegations. In the words of the Settlers' Rights Association at Qu'Appelle, they organized, "In the absence of representation of the wants and grievances of the settlers of the North West in the Parliament or in the Councils of the country"⁵⁷ Unlike the petitions, however, the settlers' organizations created the possibility of actions beyond the "every legitimate measure"⁵⁸ the settlers declared themselves ready to use in the pursuit of redress. The Times claimed that the object of the organizations was "not to encourage rebellion but to prevent it,"⁵⁹ but its suggestion earlier the same month that a Settlers' Rights Association be formed "for mutual protection and resistance if need be, of the invasion of our invested rights,"⁶⁰ hinted at the possible uses of the settlers' groups.

The protest movement in the Prairie West during the 1870's and 1880's did not produce a pamphlet war similar to that which occurred in the American colonies prior to the Revolutionary War, but as in other frontier conflicts in North America, the press played an important role as an instrument of protest. The Western press both reported concrete

information regarding the times and places of public meetings, the contents of petitions and the activities of **protesters** elsewhere in Manitoba and the Territories, and, perhaps more importantly, disseminated the attitudes and opinions which underlay the development of a protest movement in the West. Although a strong editorial bias was apparent in the newspapers, especially during election times, both Liberal and Conservative papers were surprisingly united in their opinions regarding the Dominion Government, the West's situation, and the need for redress of Western grievances. The declaration made by the Conservative Prince Albert Times that "We will continue to urge that justice be done us until the Government can in decency no longer delay granting us our wishes and desires"⁶¹ was echoed in the pages of the Liberal Edmonton Bulletin and the other Western newspapers, whatever their political persuasion.

Based on the response of people of British heritage to the difficulties of frontier life, the protest movement which developed on the Prairies during the late 1870's and early 1880's employed methods of protest similar to those used by other frontier groups of British background. The public meetings, petitions, settlers' organizations and newspapers by which the residents of the West expressed their discontent with their government and discussed ways of remedying the situation were characteristic of the British protest tradition seen elsewhere in North America. Equally part of that tradition was the escalation of protest to the level of violence against the government and even actual rebellion.

Aside from a complicated conflict in Prince Albert regarding the telegraph office and line, the white settlers' protest movement did not include actual violence against the government in the period before the Rebellion of 1885. Their language, however, reveals that although they

did not participate in violent or illegal acts of protest, they considered the possibility of doing so in ways characteristic of the protest tradition which was part of their British heritage.

Although the telegraph office issue which agitated the residents of Prince Albert during the fall of 1883 began as a conflict between factions within the town, the government's implication in the matter brought out the settlers' basic resentments against the Dominion Government and its officials. The controversy arose when, after a public meeting had chosen a site near the centre of town for the new telegraph office, Lawrence Clarke, Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, used his influence with the government to pick a different site. The town reacted angrily, telegraph poles were thrown down, and Mr. Gisborne, the government agent, was burned in effigy and received threats from a mob intending to run him out of town on a rail.⁶² Reporting that the charges Mr. Gisborne had brought against certain residents of Prince Albert were dismissed in November 1883 as Gisborne was not present to testify, the Prince Albert Times concluded with a warning that clearly reveals local sentiment concerning the **government and its officials**. Regarding the information that Gisborne was to return to the area in December, the Times warned:

If he comes he will find the same men here, equally determined to stand up for their rights and to teach Government officials that whilst they will be respected and protected in the proper discharge of their duties, yet when they exceed them and go out of their way to advance private interest, no matter how powerful they may be, they will assuredly be punished and taught the bitter lesson Mr. Gisborne has received in Prince Albert.⁶³

The Gisborne affair was one of the most dramatic instances of conflict between a government official and the residents of the North-West, but the officials as a class were unpopular, and threats, either oblique or overt, were made against them throughout the West.

Lieutenant-Governor Dewdney was a constant target of criticism from North-West residents, and while no violence was offered him in person, there was more than a hint of traditional frontier punishment in the quotation from the Toronto Globe which the Prince Albert Times saw fit to reprint on May 16, 1883. "Settlers in different parts of the North West," the Globe claimed, "have intimated their intention to tar and feather Mr. Dewdney should he ever show his face amongst them again."⁶⁴

As a high-ranking appointee of the Dominion government, Dewdney would naturally evoke hostility from the North-West settlers. Other government officials, those who affected the settlers' daily lives, received threats of a more concrete nature. In October 1883 an anonymous notice was posted in Prince Albert calling for a public meeting to devise means to rid "the town and country of land agents, timber agents, etc. . . ." ⁶⁵ In the view of the Times, this notice was a "warning to certain officials who have recently come here to be more circumspect in their actions."⁶⁶ More pointed warnings were delivered to officials of the Department of the Interior in Calgary who, on April 10, 1885, received 'quit the city notices' signed with the 'triple 7' seal traditionally used by American vigilance committees,⁶⁷ while Timber Agent Gouin met with similar threats on a visit to Silver city in late February, 1884. Although one correspondent reported to the Calgary Herald of March 5, 1884⁶⁸ that no violence was offered or even threatened against Mr. Gouin, even though he had continued to assess timber dues after a meeting of residents had

asked him to desist, Mr. Gouin's version of events was somewhat different. In the same edition of the Herald,⁶⁹ Mr. Gouin claimed that as he approached the town, he saw a warning posted which read, "Warning: No timber dues to be collected in Silver City, by order, Vigilantes." This message was illustrated with a skull and cross-bones and an "elevated" timer agent. Upon his arrival in Silver City, Gouin's account continued, he was met by a crowd who ordered him to leave town immediately. He refused, and as of the report in the Herald, awaited further orders from the authorities.

Threats against the safety of government officials in the West were not translated into action by the white settlers of the area, but the very fact that such threats were made reveals that the characteristics of the British protest tradition were present in the settlers' protest movement.

The same conclusion can be drawn from the settlers' threats of non-compliance with government policies in the West, especially regarding timber dues and evictions from settled land.

