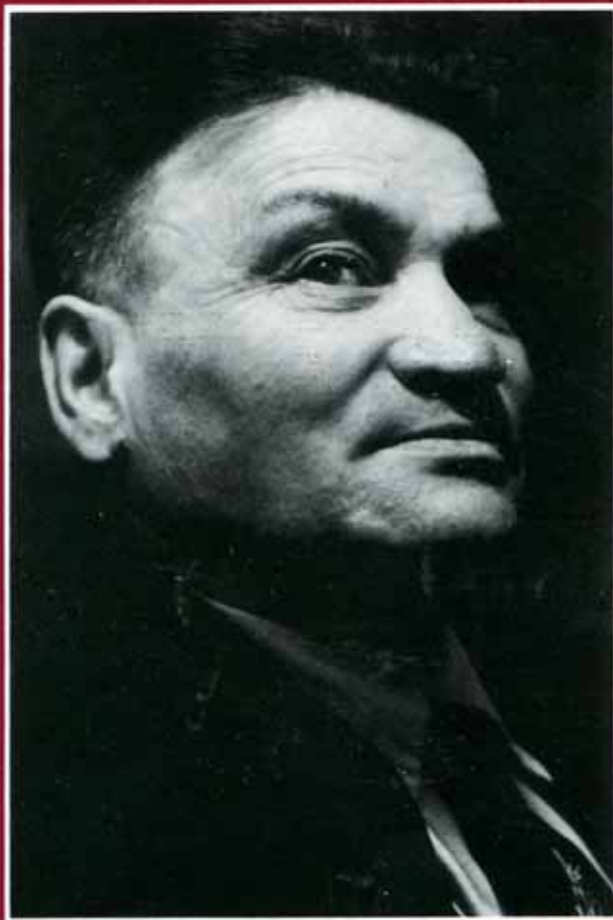


The **ONE-AND-A-HALF MEN**

Murray Dobbin



**THE STORY OF
JIM BRADY & MALCOLM NORRIS
METIS PATRIOTS OF THE 20th CENTURY**

INTRODUCTION BY MARIA CAMPBELL

The One-And-A-Half Men

Shirley Dobson



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The One-And-A-Half Men

*The Story of Jim Brady
and Malcolm Norris,
Metis Patriots of the
Twentieth Century*

Murray Dobbin



**Gabriel Dumont Institute
of Native Studies and Applied Research**

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*Dedicated to the memory
of Mildred Eleanor Dobbin*

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Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies & Applied Research
121 Broadway Ave E.
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James Dreaver was one of hundreds of Scots who made their way to Rupert's Land in the nineteenth century. He arrived at Red River, the hub of the fur trade, in the early 1850s and was immediately impressed by the variety of people he found in the dynamic, bustling town. He asked a Catholic priest about a nearby group of boisterous men. They were dark skinned but obviously not Indians. "They are the one-and-a-half men," the priest replied, "half Indian, half white and half devil."

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Preface

THIS BOOK attempts, in the words of C. Wright Mills, to examine history and biography and their intersection with social structure. It is neither strictly biographical nor purely historical.

As history it is meant to contribute to the recovery of twentieth century Metis history, so long ignored and discounted by Canadian historians. I examine several Metis and Indian political organizations in which Malcolm Norris and Jim Brady were key figures—organizations spanning two provinces, Saskatchewan and Alberta, and two periods of native resistance, the 1930s-40s and the 1960s. The book identifies several major themes in native history in Western Canada: the uneven economic, social and political development of the Metis and Indians, and of the different geographic areas of the Prairies as those areas reflected the changing priorities of industrial capitalism. The constantly shifting interplay between race (or nationalism) and class within the movements is also revealed in this study. Among the book's most important themes is the native movement's almost exclusive focus on the state, dictated by the native people's poverty, and the state's response to that movement, ranging from benign neglect and policies of segregation in the thirties and forties to deliberate and manipulative intervention in their organizations in the late sixties. Finally, the study reveals the dismal record of all political parties—especially the CCF—in confronting colonialism in their midst.

