Dr. Orr's politically motivated testimony* and Ewing's willingness to accept it infuriated the Metis executive as well as Dr. McIntyre. Brady angrily challenged Orr:

> Brady: At a distance of 300 miles from this very spot there are settlements who I don't think ever saw a doctor in their lives. Do you know of many people like that, who have never seen a doctor, with venereal disease? There are a large number are there not?
> Dr. Orr: I couldn't say that.[19]

Pete Tomkins interjected: "I think these people should be given some consideration—at least the same consideration the government gives its livestock."[20] Ewing objected to Tomkins' remark and casually suggested that the government would act if there was a epidemic. Forced to respond to the question of an epidemic, Dr. McIntyre sarcastically replied: "No, you couldn't call it an epidemic. It spreads by contact and continues to spread as long as there is no treatment. It just leaves a trail of wounded and dead behind."[21]

Despite the occasional bitterness and dismay over the way health and education were dealt with, the executive could not have been too worried about the commission's recommendations on these issues. The commissioners showed little enthusiasm for Catholic control of education, and it was obvious, no matter which medical evidence was believed, that medical care would have to be provided. The issue, which dominated the hearings, as it dominated the association, was the land issue. Even though the terms of reference for the commission made no mention of land the assumption that land was the foundation for any solution was questioned by no one.

Everyone at the hearings, whether supporting Brady's dream of a liberation struggle led by progressive "Red River" Metis or simply concerned about the very survival of destitute Metis, agreed that the Metis had to be segregated, temporarily at least, from the white population. Witness after witness testified to the nomadic Metis' inability to compete, economically and socially, as equals with whites. A priest testified that when whites came into the area the former treaty Indians simply moved out. Racial hostility was pervasive. The MLA for Lac Ste. Anne testified to bitter resentment felt by whites against the Metis' disregard for game laws. Others testified to the constant abuse faced by Metis children at white schools and the lack of sympathy for

*Dr. Orr once advised his minister that it would not be worthwhile sending a doctor to Grouard as "The cost would be prohibitive unless the venereal disease vote was very greatly increased."[22]

Metis requests for relief shown by municipal authorities. Added to the consensus that the hunting and trapping resource was already woefully inadequate the social pressure on the Metis was so great that all agreed their nomadism would have to end. With this conclusion Brady was in complete agreement:

> Yes, they do desire segregation on reserves, and the main argument advanced is, if it is going to be dealt with in an adequate manner it will be necessary that they be centralized. Experience has proven that this type of people cannot trade with the individual if you understand what I mean...[23]

The consensus regarding the destitute, nomadic Metis' inability to compete as equals with whites led to a further consensus: title to the land should remain with the government and not be transferrable. This was perhaps the one concession to history at the hearings, for it was with the scrip fraud in mind that the suggestion was made. It was widely known that hundreds of Metis, either because of immediate need, lack of appreciation of the value of land or lack of access to capital, were easily defrauded of their birthright by land speculators. If title were given to individual Metis, the scrip fraud disaster might well be repeated.

With all the participants agreed that land was the key to Metis survival, the discussion turned to the question that had haunted the Metis since 1885: Can the Metis make good farmers? The answer would determine a great deal about the future Metis settlement areas—the kind of land that would be selected, how the settlements would be run, and who would be allowed to live on them.

The association's main argument was blocked by the chairman when he refused to allow any reference to capitalist development in the West. Brady now was obliged to rely on the testimony of sympathetic witnesses to establish the association's position that the nomadic Metis could and would "settle down" to an agricultural life. Besides testimony from the executive, the association called on Pete Tomkins, Sr., Bishop Guy and James Brady, Sr., to back their position.

The doubts about Metis "suitability" were so strong that even these witnesses showed signs of doubt or acknowledged the great difficulty of the enterprise. Other witnesses, and they were in the majority, were sceptical or openly rejected the belief that Metis could become farmers. Most witnesses, when referring to land for the Metis, meant land near hunting and fishing resources. When they spoke of farming, most witnesses had in mind the kind of family farm operation which characterized the prairies. Even the Metis leaders themselves must have had doubts about the hunters' and trappers' ability to adapt quickly to

such a form of agriculture. Only Brady had given the matter serious thought. He made a few oblique references to farming co-operatives which suggested that, in his vision of the settlements, co-operatives—farming, fishing and forestry—would play a major role.

But detailed plans for the settlements were not discussed. The hearings were preoccupied with the desperation of the Metis. The characterization of the Metis as illiterate, suspicious and "child-like" was difficult to overcome. The resulting sentiment for some form of paternalistic administration of the Metis "colonies," expressed by lay witnesses, commissioners and clergy, was equally difficult to challenge. Indeed, the Metis leaders did not even present their plan for association authority on the settlements. It may be that Brady and Norris planned to fight that battle at some other time. Both expected a Liberal victory in the provincial election in the fall. With close associates in that party they might have hoped for better treatment under a Liberal regime.

The public hearings were a tough political lesson for Brady, Norris and their colleagues. To expect support of their principle of political autonomy would have been asking the government to ally itself with the Metis' national liberation struggle—to relinquish political power to the Metis association.