The timber dues that the Western settlers had to pay in order to cut the wood on their own land may not have been as important an issue as the Government land regulations, but the wood tax appears to have been a constant irritation to the settlers as an example of the unfairness of government policy in the region. As early as 1880, the Saskatchewan Herald reported that people in Prince Albert were ignoring the timber regulations, adding that, "We wish to remain a law-abiding people, but we would like to have the laws and regulations of the land such as we could live under."⁷⁰

That relatively mild comment had become more definite resistance by

the time a group of settlers met in Edmonton in January of 1882 to discuss the same issue. Although the meeting ended with a committee being appointed to draft and send a petition to Ottawa asking that the timber dues be remitted until a survey of the land were made, the original intention of the meeting had been to propose stronger measures of protest. "Supposing all hands refused to pay [the timber dues]," those present asked, "what could the agent do about it?"⁷¹ The rebellion inherent in the question was recognized by the Edmonton Bulletin which suggested that the "red coats" at Fort Saskatchewan would provide an answer.⁷²

The Dominion Government's intention to evict settlers from land which they occupied and had often improved in order to grant the land to other interests, especially to the Canadian Pacific Railway, elicited an even angrier response from those in the Prairie West. Reporting on the proposed land sale in Manitoba in the summer of 1883, the Prince Albert Times warned that "many expect that blood shed will be the result of any attempt to drive the settlers from their homes."⁷³

By the fall of the same year, the Times was urging settlers in the District of Lorne to organize to fight against ejection from their land and stated that "organization in the present state of affairs means something more decisive than the word is usually meant to imply."⁷⁴

Throughout the years preceding the outbreak of actual rebellion, threats of stronger protest measures than meetings or petitions appeared in the columns of the Western press. On March 7, 1881 the Bulletin attacked the CPR 'Swindlecate,' claiming that:

the time will come when not all the wealth nor all the influence nor all the meanness that these three powers [the CPR, political

party, hirelings] can bring to bear will keep this bargain [the Syndicate]--procured by corruption and founded on injustice-- from being broken, by fair means or foul, by ballot or bullet,⁷⁵ while in December 1882 the Prince Albert Times reported a furor in Manitoba papers over the disallowance of Railway Charter legislation in which language of "secession and rebellion, independence or annexation" was used in the "heat of the discussion."⁷⁶ The spread of such language, if not the acceptance of the actions described, was revealed by Charles Mair's 1883 farewell speech to James Sieveright, Prince Albert's retiring Presbyterian minister in which he referred to "the deep feeling of discontent, amounting to indignation, at the position of affairs in this country, and the words insurrection and rebellion were bandied about from mouth to mouth."⁷⁷

Not only did the Western settlers threaten to carry their protest to the extent that other frontier groups before them had done, that is, to the point of rebellion against the government, they also justified such a recourse by appealing to the example of those groups. In stating the grievances of the North West, the Prince Albert Times argued that:

Such was the use made [as a "slaughter market for the benefit of useless appendages and worn out hacks of a political party"] of some of the other parts of our Dominion in earlier years and such was the course which finally forced the early settlers in Quebec and Ontario and afterwards those in Manitoba into rebellion" ⁷⁸

In February of 1884, the same paper, despite its otherwise Conservative bias, approvingly reprinted an editorial from the Liberal Edmonton Bulletin which drew the same parallels between the situation in the North

West and that of Ontario and Quebec in 1837 and Manitoba in 1870 as the quotation above, and which concluded, moreover, that rebellion was probably also necessary in order for the North-West to win its rights.⁷⁹

The inclusion of the 1870 Resistance among rebellions which were part of the Revolutionary tradition invoked by the North-West settlers is especially interesting as that uprising was generally regarded as the work of Riel and the Metis alone.

As well as seeing parallels between their own situation and that of earlier Canadian protest movements, the settlers also justified their threat of rebellion by placing themselves in the tradition of the American Revolution. In an article in the Bystander, reprinted in the Prince Albert Times, Goldwin Smith accused the Finance Minister of

rating the insurgents at the same time much in the language in which Granville and Townsend rated the colonists when they protested against the Stamp Tax: Ungrateful Manitobans, planted by our care, nourished by our indulgence to strength and opulence, will you grudge to contribute your mite to relieve us from the burden under which we lie?

"The Manitobans," Smith continued, "of both political parties reply, as the Colonists replied, and with equal justice."⁸⁰ The Times, calling Smith "a powerful thinker and writer," concurred with his assessment,⁸¹ and in one of its own editorials, continued the comparison between the American Revolution and the possibility of rebellion in the North-West. Replying to the Ottawa Citizen's accusation of "imaginary grievances" in the North-West, the Times warns of the North-West's "deep-seated dissatisfaction" with Government policy

which is growing stronger as the months go by and which is rapidly developing into something more potent than mere remonstrance. The throwing overboard of a few boxes of tea in the harbour of Boston over a century ago was an insignificant event in itself, but was a precursor of a revolution which lost the American colonies to the mother country.⁸²

The implication of the historical reference, and the content of the editorial as a whole, made clear the lengths to which the settlers professed themselves ready to go in order to achieve redress of their grievances.

By their British heritage, their reaction to the conditions of frontier life, and their methods of expressing discontent with the Dominion government and agitating for redress of grievances, the North-West settlers identified themselves as participating in the tradition of frontier protest which was developed in Britain and brought to North America by British immigrants. However, unlike other instances of frontier protest, both in Canada and in the United States, the settlers of the Prairie West did not carry their protest to the point of rebellion during the 1880's. Despite their agitation and threats of stronger measures, the white settlers, with few exceptions, did not throw in their lot with the Rebellion led by Riel and fought by the Indians and Metis in the spring of 1885. In fact, with the outbreak of the Rebellion, many of the settlers joined the government forces and actively fought against Riel and his followers. This marked turn-around in their attitudes raises questions which must be addressed and whose answers provide insight both into the nature of the settlers' protest tradition and its significance for the history of the Prairie West.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

- ¹Prince Albert Times, April 11, 1884, p. 2.
- ²see Chapter 1, page 5.
- ³Canada, parliament, Sessional Papers, 13, no. 116 (1885), pp. 59-61.
- ⁴Prince Albert Times. Nov. 3, 1883, p. 6.
- ⁵from the MacLeod Gazette, reprinted in the Qu'Appelle Vidette, Nov. 6, 1884, p. 2.
- ⁶Edmonton Bulletin, Sept. 2, 1882, p. 2. For further examples of Western claims of contribution to the Dominion, see also the Regina Leader, March 22, 1883, p. 2 and Feb. 7, 1884, p. 2; and the Qu'Appelle Vidette, Dec. 18, 1884, p. 3. The latter reported a speech given by T.W. Jackson to a "large and influential meeting of settlers," December 8, 1884 at Moosomin on the subject of the region's grievances. Jackson "alluded to the growing importance of the North-West Territories to Canada, and also to the importance of Canadians being united in feeling, in order to promote the greatness and prosperity of Canada as a whole."
- ⁷Prince Albert Times, Feb. 28, 1883, p. 1.
- ⁸Ibid., Nov. 3, 1883, p. 6.
- ⁹Calgary Weekly Herald, Nov. 30, 1883, p. 2.
- ¹⁰Ibid., April 9, 1885, p. 4.
- ¹¹Ibid.
- ¹²Canada, Parliament, Sessional Papers, 12, no. 43 (1886), p. 501.
- ¹³Calgary Herald, Nov. 12, 1884, p. 2. The fourth need identified by the Herald was the appointment of competent judges, and the creation of a better judicial system.
- ¹⁴Prince Albert Times, June 27, 1883, p. 2.
- ¹⁵Edmonton Bulletin, Feb. 13, 1882, p. 2.
- ¹⁶Ibid.
- ¹⁷Ibid. For further information on the related issues of local control, parliamentary representation and regional autonomy, see L.H. Thomas, The Struggle for Responsible Government in the North-West Territories, 1870-97, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), especially Part 2, Chapter 5, which deals with the years 1883-8. See also C.B. Koester, "The Agitation for Parliamentary Representation of the North-West Territories, 1870-1887," Saskatchewan History, 26 (Winter

1973): 11-22. Koester also suggests that the Rebellion can be seen as one episode in the agitation for representation, or, in other words, as an episode of the white settlers' history.