This book is Metis history as experienced by two life-long socialists who were an intimate part of that history. Their biographies underline another theme in native political history: the role that leadership, or lack of it, played in the movements of economically and culturally oppressed peoples in Canada. As leaders over a 35-year period in numerous organizations and in the communities where they lived, Brady and Norris provide, in their life stories, a special opportunity to bring together a study of socialist leadership and history. Brady and

Norris were self-educated Marxists engaged not only in the anticolonial struggle but in the broader struggle for socialism. Their life-long effort to place the anticolonial movement within the broader socialist struggle gives us a rare gift: a systematic, Marxist analysis of the interplay of race and class in the colony within Canada, not by academics but by socialist Metis activists.

In the five-year process of researching and writing this book, I have made many friends, to whom I owe a great deal. I cannot name them all because I interviewed more than 100 people and corresponded with dozens more. I am deeply grateful for the unselfish co-operation and encouragement I received from so many people, native and white. A few command special mention.

Howard Adams, Rod and Rose Bishop, Don Nielson and Janet Feitz, native political activists I met in the late sixties and early seventies, gave me my first lessons in Canadian colonialism. I am particularly grateful to Allan Quandt and Berry Richards, whose many stories about Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris inspired this book. Once work began on the book, Allan and Roberta Quandt and Berry and Verna Richards gave generously of their time and also permitted me to study the Brady papers while they were in their care. I am grateful to Willy Norris and Betty Norris Profitt for their insights into their father's life and to Jim Brady's sisters, Eleanor Olsen, Kay Allan, Dorothy Chapman, Sister Brady and Anne Walther, for their friendly co-operation. I am also indebted to Hugh Dempsey for his assistance and the use of his papers on the Indian Association of Alberta; to Joe Amyotte for his time and permission to use his papers on the Metis Society of Saskatchewan; to Art Davis for permission to use his taped interviews with Jim Brady. I also wish to thank the staff of the Saskatchewan Archives and the Glenbow Institute for their interest and co-operation. I am grateful to the staff of the Federation of Metis Settlements in Alberta and the Prince Albert Indian Metis Friendship Centre for permission to study their historical documents and to the Association of Metis and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan for their endorsement of the project.

I also wish to acknowledge the work and assistance of others active in the field of Metis social and historical research. I am especially indebted to Ron Bourgeault, whose extensive work on a long-overdue class analysis of nineteenth century Metis history provided me with many insights into the modern period and its continuity with the nineteenth century. I thank Maria Campbell for her insights into Brady and Norris and for the very special contribution of her encouragement. F.K. "Ken" Hatt's work on Jim Brady and the Alberta Metis, and his willingness to share that work, was most appreciated.

Without the encouragement and generosity of many friends and political colleagues the task of writing this book would have been many

times more difficult. To them I express my sincere thanks. I thank Agnes Ruest, with whom I share my life and political struggles, for her critical assessments and advice throughout the project as well as for her steady support.

I wish to acknowledge the financial assistance provided by the Explorations program of the Canada Council, the Saskatchewan Multicultural Advisory Council and the Oral History Program of the Saskatchewan Archives.

Much of the credit for this book belongs to others; its deficiencies are solely mine.

Murray Dobbin
 Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
 November 1981

Introduction

WRITING AN introduction is always a great responsibility. It becomes even greater to write one for a friend who has written the biography of the two men who have been my heroes since childhood. Men whose philosophy helped me understand the world I live in and whose encouragement gave me the strength to seek my own visions.

But perhaps the responsibility is even more than this. It has to do with nationalist feelings. It has taken me two years to write this introduction, and I have only recently understood why. Let me start by telling you how I met Murray. He called me several years ago and said he would like to talk to me as he was working on a book about James Brady and Malcolm Norris. My first reaction was, "Please, go away." I had met so many white liberals posing as socialists during the sixties that I felt I could not bear to meet another one who would waste my time with his rhetoric and analysis of my people.

Murray arrived at our home and visited me and my family. We drank tea and talked far into the night. When he left, I knew I had made a friend, but most important of all I had met a brother. We shared that bond which was the basis of Malcolm Norris and Jim Brady's comradeship and the kinship they felt toward their own people and the peoples of the world.

When the manuscript arrived, I read it and felt many things. Some things were wonderful, others hurt like hell. It was one thing for me to analyze myself, my own history and my people, it was quite another to read and be objective about someone else's analysis, especially when that someone was non-native.