The social distance between the Metis leaders and the destitute Metis who were the "problem" was dramatically underlined during the hearings. Even the executives' testimony betrayed the need for some kind of paternalistic administration of the settlements. There seemed to be no connection—historic or otherwise—between the Metis leaders and their members. It was with this in mind that Norris expressed his concern about the final phase of the enquiry—the commission's visits to the Metis communities. He wrote to Brady:

> Jimmy, you know what an enquiry of individuals would result in. A collection of data, irrational, inconsistent, worthless to our cause and in all probability detrimental to our movement. I base this opinion on my knowledge of the Metis people, their limitations and...psychology...I am absolutely opposed to this type of enquiry.[24]

Norris clearly feared that visits to the communities would simply strengthen the commissioners' image of the Metis as suspicious, withdrawn and in need of paternal supervision. He suggested to Brady that to minimize the political hazards the visits should not be undertaken "except when accompanied by at least two members of our Association Executive Committee...and further that...we would prefer enquiry from the personnel of our Executive Committee." Brady was evidently even more pessimistic than Norris regarding the planned

visits. Tomkins' suggestion to Brady that the two of them accompany the enquiry received no response.

As it turned out, Joe Dion was the only executive member to take part in any of the visits; he accompanied the commisioners, at their request, as a translator. Even then, he was present at only a few of the fifteen visits to Metis villages.

The commission held meetings with local Metis in nine locations, including Fishing Lake, where 200 Metis turned out. In the other six locations the commissioners solicited advice and information only from local clergy and physicians. The evidence they gathered confirmed Norris' worst fears about the visits. In subsequent reports to the government T.C. Rankine, the commission secretary, commented: "It is perfectly true that these people are like children, helpless and irresponsible."[25] He further advised the deputy minister of lands and mines that land for the Metis be chosen "in a portion of the province where agricultural holdings are not sought for by prospective homesteaders and purchasers of provincial lands, otherwise dissatisfaction to the general public might arise."[26]

The commission's visits took place over eight months, ending in January 1936. During this time developments in the camps of the two main adversaries, the government and the association, were significant. In August 1935 the provincial election saw the UFA government annihilated by William "Bible Bill" Aberhardt's Social Credit Party.[27] The Socreds took 56 of the 63 seats. The Liberals won five seats and the Tories the remaining two.

The Metis association, barely maintained in the months leading up to the enquiry, faded even further into inactivity. Pete Tomkins wrote to Brady regularly during this time, suggesting that the executive meet with the new government. He also proposed a convention for 1936. Evidently prepared to take some initiative in reviving the organization, Tomkins was nonetheless dependent on Brady for direction and assistance. Neither was forthcoming. Both Brady and Norris were in the north working during the summer months and unable to be active in association affairs. But even when he returned south in October, Brady showed no apparent interest in the association. Norris, too, seems to have withdrawn from the association. By the end of 1935 even Tompkins had let matters slide. He reported to Brady that the Grouard local, once the best organized of all, was dead.

Correspondence between Norris and Brady reveals little interest in Metis affairs. The association's on-again, off-again political activity was by now a well-established pattern dictated by developments in the land issue. Only the government could provide the Metis with land. Throughout 1934 the association was obliged to await the government's decision to appoint the Royal Commission. That situation repeated

itself in 1935. The new Social Credit administration, with no previous involvement in the Metis issue, would not act until the commission's report was in. The association could do little but bide its time until the government made the next move.

7

Socialist Organizing: The Communist Party and the CCF

On February 15, 1936, just two weeks after completing its visits to the Metis settlements, the Half-Breed Commission* made its report to the Alberta government.[1] Considering the quantity of evidence presented, the report was surprisingly short, just fourteen pages. In accordance with one of the government's principal objectives, the commissioners suggested "that the plan could be launched with small expenditure."

The report recommended two areas be set aside "experimentally," giving the government considerable flexibility, including the option of getting out of the settlement scheme altogether. The commissioners labelled the association's description of health conditions as "an overstatement," but they recommended monthly clinics, periodic visits by a doctor and, eventually, the establishment of "modest hospitals." Educational goals were similarly modest. Children were to be taught "reading, writing and elementary arithmetic" with training in "stock raising and farming" for boys and homemaking for girls.

The commissioners repeated the ambivalence about Metis aptitude for agriculture which they heard at the public hearings, but they maintained that only through farming, principally stockraising, could the Metis hope to survive. The report recommended that each colony "should contain a very considerable amount of reasonably good agricultural land." To allow for a transition to agricultural life, the areas should be close to fishing and hunting resources and "because the Metis were the original inhabitants of these great unsettled areas. . . they should be given preference. . . over non-residents in respect of fur, game and fish."

Though acceptable in some respects, in others the report was a devastating defeat for the executive committee, especially Norris and Brady. The plan failed to meet the basic goal of broad accessibility.

*It later came to be called the "Ewing Commission."

Those Metis "who have settled down as farmers," the report said, "do not need nor...desire, public assistance. The term [Half Breed or Metis] as used in this report has no application to such men." There was no place for the Metis land-owning class, nor even those Metis "who make a fairly good living by hunting and trapping." The colonies were designed exclusively for indigents: "no half-breed would be compelled to join the colony but if he did not join he could have no claim to public assistance."