In Manitoba, which already had parliamentary representation, the drive for local control was often expressed in terms of "provincial rights," as in the controversy over the disallowance of Manitoban railway charters in 1882 and 1883. Thus, the Manitoba Free Press equated disallowance with a threat to provincial autonomy in an editorial on November 6, 1882. It argued:

They might as well obliterate the Manitoba Legislature completely, and save the country the expense of maintaining it. If one act, passed by that body within its constitutional jurisdiction, can be disallowed, so can any and all; and as for any provincial independence it secures under the present order of things, it might as well cease to exist (p. 4).

¹⁸For more information on the Disallowance Controversy in Manitoba, see W.L Morton, Manitoba: A History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957) pp. 213-14. Also, see footnote 17 above.

¹⁹The agitation for "provincial rights" was a controversial issue in Manitoba, as the different editorial opinions reveal. As indicated in footnote 17, and in a series of editorials in the Spring of 1883, the Winnipeg Free Press was a strong supporter of the claim for rights (Jan. 1, 1883, p. 4; Jan. 11, 1883, p. 4; Mar. 13, 1883, p. 4; etc.), while the Brandon Daily Mail supported the idea of provincial rights (Dec. 19, 1882, p. 2) but was generally critical of its proponents (Dec. 20, 1882, p. 2). The Winnipeg Daily Times, another Conservative paper, denied any claim to "provincial rights" for Manitoba and characterized those supporting the idea as "Repudiators and Secessionists." (Dec. 16, 1882, p. 4.).

²⁰Prince Albert Times, Oct. 10, 1884, p. 2. Editorial argues that local troubles are due to hard times and not to the Government.

²¹Ibid., July 25, 1884, p. 4. Riel's speech to a meeting of Prince Albert residents at Treston Hall, representative of the points on which Riel and the whites did agree. Further references regarding the opinion **that the government was too far away include a petition from Edmonton** residents which claimed that "on account of the distance of Edmonton from the centre of government, the lands have not been surveyed by Government officials . . ." (Edmonton Bulletin, April 1, 1882, p. 4). Similarly, the Saskatchewan Herald of March 15, 1880, p. 2 reported that, at a public meeting in Prince Albert called to protest the rumoured abolition of the Territorial Government, two men spoke against taking protest action through petition, arguing that John A. Macdonald should be trusted to know what was best. "But this extreme view of party fidelity," the report went on, "did not find an echo in the mind of the meeting, people referring to trust their own judgement to that of a gentleman who had never seen the country, and who could therefore know nothing personally of its requirements." See also the Calgary Herald, March 19, 1884, p. 4 for an editorial on the same subject.

²²Ibid., Feb. 8, 1884, p. 2. A similar sentiment was expressed in the MacLeod Gazette, Sept. 14, 1882, p. 2.

²³Edmonton Bulletin, Oct. 29, 1881, p. 2.

²⁴Prince Albert Times, Oct. 31, 1883, p. 2.

²⁵Ibid., Nov. 14, 1884, p. 4. Further illustrations of the difficulties caused by the lack of magistrates are found in a report in the Saskatchewan Herald on Nov. 10, 1883, p. 1, to the effect that although court had been advertised for Battleford on November 8, "as no magistrate or judge put in an appearance, court was not held." The same situation was reported at Calgary by the Calgary Herald, June 25, 1884, p. 4 with an account of the negative effects of such an adjournment: people from outlying districts had had to stay in town at considerable expense, witnesses would be released from bond and the necessity of testifying, and prisoners would therefore escape justice. The Herald ends by calling for the appointment of three additional stipendiary magistrates, for a total of six, one of whom should be resident in Calgary.

²⁶Saskatchewan Herald, Sept. 9, 1878, p. 2.

²⁷Edmonton Bulletin, Aug. 19, 1882, p. 2.

²⁸Prince Albert Times, Dec. 13, 1882, p. 2; Jan. 17, 1883, p. 1; Feb. 14, 1883, p. 6; Feb. 28, 1883, p. 2.

²⁹Ibid., June 13, 1883, p. 6.

³⁰Calgary Herald, Nov. 9, 1883, p. 4; Nov. 23, 1883, p. 4.

³¹Edmonton Bulletin, March 28, 1881, p. 1. Qu'Appelle Vidette, Dec. 18, 1884, p. 2.

³²Prince Albert Times, Nov. 14, 1884, p. 4.

³³For further information on the land questions in the West during the 1870's and 1880's, see articles by L. Rodwell, "Land Claims in the Prince Albert Settlement," Saskatchewan History 19 (Autumn 1966): 1-23 and "Prince Albert River Lots," Ibid., pp. 100-110. See also Thomas Flanagan, Riel and the Rebellion: 1885 Reconsidered (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1983), especially Chapter 2 and Stanley, The Birth, Chapter 12, especially pages 248-258.

³⁴Edmonton Bulletin, Nov. 5, 1881, p. 2.

³⁵Ibid. Further examples of the settlers' views regarding the land issues include an editorial from the Edmonton Bulletin, Nov. 12, 1881, p. 1, concerning land claim disputes in Edmonton. The paper argued, "Had the Government with a reasonable watchful eye to the welfare of the settlers caused the surveys to be proceeded with as soon as the base lines were run, two years ago, all this trouble would have been avoided

and settlement would have advanced with double the rapidity it has done." The Bulletin continued to discuss the issue in a series of editorials in the Spring of 1882.

The land issues were a major concern to the men who met at John Glenn's cabin at Fish Creek on April 5, 1885. Mr Livingston, the chairman of the meeting stated that "between government reserves, leases, school lands, Hudson Bay lands, a man was unable to find a spot to settle. If a man did settle, he was sure to be chased by someone, either by the police, land agents, or government officials of some kind, . . ." (Calgary Herald, April 9, 1884, p. 4). For further discussion of the meeting at Glenn's cabin see D. Breen, "Plain Talk from Plain Western Men." Alberta Historical Review 18 (Summer 1970); 8-13. See also the Qu'Appelle Vidette, Dec. 18, 1884, p. 2 for a report of the resolutions regarding land adopted at the Moosomin residents' meeting of December 8, 1884.

³⁶MacLeod Gazette, Sept. 4, 1882, p. 1.

³⁷Edmonton Bulletin, Nov. 5, 1881, p. 1.

³⁸Calgary Herald, May 28, 1881, p. 3.

³⁹Edmonton Bulletin, Oct. 29, 1881, p. 4. (quotation from a letter to the Toronto Globe.)

⁴⁰Prince Albert Times, Feb. 29, 1884, p. 1. (Resolution #9, meeting at Colleston School House).