I tried to write the introduction, but try as I might I ended up with armchair rhetoric myself. I reread the manuscript and realized what I should have known from the start. Perhaps James Brady came back to remind me that friendship is based first and foremost on honesty and that honesty sometimes involves the pain of looking at yourself. I did

not want Murray to write about my heroes. It was none of his business. My people had already been hurt enough by the writings of white historians. But I was afraid to express these feelings or even admit them to myself.

Then I remembered the old people of my childhood, my grannies, grandpas and the old Swedes and Jews who visited our home. They had talked about many things, but mostly they had talked about family and its survival. Family, to them, meant sharing all things—wealth, knowledge, happiness and pain. It meant brotherhood, loving and caring enough about each other to be honest, and from that honesty gathering strength to change those things which would hurt us all. I remembered what my Cheechum once said to me: "Oppression and all the ugliness in the world have no color, my girl, but remember, too, that family has no color."

And so my introduction becomes easy, because Murray has written a book about two men who, despite their human flaws, remained true to the socialist path they chose. His record of the Metis people's history is an honest and objective one. His admiration for James Brady and Malcolm Norris is evident in his writing, but it does not cloud the way he tells their story.

James Brady and Malcolm Norris were Metis leaders, the most important of this century. But they were much more than that. They were teachers who shared all that they had and more with all people—their vision of a better world for all of us, a world where wealth, knowledge, happiness and pain would be the responsibility of family.

This book should bring to the reader not only a new awareness and understanding of the Metis but also of Western Canada, for as Malcolm Norris always said when he spoke to us, "You cannot separate the history of our people from the history of Western Canada." It will also, I hope, bring our people models of selfless leadership. It will show that we have had leaders who studied long and hard to understand the system which oppressed their people and who, because they understood that system, could not be fooled or bought off. Leaders who never sought power or wealth for themselves.

My grannies taught me about family. James Brady and Malcolm Norris taught me that I had to know where I came from to know where I was going. Perhaps, with the help of this book, my grandchildren's generation will produce their own heroes—leaders and teachers like Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris and the people of my childhood.

Maria Campbell
Gabriel's Crossing
Batoche, Saskatchewan
5 July 1981

Prologue

THE TINY SHACK was typical of the Metis dwellings of LaRonge, 150 miles north of Prince Albert in northern Saskatchewan.¹ Made of unpainted plywood, it had no plumbing and only a wood-burning "tin-can" heater to combat the forty below weather. It sat on a rock outcropping and was surrounded by a stand of slender young jackpine. Set well back from the town's main street, it seemed to emphasize Jim Brady's preference for solitude. Inside, the walls were lined with books, the makeshift shelves dipping under their weight. It was a curious library containing everything from cowboy novels to the tracts of the Rosicrucians. But it was dominated by politics and history and, more specifically, by the complete works of Marx, Engels and Lenin. It was an unlikely setting for a Marxist revolutionary.

The quick even crunch of footsteps on deep frozen snow signalled the arrival of Malcolm Norris. Norris, who lived in Prince Albert with his family, was in LaRonge on assignment with the provincial CCF's* Department of Mineral Resources. He wasn't in LaRonge often during the winter, but when in town he never failed to drop in on his long-time friend and political colleague.

No one could break the solitude quite like Malcolm Norris. He was continually agitated, always involved in a political battle. Driven by a sense of urgency, Norris' physical appearance suited his temperament. Small, slightly built, with a hawkish face, he possessed a wiry strength and tireless energy which matched his tenacity as a political fighter.

In contrast, Brady was large, powerful and barrel-chested. His high cheek bones and round face revealed his Sioux ancestry. In his physical movements, as well as in politics, Brady was unhurried and deliberate. Seldom agitated, he did not feel compelled to speak. When he did, it

*The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, the first, and until then only, social democratic government in Canada.

was usually with a few well-considered words.

Small talk seldom passed between Norris and Brady. Contrasting personalities set them apart, but politics brought them together. In political action they complemented one another, and in political debate each was a foil for the other. Norris would launch into his familiar diatribes against the insufferable racism and blundering of the CCF administration in the north. As Norris paced the floor, building up a head of steam, Brady would sit motionless, the ever-present roll-your-own resting, European-style, between his fingers, a slight, wry smile on his face. Brady intervened only when Norris strayed from "correct" political analysis and Brady had to bring him back on track. It was an old routine which both men had learned to appreciate.