The administration of the colonies would be permanently in the hands of a government department. A supervisor would have "control of the operations...and should in addition have the powers of a police magistrate." There was no governing role for the association or even the Metis themselves, initially: "As matters develop it may be thought wise to provide for a council to be elected by the membership of the colony and to be invested with advisory powers only."

The association could have publicly opposed the report. It could have met with the new government and argued its case for political autonomy or have called on the grass roots membership to bring pressure on the Social Credit government. But it did none of these things.

Only Pete Tomkins urged the executive to reply to the report. In May 1936, Tomkins wrote to Joe Dion:

> ...Malcolm and Brady has [sic] thrown up the sponge. I fear we will have to get a few more new Executives. If the rest of the province doesn't wake up soon I will be forced to lie down too. I'm not a quitter but I like a little support and co-operation from other places once and a while...I don't like the tone of Malcolm's letter where he says "You have my sympathy in your struggle for the Metis."[2]

Much of Tomkins' work in the past had focussed on the daily conditions of the people, and he was able to assess the specifics of the report. Norris and Brady, preoccupied with the future of self-determination, apparently saw only defeat. To reassert their demand for political autonomy and association authority would require a major, sustained political fight which promised little hope of success. The UFA, fighting for its political life, had been vulnerable to the agitation of the association and its opposition allies. The new Social Credit government, fresh from a landslide victory, would not be obliged to please every dissident group in order to stay in power, and the opposition members who had supported the association were either defeated or no longer trusted.

The political struggle through 1934 and 1935 had so preoccupied

Norris and Brady that they had allowed the grassroots organization to deteriorate. It could have been rebuilt and the government confronted. Brady and Norris probably did not attempt the task at this time because they saw the issues changing. Now it was not simply a question of obtaining land, it was the more complex objective of achieving political autonomy on the colonies. It would be a struggle to create a new unity among the Metis on the issue of the association's right to political authority on the new settlement areas.

It would also be a struggle against the Church and the government. Neither had dared oppose the simple demand for land. But the issue of who would actually control the colonies was certain to draw the Church and the government onto the political battleground. Norris and Brady feared the influence of the Church, which had already challenged the association's moral authority over the Metis at the hearings. There was nothing to suggest that the new Social Credit government was anxious to relinquish power to the association. The government, by virtue of its almost monolithic control, would be a formidable opponent. In addition it would be the Social Credit government which would actually provide the Metis with land. This in itself presented great potential for the intervention of partisan politics into the Metis movement.

The dimensions of such a struggle apparently discouraged both Norris and Brady. And without them such a struggle was doomed. Pete Tomkins did not find the new executive members he hoped for, and the association remained in the doldrums.

The demands placed on the association's two principal leaders had required major sacrifices in their personal and working lives. This was particularly true for Norris; by 1936 his neglect of family responsibilities was catching up. In April, Mary Celina announced that she was leaving her husband. Their relationship—long fraught with tension—had finally reached breaking point.[3]

Celina and Malcolm's life in the northern bush had been a partnership of equals. But the move to Edmonton created serious strains. Impatient with Celina's lack of sophistication, Norris shared little of his political life with her. Yet as Malcolm's wife, Celina was obliged to make many difficult sacrifices—financial and personal—for the Metis movement. Insensitive to these burdens, Norris had, unwittingly, driven a wedge between himself and Celina. According to Celina, Norris fancied himself a "lady's man," in the euphemism of the day, and it was this final humiliation which led to her decision to leave.

Norris was devastated by Celina's action. His sister Emily remembered the letter telling her of the separation: "It was so full of pain and hurt that I burnt it."[4] Norris was a man of passion and pride, and while he likely felt guilt as well as remorse he may have seen the separation as a personal failure as well. He valued his image and

reputation as a responsible man. All in all he would have seen the failure of his marriage as a calamity.

Norris needed a family. For him politics was an emotional, tumultuous affair. Family gave his life order; it provided him with a refuge from the tensions and demands of work and politics. That same year Norris met and started his second family with Mary Emma Smith. The orphaned daughter of a United Church minister, she came from an educated and cultured family. Where Mary Celina had been a match for Norris in the bush, Mary Emma was a match for him in the white, urban surroundings in which he would choose to remain.

Of the four children, only Malcolm, Jr., the youngest, remained with Celina—and only on the condition that she give him up when he reached school age. Norris was determined that his children would receive an education, and he did not trust Celina to see to the children's schooling.[5]

There is little record of Norris' activities in the three years following the release of the commission report. Preoccupied with personal, family matters and spending most of 1936 in the Northwest Territories, Norris probably had little time for any political involvement. The combination of personal trauma and disappointment over the fate of the Metis land scheme seem to have temporarily subdued Norris' political fervour.

For much of 1936 Brady, too, was inactive politically. But by 1937 he returned to the socialist politics which had made him the subject of red-baiting by the Church and government in 1933-34. Both Norris and Brady had developed their political perspectives through observation and study of Canadian industrial society. Their work among the Metis was inspired by a socialist vision. While they seemed preoccupied with the battle for survival of the impoverished nomads, both were active in socialist politics as well. Indeed both men often had doubts about what seemed to be the separate battle of the Metis, doubts that led, at certain times in later years, to the conclusion that only through socialism would the Metis make genuine social and economic progress. This tension between socialist struggle and what amounted to the Metis nationalist struggle was a dilemma which would plague both men throughout their political lives.