⁴¹Ibid., Feb. 22, 1884, p. 2.

⁴²Edmonton Bulletin, Dec. 24, 1881, p. 2.

⁴³Qu'Appelle Vidette, Oct. 9, 1884, p. 2-3. Further references to public meetings can be found frequently in all the Western papers of the period. A good example of the varied purposes and results of these meetings is provided by the Minutes of a meeting of "actual and intending" settlers held at Fort Edmonton on January 15, 1880, and reported on February 23, 1880 by the Saskatchewan Herald. Gathering to "treat on different matters concerning the good of the country" (p. 3) the settlers discussed the Timber **Regulations**, resolved that the Act should be modified so that settlers could cut the wood on their own land for their own use free of charge (p. 1) and drew up a petition to this effect; they then enrolled a Mounted Volunteer Rifle Company of 27 initial members, resolved to apply for official approval and boasted that "Edmonton will have as fine a corps of mixed English and French riflemen as there stands on Canadian soil, and just as loyal." The meeting then composed a letter commending mission work among the local Indians and asked for government support of the work; they prepared a petition asking for a Post Office at Edmonton; they voted 30 **dollars** to the Treasurer to procure a news telegraphic dispatch from Winnipeg; they decided to hold a further meeting to decide what to do with the Agricultural Society's surplus money; and finally, the settlers agreed to prepare a petition praying that the Government would allow Colonel Jarvis to remain in charge of Fort Saskatchewan instead of being sent to "the front, as had been rumoured" (p. 3).

- ⁴⁴Saskatchewan Herald, January 16, 1885, p. 1-2.
- ⁴⁵Prince Albert Times, Feb. 28, 1883, p. 4.
- ⁴⁶Manitoba Daily Free Press, Dec. 20, 1883, p. 4. See also Prince Albert Times, Jan. 11, 1884, p. 2.
- ⁴⁷Prince Albert Times, May 30, 1884, p. 4.
- ⁴⁸Saskatchewan Herald, Feb. 6, 185, p. 1.
- ⁴⁹Wilding and Laundry, An Encyclopedia, 550-3.
- ⁵⁰Canada, Parliament, Sessional Papers, 13, no. 116 (1885); 51-2.
- ⁵¹Edmonton Bulletin, Feb. 21, 1881, p. 2.
- ⁵²Prince Albert Times, Oct. 3, 1883, p. 2.
- ⁵³Edmonton Bulletin, Feb. 11, 1882, p. 3.
- ⁵⁴Ibid.
- ⁵⁵Prince Albert Times, May 23, 1884, p. 1.
- ⁵⁶Ibid., Oct. 24, 1883, p. 1.
- ⁵⁷Ibid., June 13, 1883, p. 1.
- ⁵⁸Ibid.
- ⁵⁹Ibid., Oct. 24, 1883, p. 2.
- ⁶⁰Ibid., Oct. 10, 1883, p. 2.
- ⁶¹Ibid., Feb. 28, 1883, p. 2.
- ⁶²Gary Abrams, Prince Albert: The First Century, 1866-1966 (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1966).
- ⁶³Prince Albert Times, Nov. 16, 1883, p. 1.
- ⁶⁴Ibid., May 16, 1883, p. 1.
- ⁶⁵Ibid., May 16, 1883, p. 2.
- ⁶⁶Ibid.
- ⁶⁷quoted in D.H. Breen, The Canadian Prairie West and the Ranching Frontier, 1874-1924 (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1983) p. 50. (Telegram from C.B. Elliot to Sir David Macpherson, 10 April, 1885.) Further examples of threatened violence include the meeting at John Glenn's cabin on April 5, 1885 and reported in the Calgary Herald of April 9, 1884, p. 4. Voicing their frustration at conditions in the

country, especially land issues such as reserves, lack of patents and the encroachments of the Cochrane ranch, Livingston, the chairman stated, "unless the land be all opened up for homestead entry all must either fight for our rights or leave the country and if I am **compelled to leave** the country I will leave marks on the trail behind me". There is some ambiguity regarding the exact meaning of Livingston's threat. He may have been implying violence against persons, as he had earlier stated that "for the present I defend my claim as my neighbours do, behind my Winchester", or he may have been threatening violence against property, an extension of his vow to burn up all his improvements if forced to leave the country. John Glenn, on the other hand, was very clear as to his intentions, arguing, "It is useless for us to remain in the country unless we get our rights in every respect. If we do not get them, I will be compelled to burn my place and if I do I will not leave many ranches behind me."

These threats are particularly interesting in view of Rudé's assertion that arson as a means of protest was recognized in the rest of Europe as a "peculiarly British device." (The Crowd in History, p. 241).

⁶⁸Calgary Herald, March 5, 1884, p. 1.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Saskatchewan Herald, March 15, 1880, p. 4.

⁷¹Edmonton Bulletin, Jan. 7, 1882, p. 4.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Prince Albert Times, June 20, 1883, p. 2.

⁷⁴Ibid., Oct. 3, 1883, p. 2.

⁷⁵Edmonton Bulletin, May 7, 1881, p. 2.

⁷⁶Prince Albert Times, Dec. 13, 1883, p. 2.

⁷⁷Ibid., Sept. 26, 1883, p. 1.

⁷⁸Ibid., July 11, 1883, p. 2.

⁷⁹Ibid., Feb. 22, 1884, p. 2. Threats of rebellion, veiled or overt, were frequent in the Western press prior to 1885, whether as a report of the sentiments of a public meeting or as the opinion of the paper itself. For example, the Saskatchewan Herald of October 13, 1883, p. 2 argued that the Government couldn't continue to ignore memorials and petitions "or they may find the old issues of 'no taxation without representation' and 'representation by population' revived with a force and distinctness that will compell attention." Similarly, in an indignant editorial concerning the news of the disallowance of Manitoba's railway charters, the Manitoba Daily Free Press threatened that "Less **arbitrary** acts have provoked an indignant people to the use of other than constitutional means to secure the untrammelled enjoyment of their liberties" (Nov. 6, 1882, p. 4).

⁸⁰Prince Albert Times, July 25, 1883, p. 2.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid., Sept. 19, 1883, p. 2.

CHAPTER FOUR

Restrained Protest: A Traditional Response

There is a basic assumption among historians of the Rebellion period in the West that the white settlers' discontent was less profound and therefore less significant than that of the Metis. Beal and Macleod argue that "fundamentally, as Riel realized, the grievances of the Prince Albert settlers, although strongly held, were much more superficial and administrative than the demands of the Metis"¹ while Flanagan makes a similar point in suggesting that the resolution of land claims in Prince Albert "no doubt contributed to the reluctance of the white settlers and English half-breeds to join the Metis of St. Laurent when the latter took up arms."² Compared with the Metis' dramatic struggle for racial **survival** and with the enigmatic person of Louis Riel, the settlers' anti-government agitation assumes the role of a pale shadow.