Norris' predictable attacks on the CCF were just as likely to be interrupted by one of Jim Brady's frequent visitors. Brady's shack played a special role in the surrounding native community: as drop-in centre, temporary hostel or lending house, a place where no one was turned away. The visitor this time was drunk and had been so for several days. Soon after Brady's inebriated friend arrived, Norris took his leave. Norris' fierce pride in his Indian ancestry made him intolerant of undignified behaviour by fellow Metis and Indians. While Brady accepted such incidents as part of day-to-day life in the north, Norris believed that native self-respect and pride were necessary weapons in the political struggle, and he regularly used such incidents to impart political lessons. But on this occasion Norris could not openly chastise a man who was there to visit Brady. Instead he cut his visit short.

But he returned soon and often. Over the years Brady and Norris had come to rely on each other. Norris' political passion needed the steadying influence of Brady's cool, analytical approach. In turn Brady, whose clinical approach could lead to cynicism and inaction, relied on Norris for inspiration and encouragement. It was all very well to recognize that social change could only be brought about under certain conditions, but if inactive for too long, even the best political machinery would rust. Malcolm Norris' passionate devotion to the daily battle against oppression reminded Brady of this danger. There were often tensions between the two men, caused not only by their sharply contrasting temperaments but by the contrast in how each chose to live—Brady in spartan surroundings in the north and Norris in the comfortable domestic life of the city. But these tensions were overcome by a determination and necessity born of their special political undertaking, the merging of the socialist struggle with the anti-colonial struggle of native people.

Their 30-year socialist commitment sprang from the turbulent, white

settler society* of the 1920s and 1930s. Both men remained close to white socialists. Yet the struggle for socialism was taking place in the white world of Canada, and Brady and Norris' racial consciousness—their identification with past native struggles—drew them into the colonized native world as well. The native world was no longer the stable Indian tribe or the dynamic Metis society of the nineteenth century. In twentieth-century Canada to be “native” was to be outside the mainstream: chronically unemployed, avoiding white society, uneducated and suffering from racially induced feelings of inferiority. It was not so much race as place: if you were a northern native, living a semi-nomadic life in the bush, a reserve Indian trying desperately to survive rural poverty, or one of the growing number seeking to break through the barriers of racism and poverty and move into prairie urban society, you were a native. To whites those native people who had successfully integrated into the mainstream working or middle classes were no longer “native.”

Attached as they were to native people by their ancestry and by history, Norris and Brady were separated from it as well by their belief in European ideas and cultural values, including socialism. Few native people shared their socialist vision. And so both men found themselves trying to function in two separate worlds but alienated from both.

That Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris were involved in the anti-colonial native struggle was, in itself, remarkable. They were born into middle-class Metis families, into that Metis elite who could choose between the two realities. Their choice to join the native struggles was partly a result of their commitment to socialist principles. Socialism in Canada, as a struggle for social and economic democracy, inherited the mantle of the Metis struggles in the 1800s for democratic rights. Just as the modern workers' movement had roots in the rebellions of 1837, the twentieth century Metis' anti-colonial movements were the continuation of an unfinished national struggle. In that long struggle native

*In using the terms “settler society” and “white society” I do not wish to suggest that I consider the non-native population of the prairies in this period (or subsequent periods) to be homogeneous. Rather, as has been well established, the Euro-Canadian population consisted of various classes, the most numerous being petit bourgeois farmers and workers. I use the term only to contrast Euro-Canadian society on the prairies with those particular Metis and Indian elements which were severely marginalized with respect to mainstream economic activity. To these aboriginal peoples, “white society,” however class divided it might have been objectively, appeared homogeneous, or nearly so. In other words the term “settler society” is useful in the same sense that the term “colonial” is useful in describing the situation of the above-mentioned aboriginal people. It was settler colonialism which displaced the Indian and Metis, and in the sense that all classes of Euro-Canadians played a role in that displacement, the term “settler society” is useful in attempting to grasp both the psychological and socioeconomic dimensions of what has been called the “colony within.”

people had lost their self-respect and their leadership. For Brady and Norris, the struggle for socialism and the struggle for Metis national liberation became one and the same—a struggle for the human rights of the Metis people.