There is little documentation of Brady's involvement with the two principal left-wing parties, the CCF and the Communist Party,* from

*The Communist Party of Canada was founded in 1921, bringing together Marxists of three existing socialist parties, the Socialist Party of Canada, the Social Democratic Party of Canada and the Socialist Party of North America. According to Norman Penner in his book *The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis* (Toronto, Prentice-Hall, 1977) the Communist Party was formed "...on the basis of a conviction that the problems which had bedevilled the movement from its inception could be solved by the teachings of Lenin and by affiliation to the Communist International" (p. 78). While there is considerable

1933-35. With respect to the CP this is not surprising, for the CP was illegal in Canada from 1931 to 1936, and it was not wise to keep self-incriminating evidence. In correspondence from Norris the only apparent reference to Brady's communist connection was Norris' occasional cautioning of Brady about publicly revealing his radical beliefs.

What little evidence there is suggests Brady was extremely active in the CP in 1934 and 1935.[6] Bill Tuomi, then Alberta Secretary of the CP, remembers Brady as one of the most active members. He was a Party organizer, contributed to the Party's newspaper, *The Worker*, and was involved in the Farmers' Unity League, the sister organization of the Communist-led Workers' Unity League, which headed the struggle for industrial unions throughout this period. At the height of the commission hearings the Party asked Brady's "unit" to send him to Edmonton to a meeting with national leader, Tim Buck, who was in town to address key members on the Party's new "united front" strategy against fascism which would be used in the upcoming federal election.

In many ways Brady was typical of hundreds of young, single workers who made up the bulk of the CP membership. He was an "organic intellectual" of the working class. Norman Penner described men and women like Brady as "worker-intellectuals who earned their living at their vocations and who studied and wrote and taught Marxism in their spare time."[7] These workers spread the ideas of revolution and communism in 1930s Canada.

However, while Brady had much in common with his fellow worker communists, he was unique in at least one respect. He was the only individual who was openly and actively organizing for both parties. The CCF saw itself as a reform party of both farmers and workers, and a majority of its members, as reflected in its leadership, were more social democratic than socialist. The CP, officially, felt obliged to denounce the CCF as a party which actually propped up capitalism. The CP was a party of the working class and sought fundamental changes in social structure, changes which could not be accommodated by the present system. Yet the CCF had among its members many Marxists and, for this reason, the CP's official characterization of the CCF as the enemy of the working class often had little effect on the rank and file of either

controversy regarding what some have claimed was Canadian Communists' subservience to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union there is little doubt that the Communist Party of Canada stood out as the most important political party dedicated to the interests of the working class. This was particularly true during the first half of the 1930s when the CP was alone in its efforts to organize industrial workers, played the leading role in defending the economic rights of workers and poor farmers, and organized anti-fascist activity across the country.

party. At this level there was far more affinity and co-operation between CP members and CCF'ers than was indicated by official CP writings of the time.[8] The formal hostility between the two, however, barred individuals from openly supporting both parties. Bill Tuomi explains Brady's circumvention of this rule as a result of Brady's particular character. He inspired unquestioned trust among all his political associates. "He could do it just because he was Jim."

Brady's trusted position within both parties may have been due to another factor: his ultimate loyalty rested not with any political party but with the Metis. Neither party suspected him of betraying their interests to the other. While there were significant exceptions, Brady's 35-year history as a political activist would reveal an unwavering commitment to socialism but a commitment acted out in the interests of native people.

Brady's activity in the CCF and the CP inevitably meant that his colleagues would, for the most part, be whites who made up the majority of the workforce. Yet this did not necessarily mean that Brady's activity was separate from his commitment to the Metis. While destitute nomadic Metis were numerous and visible because of their poverty, there were many working-class Metis in north-central Alberta, particularly Lac La Biche, which was a working-class town. Many Metis identified with their class interests as workers as much or more so than they did with their racial origins. Brady was active in bringing Metis into both parties throughout this period.

While Brady promoted the socialist cause among the Metis, it seems that he did not press the Metis' autonomous struggle within the CP. He did, however, bring an understanding of the land issue and the condition of the nomadic Metis to the CP. Tuomi credits Brady almost exclusively for the attention the Party gave to the issue, for example, articles on the association's struggle in its paper. Yet in Party study groups and discussions Brady apparently was content to listen and absorb the political lessons offered by the debates over revolutionary theory and practice. Brady was prepared to accept the CP's Marxist analysis of society and bring the Metis into the struggle for socialism as workers rather than as fighters of an anti-colonial struggle.

The Communist Party provided excellent training in political organizing, and it almost seems as though Brady used the Party to learn these skills for use in the Metis struggle. But the CP was weak in other areas, particularly in its ability to provide a detailed analysis of Canadian society. It did not have the resources to support full-time intellectuals who could apply Marxist analytical tools to the specific conditions of Canadian capitalism. Much of what passed for analysis was an "abstract doctrinaire [repetition] of Marxist postulates."[9] The CP looked to the Soviet Union for much of its direction, and much of this

came from the dogmatic and simplistic writings of Stalin.