Certainly the settlers' methods of protest during this period do not easily lend themselves to definition as even an organized movement, let alone as a revolt or rebellion. Grievances rankled, tempers flared from time to time, meetings were held and resolutions passed, sometimes threats of rebellion were made; but no cohesive plan of action emerged to bind the many discontents of the region into a unified force. No visionary leader stood out among the whites; such leaders as there were, often newspaper editors or articulate farmers, were **concerned primarily** by local issues and the specific grievances of their town or locality. The closest the white community came to producing a visionary was W.H. Jackson, but, despite his best efforts, he was not accepted as a leader in his community, but rather regarded as a madman.³ Not only did the

white settlers fail to punctuate their protest by taking up arms against the Canadian government, they actively assisted that government in suppressing the Metis and Indians who did. The temptation to relegate the white settlers' history during the early 1880's to a subordinate role compared to that of Louis Riel and the Metis is thus entirely understandable and, depending on the questions being asked, perfectly acceptable.

It is not acceptable, however, to pass over the historical role of the whites during this period when considering important questions regarding the nature and development of Prairie culture.

There is a traditional and romantic claim among Western historians that the discontented regionalism which has marked the history of the Prairie West has its origins in the Metis' fight for survival against the expansion of the Canadian nation. Arguing that "the resistance of the Metis was in many ways pathetic and even comic, but it was sufficient to set a tradition at work, the tradition of western grievance,"⁴ W.L. Morton places the beginning of western discontent with Riel's partial and soon undermined victory of 1870. Because Ontarians quickly began to outnumber the Metis in Manitoba and as Manitoba had not been granted control of its lands, Morton claims that "the West was left with a sharpened sense of inequality and a tradition of grievance and of special claims, to be embodied by Bills of rights from Riel's series of four to that of Mr. Hazen Argue M.P. of May 1955."⁵ S.D. Clark agrees with Morton's premise and traces the roots of Western discontent even further back than 1870, stating that

the history of political unrest in western Canada reaches back to the Red River insurrection of 1870 and the Northwest

rebellion of 1885; indeed, it might be thought to have its beginnings in the opposition to the settlement of the Red River Valley which **culminated** in the Seven Oaks massacre of 1816.⁶

However, despite the fact that there are similarities between grievances of the Metis and those of the white settlers, domination by an outside power, for example, modern Western society did not grow out of the experiences of the Metis and the Indians, but rather from the culture of the Ontario immigrants of the 1870's, 1880's and beyond who shaped the West in the image of the Ontario society they had left. Metis and Indian discontent was, and continues to be, very real in the West, but it is not the same discontent which fueled the CCF, the Social Credit, and which continues to influence the relationship between Ottawa, Ontario, and the Western provinces. The root causes of Western protest lie in the cultural heritage of those Ontario immigrants who settled the West in the last half of the 19th century.

In order to support this argument, it is necessary to re-examine the rebellion period in the North-West, focusing on the experiences of the white settlers. Through a study of the settlers' actions and attitudes in the time before and during the rebellion of 1885, and especially by an analysis of their apparent **inconsistencies** and contradictions, it is possible to discern those forces which shaped the settlers' behavior and which influenced the developing character of Prairie West culture even into the twentieth century.

The actions of the white settlers during the period of Metis agitation which culminated in the Rebellion of 1885 appeared contradictory, even hypocritical, to contemporary observers, and caused later historians of the events to conclude that the settlers had not been

deeply serious about their own anti-government protests. After all, the same people who had written petitions, organized and participated in protest meetings, one of which had been instrumental in bringing Riel to the North-West, and indulged in bombastic threats regarding the lengths to which they were prepared to go to achieve their goals, not only did not support the Metis and Indians when they took up arms against the government, but many of them fought actively with the **government** forces to suppress the Rebellion. As discussed at the beginning of the chapter this led some historians to regard their grievances as superficial and easily resolved, while others attributed the whites' actions to lack of resolve and even cowardice. Howard argues that "...those whites who had helped to promote the struggle did not stick to see it through"⁷ while Lamb claims that the English half-breeds and "small white tradesmen and settlers in the Prince Albert area... were not without sympathy for the plight of the French Metis, but they balked from anything that meant danger for themselves."⁸

In the eyes of the contemporary observers no less than in the opinions of historians, the contrast between the settlers' political agitation and rebellious talk and the undoubted loyalty of their actions during the Rebellion was surprising enough to evoke considerable and often critical comment.

For the Metis, who had counted on the settlers to remain neutral in the event of an uprising, if not to actually join them, the whites' decision to fight against them was seen as an inexplicable betrayal. Meeting with Riel at Duck Lake two days after the battle there, T.E. Jackson reported that Riel was angry that the white settlers would fight against him and felt that they should at least remain neutral.⁹ Other

Metis, and the priests who served them, felt that the whites had betrayed the Metis not only by opposing their rebellion, but also by having encouraged them to that point by their own agitation and by assurances of support and sympathy. This was the view stated by Father Fourmond in his deposition of August 1885 at the trial of Albert Monkman and others in Regina; "...the poor ignorant half-breeds were encouraged on from step to step in the late uprising till their false white pretended friends and their English fellow half-breeds left them on the verge of rebellion and bloodshed...."¹⁰ Michel Dumas, a Metis leader, expressed the same opinion in more dramatic terms in the fall of 1885. "The half-breeds had no intention of going to war", he claimed in an interview with the Pioneer Press Gazette of St. Paul, Montana, "but were provoked and forced into it by English agents."¹¹

Based on the same premise, that the Metis had risen in large part due to the encouragement of the white settlers, numerous articles in the Eastern press, especially in the Toronto Mail,¹² did not recognize any difference between the settlers' agitation for redress of grievances and the taking up of arms against the Government, and labelled the North-West settlers as "rebels." Although the Government had been concerned enough about the possibly rebellious nature of the settlers in the Prince Albert area to remove all arms from the militia, in late 1885,¹³ the fact that the Crown later charged only two whites with treasonous activities,¹⁴ and both were acquitted, reveals that from a legal point of view, the Government was forced to concede that political agitation had not equated rebellion.

The white population of the North-West was itself uneasy about the part some of its members may have played in encouraging the Metis

rebellion. By and large, this sense of possible culpability was resolved by upholding the loyalty of the majority of the settlers, and singling out a relative few as instigators of the rebellion. An editorial in the Regina Leader of March 31, 1885, reflected this view, stating that "-without wishing to cast the first stone it is the fact - and with shame and abhorrence be it said - that a few white settlers who are well known, have been abetting the traitor Riel ever since he returned to this country."¹⁵ In the same vein the Prince Albert Times blamed the activities of white agitators for "the encouragement given to the Metis to believe that our own people believed in the justice of their cause and might be relied upon in the event of a resort to arms, if not to actually help the rebels, at any rate to maintain strict **neutrality during the** conflict with the Government."¹⁶ The Times also argued that the always loyal majority of settlers were afraid to speak out against Riel in the time before the rebellion because the Government was doing nothing to check him.¹⁷

As the above quotations testify, the Western press agreed with the opinion of other contemporary observers that white settlers, even if only a few, had been morally, if not legally, responsible for the Rebellion. This view that the whites had played an important though hidden role in the Rebellion was not generally held by historians of the region. Even when their presence and participation in political agitation is recognized, they are nonetheless relegated to a supporting role in a drama which stars the actions and personalities of the Metis. Ironically, the white settlers, loudly criticized in their own time for their supposed part in the Rebellion, have been almost ignored by historians of the Rebellion for a supposed lack of participation in the

events of 1885.