The Metis were “mixed blood” people, the offspring of Europeans and North American Indians. Indeed it was not so much blood that was mixed—Europe itself was a product of such mixing—but two dramatically different worlds, the dynamic, profit hungry world of European mercantilism and the technologically less-developed world that was not Europe. The world-wide penetration of mercantilism brought Europeans in contact with “natives” in what the European ideologists would call “the expansion of Europe” and what the native peoples knew was the pillage of their societies and cultures.

The Metis people owed their birth to the fur trade.² At the economic level the fur trade was an expression of the confrontation between two worlds. On another plane, these two worlds would mix and share their differences. Out of this mixing and sharing, and out of this confrontation, came a new people: the mixed blood people, the Metis and the Half Breeds.

The fur trading companies which moved into Rupert's Land in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries contracted the poor of Scotland and French Canada to labor in the fur trade with the Indians. In the early days of the trade the companies paid for the upkeep of their employees. Wives and children were not kept and were thus effectively excluded, ensuring that the Europeans who came to conduct the fur trade were all men.

While liaisons between Scottish and French laborers and Indian women were initially discouraged, the fur companies soon realized the economic advantages of such liaisons. The companies could slough off some of the cost of labor upkeep onto Indian women and family ties and knowledge of Indian languages could improve trading relationships. As the first generation of fur trading passed into the second and third, the children of these liaisons—the French Metis and the Scottish Half Breeds—became an increasing component of the companies' labor force. As labor from Europe became more scarce and more expensive to transport, the mixed bloods of the North West gradually became the mainstay of the fur trade. They were middlemen in the fur trade as well as “middlemen” racially and culturally, sharing the traditions of their Indian mothers and European fathers. The Metis and Half Breeds quickly became resident nationals of the North West, the first people of European descent to see the North West as their permanent and only homeland.

The indigenous people of British North America, the Indians, were deliberately segregated from the invading European society. In the

north, Indian trappers were economically conquered, tied permanently to a system of debt but otherwise left undisturbed, not out of benevolence but in the interests of the trade. Plains Indians, living outside the main fur-producing region, were left virtually alone. They had nothing of economic value to offer; to conquer them militarily was largely unnecessary and financially impractical.

The fur trade shaped Metis life. Their language—a mixture of Cree, French and English—was created by their role in the fur trade. The geographic boundaries of the trade were the boundaries of their homeland. The location of their settlements, the seasons of their lives and customs were determined by the fur trade. Inevitably, there began to develop among the Metis, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, a feeling of being a distinct people—the resident nationals of the territory.

Aside from the positive, natural growth of identity, one more factor contributed to the mixed bloods' national consciousness: the race and class oppression they experienced at the hands of the fur companies. By the late 1700s the fur trade belonged to only two companies: the British Hudson's Bay Company and the Montreal-based North West Company. The companies were organized feudally, assuming living costs as payment for labor and using a hierarchical system of status, privileges and loyalties. There was also a racial hierarchy in which the Metis, regardless of qualification, could rise only to a certain level—the middle positions of clerk or master of a small post.

The companies were not acting out of racism but out of economic and political expediency. Both companies, but especially the HBC, were preoccupied with the question of loyalty to colonial interests. It was feared that if the Metis, whom the companies, too, recognized as the resident nationals of the North West, were allowed into management profit sharing positions, their loyalties might rest with their own national and class interests rather than with British colonialism.³

The first clear expression of Metis nationalism occurred in the period 1812-1816. The HBC, under Lord Selkirk, established a small settlement at Red River to produce food for the company's outposts. The North West Company, in a last desperate bid to defeat its more powerful rival, then attempted to manipulate Metis nationalism to destroy the settlement. Using one of its Metis straw bosses, Cuthbert Grant, the North West Company promoted the notion that the new settlers were interlopers who were about to take over the territory which was rightly the home of the mixed blood peoples. The manipulation had limited success but, more importantly, proved that the Metis now saw themselves as a distinct nationality.

In 1821 the HBC took over its financially weaker rival. With the elimination of the North West Company, a company based in the New

World, British colonialism became entrenched in the North West.

Hundreds of Metis, left unemployed by the closing of dozens of redundant inland posts, were drawn to the Red River. By centralizing the newly unemployed the HBC intended to head off a violent reaction by Metis resentful at being thrown out of work and, as well, build a convenient labor pool.