Given this weakness, it is not surprising that Brady did not press the case of the autonomous Metis struggle within the CP. Brady's class analysis of the Metis struggle, which saw middle-class Metis aligned with the most destitute nomads, contradicted everything the CP's analysis stood for. According to the Marxist analysis of industrial society such alliances did not occur. The Metis underclasses, the impoverished Metis, had, by this assessment, no place at all in the struggle for socialism. As "lumpen proletariat" they were more likely to play a reactionary, counter-revolutionary role. The CP saw the Metis as simply another underprivileged group in capitalist society. With little connection to the Metis people or their history, the CP did not see the Metis' struggle as a nationalist or anti-colonial struggle let alone part of the struggle for socialism.

Though Brady's analysis of the Metis struggle can be characterized as nationalist and anti-colonial, Brady had not yet fully developed that analysis. Nowhere during this period did he describe the Metis struggle in these terms. Had he done so, he might have resolved the seeming contradiction between his dual class analysis of the Metis and the orthodox Marxist analysis of mainstream Canadian society. Communists in the third world countries were applying Marxist tools to their national liberation struggles. The same application could have been adapted to the dilemma of the Metis in Canada. But, for the time being at least, the CP could not provide the link that Brady needed to reconcile the two struggles. And Brady, alone except for Norris in his efforts to place the Metis in the broader struggle for social justice, could not do so either.

For most of 1936 Brady was not engaged in any political activity. Yet his life was by no means dull. He spent the summer in the Northwest Territories working on road construction for the Northern Transportation Company. His Journal records his meetings with diverse people. The most notable was Marcel Giraud, "the Amerindian expert." Giraud was in Alberta researching Metis history for Columbia University. He would later complete a massive social history of the Metis,[10] and Brady would cross paths with him again.

Brady's approach to socialist politics was somewhat individualistic. He seems to have let his membership in the CP lapse in 1936, and his Journal records special mention of two CCF figures: "William Irvine of the Alberta CCF—the Rowe faction in Social Credit." Irvine was a Marxist prominent in the CCF, and to the left of many CCF'ers. He was respected by many in the CP—despite his frequent criticisms of the CP. Rowe was a left-winger in the Social Credit Party and eventually became a CCF MP.

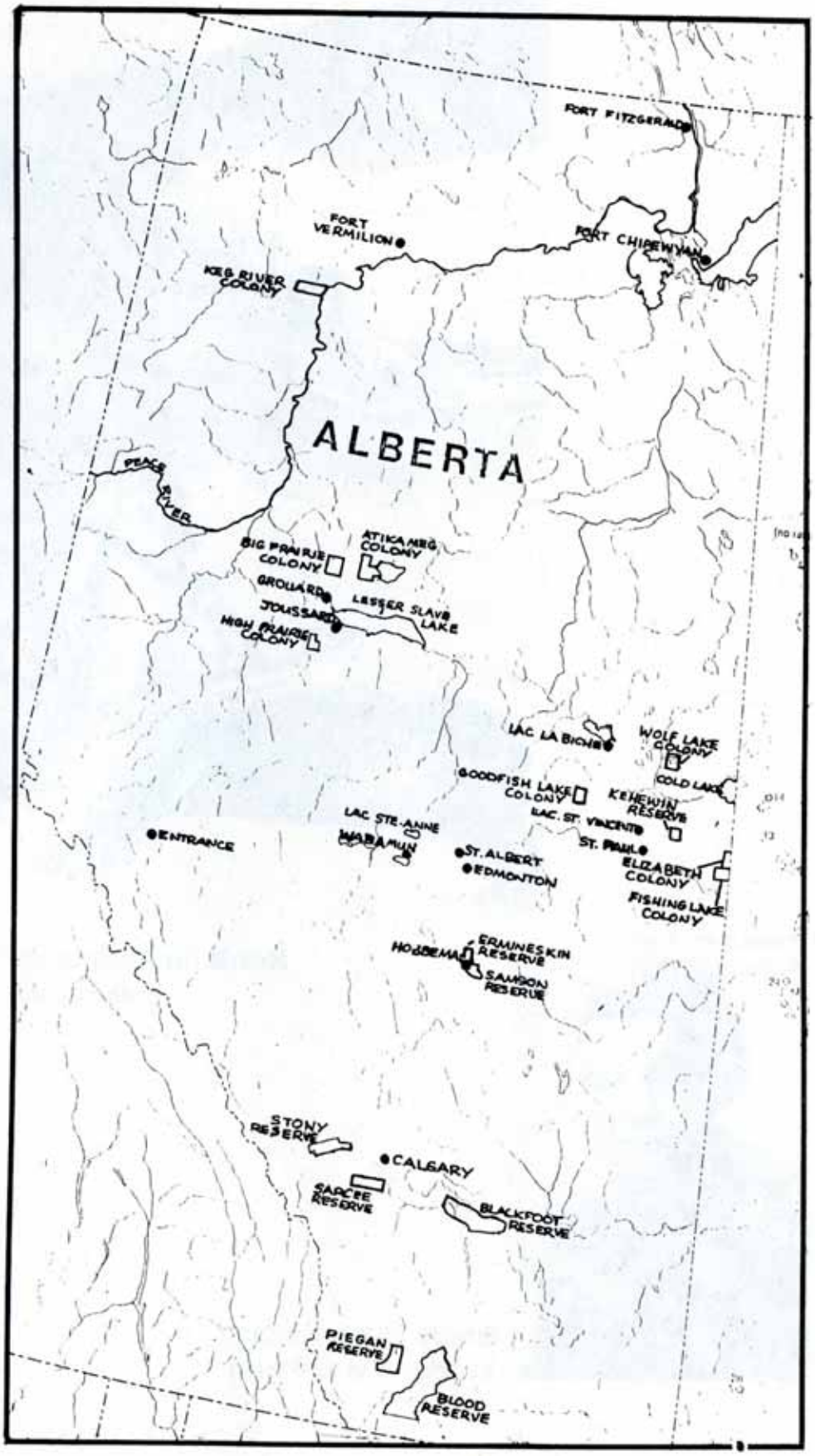
In January 1937 Brady, for unknown reasons, was again attracted to