Both the contemporary and the historical interpretations of the whites' role in the Rebellion are based on a Metis-focused analysis of events. By centering on the actions of Louis Riel and the Metis, especially on the taking up of arms, the white settlers become important only in terms of their help or hindrance to the Metis cause. Despite the value of such a focus for understanding the history of the Metis in the latter half of the 19th century, the consuming interest in the Metis has tended to obscure the significance of the whites' actions in the context of their own history and, as the whites were the shapers of the new Prairie culture, for the history of the emerging Prairie West.

In order to understand the logic underlying the whites' involvement in the Rebellion, it is necessary to reappraise their actions in the light of their own **identity and culture**.

As was discussed in Chapter 2, the majority of immigrants arriving in the West during the 1870's and 1880's were from the province of Ontario. As Ontarians, as Canadians of a strongly felt British heritage, these settlers brought their culture to the West, including a particular tradition of frontier protest. However, despite their cultural tendency to seek redress of grievances through protest and political agitation, the settlers did not transfer their discontent from the form of meetings, petitions, and threats to that of armed defiance of the government. Why did they not? The answer to that question provides insight into the character of the culture which has shaped the Prairie West.

One possible explanation of the settlers' hesitancy to cross the boundary from protest to rebellion lies in S.D. Clark's thesis regarding the Canadian attitude towards rebellion. Clark argues that although

Canadians share the same heritage as the colonists who fought the American Revolution, the historical and geographical differences between the countries have resulted in the development of a particularly Canadian view of rebellion.¹⁸ Due to the demands of geography, Canada had developed centralized political and economic institutions to which "backcountry" rebellions were perceived to pose a threat. With the proximity of an expansionist American state to the south, Canadians worried that protest, if pushed too far, would weaken the country's institutions and expose it to American advances. As a result, Canadians are caught between their cultural history of frontier protest and the national security needs of loyalty. This argument has many convincing points and explains much about the Western settlers' willingness to strongly protest against the Dominion Government's officials and policies, even while refusing to join the Metis in an outright rebellion.

The fear of threatening Canada's central institutions and thereby endangering the national edifice which Clark has identified as a strong factor in Canadians' rejection of frontier rebellion was clearly expressed in a Brandon Daily Mail editorial in late 1882. "Some of the champions of 'Provincial Rights', The Mail argued, "are dealing in the veriest spread eaglesism." The editorial continued,

These Jefferson Bricks imagine that the provinces have a kind of State Right jurisdiction, and that a province may secede from the Confederation, whenever its local legislature wills it. This is sheer ignorance, and if it were not ignorance, it would be **prejudicial** to the Dominion, Anti-Canadian, un-British disloyal (sic), for anything that threatens the integrity of the Confederation threatens our promising Commonwealth.¹⁹

The general threat that the Mail's editorialist perceived was identified much more specifically by Mr. J.J. Campbell, Justice of the Peace for Prince Albert and the District of Lorne. At a mass meeting held in Prince Albert on October 16, 1883 to discuss the formation of a Settlers' Union, Mr. Campbell expressed his fears of the possible consequences of their agitation, declaring that:

He did not approve of the free use of the term rebellion. It might not do any harm in Prince Albert, but in some parts of the Territories there were men only too anxious to receive any encouragement in that direction, and therefore we should be cautious. Rebellion in this country meant annexation to the United States, and he for one was not prepared for that, nor did he think the majority of the people of these Territories were.²⁰

Whether or not J.J. Campbell reflected the majority opinion in the Territories, his remarks were well received at the meeting and his resolution urging cautious pressure on the government was unanimously passed. As both of these quotations reveal, the settlers of the Prairie West were aware of the possible threat that frontier agitation posed to the nation and wanted to limit its extent.

No doubt the factors identified by Clark's thesis could and probably did play an important role in preventing the political discontent of the white settlers from becoming rebellion in 1885. However, to accept Clark's argument as the complete explanation of the whites' behavior would be to ignore the settlers' place in a context larger than their Canadian identity. Not only were the settlers' actions characteristic of their beliefs and concerns as Canadians, they were also products of the settlers' British cultural heritage of frontier protest. In fact, their

Canadian concerns did not create their conservative, loyalist response to the Rebellion, but served to reinforce the attitudes that the settlers had inherited from their British background.

Not only did the Western settlers' discontent and political agitation during the 1870's and 1880's reflect the British protest tradition through the motives and methods discussed in Chapter 3, their behavior's connection with that tradition is also revealed in the character and, most importantly, in the limitations of their protest.

Until relatively recently, common conception held that popular protests in Britain, as in the rest of Europe, were uncontrolled and uncontrollable, wanton in their destruction of life and property. Recent studies, however, have suggested that the opposite appears to be true about the behaviour of those involved in popular protests. George Rudé, one of the leading proponents of a new characterization of popular protests and crowd action, identifies in the behaviour of their participants a "discriminating purposefulness."²¹ This meant that those involved in protests as dissimilar as the Gordon Riots²² and the actions of "Rebecca"²³ were alike in their determination to focus their actions towards specific goals. The Gordon Rioters, for example, protesting the suggestion that anti-Catholic measures should be lightened, expressed their displeasure by destroying houses and other property belonging to Catholics, while carefully sparing that of Protestants.²⁴ In the same way, those who rode with "Rebecca" in Wales were interested in pulling down only those toll-gates which they considered unjustified, and left other, more acceptable gates, standing.²⁵ Many other British protests, from the "Church and King"²⁶ rioters in Manchester to the followers of Captain Ludd²⁷ exhibited the same purposefulness in their actions.