Nationalism can only take root, as it did in Europe, where there are concentrations of people and the development of modern social classes. In centralizing the Metis people, the HBC inadvertently created these conditions. After 1821 the HBC changed its feudal labor system to one of wage labor, a system easier to maintain and more flexible. But the company had to alleviate the insecurity of the unemployed and the uncertainty caused by the new wage system. To do so, it allotted land to those employees—Metis and European—thrown out of work by the merger. Land grants varied with former position of the company hierarchy—with officers receiving the largest grants and laborers getting the equivalent of squatter's rights. At the same time the HBC created a market for buffalo hides and pemmican, which became the staple of the inland posts. These changes also brought about other changes in the social structure of the Metis population. The relatively homogeneous society splintered into a wage-labor class, a small agricultural class and a class of skilled buffalo hunters. These classes were not exclusive, for many Metis would farm for part of the year, work as farm labor, take part in annual buffalo hunts and work occasionally for the company. They had in common a dependence on the Hudson's Bay Company, which held a monopoly in the fur, buffalo hide and pemmican trades, and was the only purchaser of farm produce.

One other class appeared after the 1821 merger. This was the educated elite of the Metis and Half Breeds, the sons of the officer class of the two companies whose fathers had paid for their education, often sending them abroad or to Lower Canada. Brought up with the same middle-class aspirations as their fathers, they were barred from fulfilling those aspirations within the HBC structure. They began trading on their own, in direct and illegal competition with the HBC. Thus began the class of Metis "free traders" and the long struggle for free trade in the North West.

The middle-class Metis free traders became the national leaders of the Metis. It was these educated Metis who would articulate Metis nationalism and the liberal democratic ideology which challenged the colonial monopoly of the HBC. The Metis sons of the officer class received an education which reflected the contemporary liberal ideology. In Britain, France and the colonies liberalism was being used as a weapon against the old colonial order by the advocates of free

enterprise. Scottish Half Breeds sent to Britain were steeped in liberal thought. French Metis received a more revolutionary version of liberalism from radical priests at Red River.

Liberalism, a philosophy which preached democratic rights, civil liberties and the equality of man as well as free trade, could be used by all classes of Metis to attack the company—workers, farmers and buffalo hunters drew upon liberal ideology and were supported by free traders. While these former classes received no formal education, they came in contact with liberal ideas through the Catholic priests, whose influence extended far beyond religion.

The greatest threat to the HBC dominance of Rupert's Land came from the free traders. Their competition for profits led the HBC to seize their goods, arrest and often jail them. In the mid to late forties the company brought troops from Britain to emphasize its authority. In 1849 the free trade struggle came to a head. At the trial of two Metis free traders, Louis Riel, Sr., led 300 Metis, most of them armed hunters, in a confrontation with the company. The prisoners were released, and the Metis declared free trade.

The middle-class Metis traders had been supported, as mentioned, by other classes of Metis. But it was only the free traders who benefited. The company appeased the free traders by giving them limited rights to trade (they had to buy their trade goods from the HBC), several seats on the governing Council of Assiniboia, and by contracting out the transportation business to them.

Both the free traders and the HBC were happy with the compromise. The HBC was still the dominant financial force in the North West. The free traders were not allowed to compete on an equal basis and, by contracting out transportation, the HBC was manipulating Metis nationalism: Metis workers would be less trouble working for Metis bosses than they would working for the company. The HBC was right, for after 1849 there was relative peace in the North West.⁴

The nationalist sentiment of the Metis continued to grow after the uneasy truce with the HBC. Continued domination by the company, however, made the formation of a nation—in the sense of a nation-state—impossible. The Metis remained an oppressed nationality, dependent on HBC capital and without political control over their territory.

By the 1860s the conditions favoring the growth of nationalism were gaining strength at Red River. The Metis and Half Breeds now numbered in the thousands, five times the white population. The working, peasant and middle classes were becoming stronger and more defined. Yet they were still far from fully developed and this slowly emerging national strength now faced new, external threats.

Liberalism and industrial finance capitalism were finally reaching the

mercantile North West. The HBC was losing its financial grip as were the other mercantile companies world-wide. The fur trade and the HBC were about to be succeeded by a new economic thrust: agricultural settlement sponsored by industrial capitalism. The new Canadian nation and Canadian capitalists were turning to the North West as a natural area for national expansion and a source of markets. American agitation for the annexation of the Canadian North West intensified the interest.