Glenbow-Alberta Institute

Norris on a hunting trip near Yellowknife, 1930s

Kathleen Brady Allan

Brady in his Second World War uniform


FORT FITZGERALD
FORT VERMILION
FORT CHIPEWYAN
KEG RIVER COLONY
ALBERTA
PEACE RIVER
ATIKAMEG COLONY
BIG PRAIRIE COLONY
GROUARD
LESSER SLAVE LAKE
JOUSSARD
HIGH PRAIRIE COLONY
LAC LA BICHE
WOLF LAKE COLONY
GOODFISH LAKE COLONY
COLD LAKE
KEHEWIN RESERVE
LAC. ST. VINCENT
ST. PAUL
LAC STE. ANNE
ENTRANCE
WABAMUN
ST. ALBERT
EDMONTON
ELIZABETH COLONY
FISHING LAKE COLONY
HOBBEMA
ERMINESKIN RESERVE
SAMSON RESERVE
STONY RESERVE
CALGARY
SARCEE RESERVE
BLACKFOOT RESERVE
PIEGAN RESERVE
BLOOD RESERVE

the CP. At that time the Party was approaching its greatest strength in Alberta. Brady wrote to the Party in Edmonton offering his services to assist "the newly formed locals" of the Party. The provincial finance secretary thanked Brady for his offer and informed him that "The Provincial Executive Committee is of the opinion that you should join our Party."[11]

Brady did and by May was chairman of a "section" of the Party which included several locals of the Lac La Biche area. He was also appointed Party organizer for the area and evidently took to his tasks with considerable energy, despite his third summer in the Northwest Territories.

Why Brady was moved to commit himself again to the Party is not clear. The Party's focus on the anti-fascist movement certainly attracted him. In 1935 Brady started keeping political scrapbooks—clippings from various radical and communist journals, as well as from the daily press—and the first volumes of these scrapbooks,[12] which Brady kept faithfully for 30 years, are dominated by the struggle between fascism and socialism. As with thousands of socialists, communists and progressives everywhere, he sensed the overriding threat of fascism to democracy.

Nowhere was that threat more imminent than in Spain. The struggle for survival of the new Spanish Republic mobilized the political energy of the world-wide anti-fascist movement. Brady's Journal is peppered with references to the Spanish conflict, including a 1937 entry recording his intention to enlist in the international brigade and the Canadian government's refusal to grant him a passport.

Brady had to accept that he would not be one of the 2,000 Canadians of the MacKenzie-Papineau Battalion who fought in the Spanish Civil War. He had to be content with working on the support committee for the "Mac-Paps."[13] Still, there was no shortage of opportunities to engage in direct struggle with fascists in Canada. While no single organization united the fascist forces in this country, it was the rare community that did not have supporters of Hitler and Mussolini.

Lac La Biche apparently had more than its fair share. Despite its small size, the town's population was cosmopolitan, including Ukrainians, French, Finns, Icelanders, Italians, Syrians and White Russians. The political atmosphere of Lac La Biche was tense and the politics occasionally violent. Brady, despite his unemotional political demeanor, was a physical match for the nasty mix of politics in Lac La Biche. Brady's brother Red recalled that Brady, after distinguishing himself with particularly effective heckling at a political meeting, was attacked by six local men outside the hall. The conclusion of the story, "six men lying on the ground" may be an exaggeration, but it leaves little doubt about Brady's prowess as a fighter. He was big and

powerful, prided himself on keeping physically fit, and was a boxer of some talent. It was only on very rare occasions, however, that Brady resorted to physical violence.

References to fascists in Lac La Biche outnumber references to progressives in Brady's Journal: "Captain Von Fischer, the Nazi fanatic. The local pro-Nazis and the blue shirts...Captain Lee Bennette, ex-British military intelligence, Social Credit politico and defender of Anglo-German fellowship." But Brady found allies, and before the war started he had established a local for the CP. One of Brady's CP colleagues, Marshall Hamar, built a Communist Party Hall in the town.

Between 1937 and 1939 the CP in Alberta reached its greatest strength. In 1937 the Party had 2,000 members and was establishing new locals across the province. Many communities had halls built by Communists and their sympathizers. To what extent this growth was due to the Party's anti-fascist united front strategy is not clear, but in 1937 the Party wanted and expected an opportunity to test its popularity with the people.

Serious divisions within the governing Social Credit caucus and party over the government's apparent rejection of orthodox Social Credit policies were expected to result in a provincial election in the late fall of 1937.[14] Feeling its new strength and welcoming the chance to apply its united front tactic in a major political confrontation, the Party ordered its organizers and committees to gear up for the election.