Pauline Maier has identified a similar "focused character" in colonial American uprisings.²⁸ Although American historians have tended to view colonial protests against British policies and officials, such as impressment and customs officers, as being precursors of the American Revolution, Maier points out that these protests were in fact motivated by the same community concerns as the Norfolk inoculation riots of 1768 in Virginia, where a group of townspeople acted together to drive newly inoculated women and children out of the town for fear that they would infect others with smallpox.²⁹ In these protests, as in others in colonial America, Maier argues that "the effort remained one of safeguarding not the interests of isolated groups alone, but the community's safety and welfare."³⁰ In order to achieve these goals, American protestors, like their British predecessors and counter parts, confined their actions to targets which had a connection with their grievances. Customs rioters directed their attacks against customs officers and informers, while the Boston mob exercised such control that it refused to riot on the holy days of Saturday and Sunday.³¹

Because of the discriminating nature of their purposes and targets, popular protests in both Britain and America had a much lower level of violence than is commonly supposed. As Stevenson remarks about the labour disputes of the West Country weavers in 1738-40 and the North East colliers in 1765, "It would be unwise to place too much emphasis on violence in the course of eighteenth-century labour relations: disturbances were often only the tip of an iceberg of peaceful negotiation and orderly adjustments."³²

Brown makes a similar point about American protest movements. Of the eighteen insurgencies of varying degrees from Bacon's 1676 Rebellion in

Virginia to Hambright's march on the Pennsylvania government in 1755³³ which he identifies, Brown argues that only six could be counted as violent and of these six only one, Bacon's, saw major violence occur. He concludes that bloodshed was not a predominant characteristic of the colonial uprisings.³⁴

The restrained nature of the protesters' violence is revealed by the very small number of casualties for which they could be blamed. In England, there were no casualties in disturbances such as the Wilkite,³⁵ "No Popery"³⁶ and "Swing" riots,³⁷ nor in the food riots of 1766, while the Luddite and Rebecca riots and the 1736 Porteous riots at Edinburgh each resulted in one casualty.³⁸ The more impressive casualties, Rudé argues, were those inflicted on the protesters by the authorities, both the military and the courts. For example, twenty-five of the Gordon rioters were hanged (1780) while 285 of them had been killed during the riots by the military.³⁹ The American experience was similar in the rare occasion of fatalities inflicted by protesters and, when fatalities did occur, as when five people were killed in a 1762 riot near Norfolk, Virginia, Maier argues that their deaths could be attributed to the presence of "volatile foreign seamen."⁴⁰ An important difference between American and British protests lies in the relatively lower level of fatalities in America. Maier attributes this to the lack in America of both a large city like London and of an easily deployed regular army.⁴¹ Gordon Wood agrees especially with the latter point in **arguing** that the lack of effective authoritarian force probably contributed more to the relative non-violence of the American Revolution than did **any** inherent conservatism of those involved in it.⁴²

The settlers' agitation was similar to other protest movements not

only in the violence which did occur or was threatened, but also in the ultimate restraint placed upon the extent to which they were willing to use violence. The threats against government officials, for example, Mr. Waggoner, the Crown Timber Agent, and Mr. Gisborne of the telegraph office,⁴³ and the violence against property, as in the tearing down of the telegraph poles, was typical of British protest movements. So too was the fact that the threats were never realized, nor did the pole-downers attack other targets, "sacking the stores", perhaps, as Mr. Campbell feared they might.⁴⁴

The most important point is that the settlers of the Prairie West did not default on their status as protesters by their lack of revolutionary goals or their refusal to engage in the widespread violence of a rebellion. Their attitudes and actions, reinforced by their Canadian concerns, were typical of the British protest tradition. Acting out of concern for the welfare of their community, the settlers rejected extreme actions which might jeopardize its safety. American annexation posed a threat should the region be made vulnerable by a rebellion; so too did Louis Riel. Metis, French-speaking, heretical Catholic, Riel was the **epitome** of an outsider to the white, English-speaking Protestant community of the settlers, and when he became linked with the even more foreign and threatening Indians, the whites automatically closed ranks against him. Their decision to join the Eastern militia and fight against the Metis is hardly surprising; it was fueled by their sense of community. When it came to a choice between supporting the Metis or the Ontario militia, there was no question of the settlers' "loyalty." As Eastwood Jackson attempted to explain to Riel, "we could not take up arms against Canadians."⁴⁵ Not only that, they could not expose their

community to the dangers of the Indian war which might follow upon Riel's actions.

Thus, by the same British heritage which compelled them to protest against the conditions of their frontier environment, the white settlers were restrained in the extent to which they would press their agitation against the government. Far from being merely adjuncts to the more dramatic events being played out by the Metis, the white settlers were engaged in their own equally important process during the Rebellion period. By their actions and attitudes during this time, they revealed the manner in which the protest tradition of their British heritage influenced their reaction to their environment.

The settlers' protest tradition was based on a shared culture between the metropolis and the hinterland. In the same way that the American colonists began their protests against England in order to claim the "rights of Englishmen", the Western settlers' agitation against Ottawa and Ontario was based on the assumption that as Canadians and "fellow British subjects" they were entitled to the same treatment as those in the East. This is in sharp contrast to the protest tradition of the Metis which was founded on the struggle against a foreign power, different in race, religion, language and customs. Rather than modern Western discontent growing from the Metis tradition of protest, if anything the Metis adopted the forms of the white settlers' protest, the use of petitions and the claim of rights as British subjects,⁴⁶ for example. In many ways, the armed protest of 1885 in the North-West reveals an intersection of the two traditions, and the last manifestation of the Metis' unrestrained struggle against a foreign power. The white settlers, by the complexity of their behaviour, their drive to protest,

and their need for loyalty, portrayed the influences which are the real root of Western discontent. The West's continuing status as Ontario's hinterland has continued to elicit hostility towards the east and to fuel movements of protest, from the Social Credit to the Western Canada Concept, which have as their goal autonomy and local control for the West. At the same time, however, Western protest continues to show the restraint of the British protest tradition. Despite periodic threats of drastic measures, such as the secessionist platform of the WCC, Western protest does not take violent or revolutionary forms. It remains an attitude of mind, the tension between conflicting needs of loyalty and protest.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

- ¹Beal and MacLeod, Prairie Fire, p. 111.
- ²Thomas Flanagan, Riel and the Rebellion, p. 37.
- ³Beal and MacLeod, Prairie Fire, p. 306.
- ⁴W.L. Morton, "Bias of Prairie Politics," p. 58.
- ⁵Ibid., p. 60.
- ⁶S.D. Clark, Foreword, The Progressive Party in Canada, by W.L. Morton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), p. vii.
- ⁷J.K. Howard, Strange Empire, a narrative of the Northwest. (New York: Morrow, 1952), p. 375.
- ⁸R.E. Lamb, Thunder in the North: Conflict over the Riel Risings, 1870 . . . 1885 (New York: Pageant Press, 1957), p. 140.
- ⁹Beal and MacLeod, Prairie Fire, p. 166.
- ¹⁰Deposition of Father Fourmand, "Queen vs Monkman et al," Canada Sessional Papers 19 No. 12 (1886), paper 45c, p. 22.
- ¹¹quoted in Lamb, Thunder, p. 41.
- ¹²Beal and MacLeod, Prairie Fire, p. 316.
- ¹³Prince Albert Times, Jan. 23, 1885, p. 2.
- ¹⁴Thomas Scott and W.H. Jackson.
- ¹⁵Regina Leader, March 31, 1885, p. 2.
- ¹⁶Prince Albert Times, June 5, 1885, p. 4.
- ¹⁷Ibid., June 12, 1885, p. 2.
- ¹⁸Clark, Movements, pp. 9-10.
- ¹⁹Brandon Daily Mail, Dec. 22, 1882, p. 2.
- ²⁰Prince Albert Times, Oct. 17, 1883, p. 6.
- ²¹George Rudé, The Crowd in History, p. 81. Other important writers on the same theme include E.J. Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (New York: W.W. Norton, 1959); and E.P. Thompson, in the works cited in Note 16 of Chapter One.