The Metis and Half Breeds had demonstrated their attachment to Canada and opposition to American annexation. But this loyalty brought them no recognition from the politicians and financiers of Canada, whose concept of political union involved a strictly business deal with the handful of HBC shareholders—giving Canada the company's political control and the financiers its economic monopoly.

Different sections of the Metis population had varied reactions to the proposed transfer of Rupert's Land to Canada. Many of the Scottish Half Breed middle class quietly welcomed the developments. The irritating monopoly of the HBC would disappear and under Canadian government rule British civil liberties would eventually be introduced. Their economic interests were not threatened, or so they believed.

The French Metis intellectuals, led by Louis Riel and encouraged by their priests, were not as optimistic about the future. The arrogance of annexation did not suggest Canadian concern for democratic or economic rights. There was every indication that Canada intended to ignore the history and rights of the Metis. Riel believed that only by securing responsible democratic institutions before Canada assumed authority would an end to Metis oppression be guaranteed. The resulting confrontation with Canada, erroneously referred to as a "rebellion," was the Metis' first armed defence of their national rights. Faced with a united and armed people and a Metis provisional government, Canada was forced to negotiate the entry of Red River into Canada. The end result of that negotiation was the Manitoba Act of 1870.

The Manitoba Act gave the Metis the two elements they needed to ensure their national liberation: control over capital and a share of state power. The Metis were to have title to 1,400,000 acres of land, and land was then a major form of capital. The act granted Red River provincial status and thus gave the inhabitants partial political control over their territory. For the few short months in 1869-70 that the provisional government was in place the Metis people had enjoyed complete sovereignty and were, in fact, a nation in the full sense of the term.

The Manitoba Act seemed to promise continued national protection for the Metis, but it soon turned out to be a paper victory. The Metis'

formal political rights were overwhelmed by the brute power of eastern financial interests supported by the Canadian government. Many of the new settlers from Ontario were fiercely anti-Catholic, anti-French and racist. The execution of Ontarian Thomas Scott by the provisional government had whipped up hatred of the Metis, and many settlers came west seeking revenge as part of their new life. Louis Riel, the revolutionary democrat of the plains and symbol of Metis national sentiment, was forced into exile by the Canadian government.

Physical and psychological abuse of the French Metis went unpunished. Many Metis were driven from their land by settlers from Ontario, while Ontarian troops stood by and did nothing to prevent this illegal seizure. As well, the Dominion government deliberately delayed the distribution of the 1,400,000 acres to the Metis. The eastern politicians and financiers felt the removal of this amount of land from speculation was not acceptable.

In the years after 1870 there was a steady Metis migration away from Red River. Some went south to the United States, others, mainly the agricultural Metis, trekked to the mission settlements surrounding Fort Edmonton, and the rest, reverting to their traditional skills, took to the plains and began the new settlements of St. Laurent, Batoche and Duck Lake on the South Saskatchewan River. Only the middle-class English-speaking Half Breeds enjoyed relative immunity from Canadian harassment and were allowed to cross the color line which Canadian bigotry had drawn against the rest of the mixed blood population.⁶

The new settlements on the Saskatchewan River consisted of a few hundred Metis stretched out for many miles along the river's banks. Most were plains buffalo hunters and refugees from Red River. In some ways these river settlements represented the highest expression of Metis political organization. Elected councils established laws for the community and for economic activity, passing the first labor laws on the prairies, limiting hours of work and declaring Sunday to be a holiday. For several years they were politically independent, for while Canada had taken official control, it made little effort during the first half of the 1870s to govern its citizens.

The depth of their democratic expression notwithstanding, the Saskatchewan River settlements could not sustain Metis unity. Red River was the home of Metis nationalism, the Hudson's Bay Company its rallying point. The dispersal of the Metis from Red River spelled the eventual disintegration of Metis nationalism as a force in the North West.

The plains hunters and Red River exiles who made up the population of St. Laurent, Batoche and the other Saskatchewan settlements recognized by the late 1870s that the days of the fur trade and the buffalo hunt were numbered. Reluctantly abandoning the free life of

the hunt, the Metis accepted the inevitability of a more sedentary life on the land. But such a life required a different kind of security—the security of land tenure.