The CP viewed the election in Alberta as crucial for the future of progressive politics in the province. The letter which went out to Brady and other Party organizers declared:

> ...at no other time in the history of this dominion did the fate of a province and its people depend so much upon the independent work of our party...Comrades, here is a splendid opportunity for the party to come out publicly in every constituency through meetings, letters, newspaper statements, and radio speeches—speaking to the people.[15]

Organizers were urged to build united front campaigns around Communist candidates where possible and to "provide leadership" to voters where Communist candidates could not run. The CP leaders worried about submerging the Party in united front work:

> Any neglect of independent party work or attempt to hide the face of the party will be regarded as a grave crime by the provincial committee...During the election campaign every organizer must raise as our organizational slogan "The Party

> and the *Clarion* [the new daily paper of the Communist Party] must be built.''[16]

Premier William Aberhardt managed to create a tenuous unity within his caucus and the provincial election so keenly anticipated by the Communists did not materialize. But the united front tactics produced some interesting results. In a federal by-election for an Edmonton riding, in March 1938, Orvis Kennedy, a Social Credit candidate, jointly chosen and supported by the Communists and the Social Credit, defeated a right-wing coalition candidate. The victory parade featured an unlikely sight—the lead car was occupied by Social Credit Premier William Aberhardt and leading Alberta Communist, Jan Lakeman.

Brady's involvement with both the CCF and the CP continued throughout 1938 and probably into 1939. He became a correspondent for the *Clarion* in late 1938.[17] At the same time his signature appeared for the CCF in a united front (CCF, Liberal and Social Credit) effort to eliminate political patronage in Lac La Biche.[18]

Brady's loyalty to the Metis cause would soon, however, be demonstrated once again. For at what seemed to be the height of his commitment to socialist organizing Brady was to be drawn back into the anti-colonial politics of the Metis, into the settlement issue and into the building of fishermen's co-operatives. In these enterprises he would also renew his political partnership with Malcolm Norris.

8

The Metis Colonies: The Test of Metis Unity

THE EDMONTON *Bulletin* of August 1, 1938 ran the following headline: "2,500 Metis Families to be Awarded 70 Townships of Land." The headline was misleading—probably less than 1,000 families were to take part—and the story made no mention of the eight-year struggle which led to the "award." The newspaper account concentrated on a few details of the plan and the statement made by provincial health minister W.W. Cross that, "We found the main appeal of the Metis was 'Save us from the whiteman.'"[1]

Each family would be allotted 320 acres. The Metis would not be wards of the state; they would be required to pay lease fees, provincial taxes and royalties. Three-man advisory boards elected by the Metis would have power to "ban" all whites from the colonies and would have the authority to erect schools and hire teachers. The actual number of Metis and colonies would be determined by the number of families expressing an interest. News reports suggested that the government intended the scheme to be inexpensive. It would give assistance in erecting schools, hiring teachers and providing health care "wherever possible."

There were no further details on the power of the Metis boards and no indication, in the press, of the role of "supervisors" on the colonies. The only other specific information given was that Pete Tomkins had been hired as the temporary administrator of the scheme. He was given 60 days to complete a survey of interested Metis and identify possible sites.

The most remarkable aspect of Cross' announcement was the role it attributed to the Metis association. The plan was the result, said Cross, of negotiations with the Metis association's "Executive Council of eight men," which took place July 25 at Joussard. "All members of the Metis Executive were satisfied with our discussion and the tentative agreement."

In fact the executive council of the association had not met since 1935, nor even communicated with each other for months and in most cases years. Whatever negotiations took place at Joussard were between the government and Pete Tomkins. His presence at the Joussard meeting may have been requested by the government, but there is no evidence to support this, and Tomkins was probably there by chance. In any case, Tomkins engineered the re-election, by declaration, of the entire executive council. The Joussard meeting was thereafter referred to, somewhat euphemistically, as "The Fourth General Convention of the Metis Association of Alberta."

Tomkins believed the government's willingness to reach an agreement with the association was genuine. The association had brought no pressure on the government to negotiate. Tomkins wrote to Dion and Brady suggesting action. Dion refused to reply to Tomkins' letter and telegram. Brady initially indicated interest but did not follow up.[2]

Tomkins' information, on the surface at least, suggested important issues which demanded the association's response. He revealed to Brady the contents of a letter from Cross, appointing Tomkins temporary administrator and listing outstanding issues to be discussed with the executive. They included: the language of education, mineral rights on the colonies, and the administration of justice. Confirming the association's fears about relief orientation, Cross suggested that Metis demanding relief be compelled to move onto one of the colonies in order to receive it.[3]

Most important was Cross' continued recognition of the association's role. Once Tomkins had completed his survey, said Cross, "I will get you to bring in with you your president and...secretary...By that time we will have a rough draft of the agreement prepared and can discuss anything further that your men have to suggested [sic] and prepare the final agreement."