²²riots protesting the lifting of certain anti-Catholic restrictions, named after Lord George Gordon, leader of London's Protestant Association, in London during June 1780.

²³the name adopted by groups of men who, in disguise, tore down unpopular toll gates in Wales in the 1840's.

²⁴John Stevenson, Popular Disturbances, p. 84.

²⁵Rudé, Crowd in History, p. 158.

²⁶Loyalist riots in the Midlands during the early 1790's; liberal Non-Conformists the target of attacks.

²⁷Luddism: name given to protests in the Midlands during the early nineteenth century. In order to force wage and other concessions from masters, hosiery workers resorted to breaking their machines.

²⁸Maier, "Popular Uprisings," p. 6-7. Other American historians writing on the same theme included Lloyd Rudolph, "The Eighteenth Century Mob in America and Europe," American Quarterly 11 (Winter, 1959): 447-69 and Gordon S. Wood, "A Note on Mobs in the American Revolution," William and Mary Quarterly 3rd ser. 23 (October 1966): 635-42. For useful bibliographical information on American colonial uprisings, see Richard M. Brown, Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

²⁹Maier, "Popular Uprisings", p. 7.

³⁰Ibid., p. 12.

³¹Ibid., p. 17.

³²Stevenson, Popular Disturbances, p. 131.

³³Richard Brown, "Violence in the American Revolution," Essays on the American Revolution (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), p. 85.

³⁴Ibid., p. 86.

³⁵London riots of the 1760's and 1770's; centred on the person of John Wilkes, seen as the champion of the common man.

³⁶anti-Catholic outbursts, such as the Gordon Riots.

³⁷rural disturbances in Southern England, 1830-32, marked by arson and machine breaking.

³⁸Rudé, Crowd in History, p. 255. Captain Porteous, having fired on a crowd at a smugglers' execution, was sentenced to death, reprieved, and then hanged by the people in the Grass Market, Edinburgh. (Rudé, p. 35).

³⁹Ibid. See also Stevenson, Popular Disturbances, p. 313.

⁴⁰Maier, "Popular Uprisings," p. 38.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 18.

⁴²Wood, "A Note on Mobs," p. 641.

⁴³see Chapter 3.

⁴⁴Prince Albert Times, Nov. 16, 1883, p. 1.

⁴⁵Beal and MacLeod, Prairie Fire, p. 166.

⁴⁴W.L. Morton, Introduction, Alexander Begg's Red River Journal and Other Papers Relative to the Red River Resistance of 1869-1870 (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1956).

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APPENDIX 1

Petition of the Inhabitants of Orange County, to Governor Tryon.*

"15th May, 1771.

"To His Excellency, Williams Tryon, Esq., His Majesty's governor, in Chief in and over the Province of North Carolina.

"The petition of us, the inhabitants of Orange County, humbly showeth:--
"First--That we have often been informed of late, that your excellency is determined not to lend a kind ear to the just complaints of the people in regard to having roguish officers discarded, and others more honest propagated in their stead, and sheriffs and other officers in power, who have abused the trust reposed in them, to be brought to a clear, candid, and impartial account of their past conduct, and other grievances of the like nature, we have long labored under without any apparent hope of redress.

"Secondly--That your Excellency is determined on taking the lives of many of the inhabitants of this county, and others adjacent to it, which persons, being nominated in the advertisement, we know them to be men of the most remarkable honest characters of any in our country. These aspersions, though daily confirmed to us, yet scarcely gains credit with the more polite amongst us; still, being so often confirmed, we cannot help having some small jealousies abounding among us. In order, therefore, to remove them, we would heartily implore your Excellency, that of your clemency, you would so far indulge us, as to let us know by a kind answer to this petition, whether your Excellency will lend an impartial ear to our petition, or no, which if we can be assured of, we will with joy embrace so favorable an opportunity of laying before your Excellency a full detail of all our grievances, and remain in full hopes and confidence of being redressed by your Excellency, in each and every one of them, as far as lies in your power; which happy change would yield such alacrity, and promulgate such harmony in poor pensive North Carolina, that the presaged tragedy of the warlike troops, marching with ardor to meet each other, may by the happy conduct of our leaders on each side be prevented. The interest of a whole province, and the lives of his Majesty's subjects are not toys or matters to be trifled with. Many of our common people are mightily infatuated with the horrid alarms we have heard; but we still hope they have been wrong represented.

"The chief purport of the small petition being to know whether your excellency will hear our petition or no. We hope for a speedy and candid answer. In the meantime your humble petitioners shall remain in full hopes and confidence of having a kind answer.

"And as in duty bound, shall ever pray.

"Signed, in behalf of the county, by John Williams, Joseph Scott,
Samuel Low, Samuel Clark."
James Wilson,

"Delivered to his Excellency at Alamance Camp, the 15th day of May, 1771, at six o'clock in the evening."

reproduced in: J.M. Wheeler, Historical Sketches of North Carolina from 1584 to 1851, compiled from original records, official documents, and traditional statements, with biographical sketches of her distinguished statesmen, jurists, lawyers, soldiers, divines, etc. (Baltimore: Regional Pub. Co., 1964).

APPENDIX 2

Petition of the Residents of Battleford to the
Minister of the Interior, March 1881

To the Hon. the Minister of the Interior, Ottawa:

The petition of the undersigned residents of Battleford, in the
North-West Territories,-- HUMBLY SHOWETH:

That the town site of Battleford was reserved in the year 1876
by the government.

That it is the present seat of Government, the headquarters of
the North-West Mounted Police on the Saskatchewan, and of Indian Affairs
in this district.

That Battleford is situated on the Battle and Saskatchewan
Rivers, and is the centre, not only of a large and fertile agricultural
country, but of the North-West, politically, geographically and
commercially.

That a bridge over Battle River is now in process of
construction, which will still further attract travel and business to
this point.

That the town site has not been surveyed.

That in consequence of this Battleford has made no real
progress, as intending settlers could not build on land reserved by the
Government, and not surveyed and placed in the market for sale.

That a number of us are now, and have been, ready and willing to
erect substantial residences and places of business, and only wait for
the town site to be surveyed.

Your petitioners would therefore ask that a survey of the town
site, and of a few adjoining townships, be ordered and proceeded with at
once.

And as in duty bound, will ever pray.

Mahoney & Macdonald,

P.G. Laurie,

R.C. McLean,

Donald McLean,

J. Wymirskirch,

John Clisby,

W.C. Gillis,

W. Fennimore, et al.

reproduced in: Canada. Parliament,
Sessional Papers, 13, no. 116 (1885): pp.
51-2.