The only concern of the Canadian government and its financier partners, however, was that the Indians and Metis might impede the settlement and exploitation of the West. The disappearance of the buffalo, which left the plains Indians destitute, made it possible for the government to segregate the Indians on reserves. No such solution was possible for the less vulnerable Metis, and the government decided to simply ignore them.

The government managed to alienate white settlers as well as Metis by their policy of ignoring those already settled on the plains. Refusing to grant immediate title to Metis and white settlers who had occupied their lands for years, the government's land agents informed the settlers (those who could speak English) that they would have to wait three years to get title. Numerous petitions outlining grievances were sent to Ottawa. With an attitude ominously similar to the events preceding 1869-70, the Canadian government ignored the petitions. Frustration gradually turned to suspicion and anger.

By the spring of 1885 the settlers had exhausted all hope in petitions and they looked to the leader who had once before inspired the Metis. After some debate, the Metis, supported by some white settlers, sent a delegation to Louis Riel, who was living in exile in Montana. Riel accepted the challenge.

The Metis struggle of 1869-70 was a struggle for democratic rights and economic freedom and involved a broad alliance of Metis—voyageurs, workers, farmers, Red River hunters, middle-class businessmen and intellectuals. The rebellion of 1885 was different in important respects. It was an economic struggle for land and, secondly, involved a narrow alliance of Metis workers and plains hunters. Gabriel Dumont, the popular Metis leader, typified the population. Although he ran a ferry service, he was a son of the plains, famous as a buffalo hunter and he identified entirely with the Metis laboring classes.

Despite the purely economic demands, a strong element of national liberation motivated the Metis, and armed confrontation with the Canadian government was almost inevitable. Probably because of this the Metis soon lost the support of their white settler allies. The Metis were fighting a national liberation struggle and that was worth taking up arms. In the end the Metis managed to establish a loose alliance with their Cree Indian cousins, who were fighting their own battles against the deception of the Canadian government and the brutal treatment which was its result.

Differences in military strategy between Riel and Dumont plagued the Metis in their confrontation with Canadian troops, but ultimately it did not matter, for the Metis had no secure source of military supplies

for an extended conflict. As well, many of the Metis warriors were highly individualistic hunters who rejected authority, even that of their commander, when they tired of the fight. At the height of battle many simply wandered off. The Metis' national will was weakening. This final struggle for liberation didn't demonstrate the strength of will possessed by the Metis in the conflict of 1869-70.

The frailty of the Metis national will was starkly clear in the aftermath of their defeat at Batoche in the spring of 1885. Already undermined by the decline of the fur trade and disappearance of the buffalo, demoralized by racial abuse and religious bigotry, their interests betrayed by the connivance of the Catholic clergy, Metis national unity suffered its final blow in the flight into exile of Gabriel Dumont and the cynical and illegal execution of Louis Riel.

A final humiliation of the Metis began just before the confrontation on the South Saskatchewan. The Canadian government, belatedly attempting to pacify the Metis, began the distribution of land scrip. The scrip certificates entitled the holder to up to 240 acres of land. However, the government neither consulted nor negotiated with the Metis. The scrip was transferrable and, in the end, 90 percent of the Metis were either defrauded of their birthright by banks and organized groups of land speculators or forced to sell because of poverty and the refusal of banks to loan them money to begin farming.

By the turn of the century tens of thousands of poor immigrants were sweeping onto the inhospitable Canadian prairies, establishing villages and towns. A new society arose, ignorant of the history of the place and its native people. The old order was swept aside and as the old Metis social structure disintegrated, there was a rush for safety. Metis national unity was finished, as each individual tried to fit into the new system. Those who overcame the odds and won a place in the new scheme of things joined white workers and farmers in their struggles against the new monopolies in the North West—the banks, railways and corporations.

Many Metis did not find a place. They were forced to live on road allowances or to trek north to the edge of the bushland, avoiding, temporarily, the inexorable push of settlement. Many who had been workers and farmers were now forced by circumstance to go back in time, to retreat to the archaic hunting economy of their past.⁷ These Metis and the generations which followed them became trapped in an outdated economy which was incapable, in the long run, of sustaining them. These Metis remained colonized, along with their plains Indian cousins and the nomadic mixed bloods and Indians of the northern bush. The national leaders of the past, the educated elite, were joining the new society, leaving their former allies to complete their liberation on their own.