Brady was not moved by any of these developments. This may have been due to his distrust of the Social Credit government. Negotiating from a position of weakness might have served, in Brady's mind, to legitimize a relief-camp plan for the colonies. There may have been another reason for his reluctance to get involved. In a document entitled "Analysis of the future," probably written about this time, Brady expressed doubts about the alliance of "progressive" and nomadic Metis, "It may be that the progressive type who has lived a lifetime in advanced communities has felt that an association in the same organization as an illiterate bush ranger would serve no useful purpose."[4] Brady seemed enthusiastic about the possibility of involving the Metis in the broader social struggles of the day, and he anticipated "with eagerness...the sympathy and association of our fellow [white]

workers and farmers.'"[5] But Brady's hope of including the Metis in "the general democratic front" was still tempered by the conflicting belief that all classes of Metis must work together.

Whatever Brady's long-range designs, his immediate plans did not include the Metis settlement struggle. His colleague, Malcolm Norris, was not available either. He was still in the far north, apparently unaware of the political developments in the south. Their absence was noticeable. Extensive press coverage of the issue continued, and the absence of any association comment was conspicuous. Filling that vacuum was an attack on the government by a previously unknown Metis organization.

The name of the new organization varied, apparently at the whim of its self-proclaimed leader, A.J. Hamilton. It was either the Dominion Independent Association of Canada or the Dominion Independent Progressive Association of Canada (Native).[6] Claiming to represent all Canadian Metis by right of national charter and claiming as well to be Louis Riel's grandson, Hamilton attacked the settlement scheme on the grounds that the government was "trying to lead the Metis population into a corral." He demanded instead that each family be provided with substantial financial assistance to start their own farming operations.

In other circumstances Hamilton's self-proclaimed leadership and his dubious organization[7] would have discredited him. But with no Metis association presence, he gained credibility by default. Many of his criticisms regarding the alleged agreement with the government were valid. Hamilton's criticisms, however, had no noticeable effect. Throughout the fall and into the winter, press reports followed the progress of the settlement scheme. Tomkins and Dion, who was also working for the government, were identifying locations for the colonies. The government stated its intention of reaching an agreement with the association once this process was complete. By Christmas an Order in Council set up the first four colonies with the remaining six to be established later. Tomkins and Dion conferred with the Metis in preparation for the drafting of regulations that would govern the colonies. Both men were working closely with a committee of officials from health and relief departments.[8]

With the fate of the colonies drifting into the hands of the government bureaucracy, Malcolm Norris reappeared on the political scene. He had not heard about the "Fourth General Convention" until December. When he learned that Brady had ignored appeals from Tomkins and Dion, he was greatly disturbed. In an uncharacteristically blunt letter, Norris criticized Brady and urged his immediate action. Norris believed the Social Credit government was sincere in its efforts to deal with the association "notwithstanding their political aspirations...So long as I can see some good will accrue to the Metis I am

still ready to lend my support to the scheme. I have given both Pete and Joe this assurance.''[9]

In the old, familiar pattern, Norris' appeal overcame whatever doubts Jim Brady still had about the colony issue. In early January both men began to provide leadership in the colony negotiations. They identified two key issues: the role of the association in the colonies and the clergy's role in education. Norris and Brady forwarded resolutions on these issues to Dion and Tomkins with the request that they support their resolutions' passage at up-coming elections of colony boards, elections that they would be supervising. One resolution dealt with the status of the association: ''That as members of the Metis Association of Alberta, we desire to retain our identity. . . separate and apart from any association formed for the purpose of entering and electing a board to govern, formulate and draft resolutions for the colony.''[10] Norris included resolutions guaranteeing the role of the executive committee as ''advisors and mouthpieces'' for the Metis on the colonies. Resolutions concerning education gave control to the local Metis boards, and guaranteed nondenominational, English language education.

The resolutions were the opening shot of a new phase in the colony struggle. But the six-month absence of Brady and Norris had given the government a generous advantage. The government-sanctioned ''settlement associations'' undermined the Metis association and were an invitation to opportunists. The boards had formal power; Norris and Brady would now have to rely on the moral authority they had earned in past struggles. With their fellow executives integrated into the government apparatus the association was in limbo, and Norris and Brady were reduced to the status of individuals trying to influence their former colleagues.

Norris played the major role in this battle. As well as trying to influence Dion and Tomkins, he met with government officials, including health minister Cross. He was also fighting a rearguard action against Hamilton's organization. In both enterprises Norris had some success. Cross evidently agreed that clerics should be kept out of Metis education.[11] And an Edmonton meeting called by Norris to re-establish the association's authortity voted 35 to 10 to support Norris and the association over Hamilton.[12]

But in dealing with their old colleagues Norris and Brady had little success. Tomkins did have the resolutions sent by Norris and Brady passed at two colony board elections. (It is not clear whether Dion did the same at the other two.) But both Dion and Tomkins were becoming increasingly secretive about government intentions.[13] They had always relied on Brady and Norris for political direction, and now the government was providing that direction.

Norris was becoming alarmed at the situation. He learned that Pete

Tomkins was "instructed not to meddle or intercede on behalf of Metis in relief matters."[14] He broached the topic with Dion, suggesting that he and Tomkins were not "free to be the aggressive mouthpieces of the Metis people."[15]

Norris wrote to Brady in June 1939:

> It is quite apparent that Joe and Pete are more interested in their monthly pay check than they are in the Metis. This is a human characteristic easily understood. . . Deep in their hearts they have a sincere desire to be of service to their Neestow brethren. They are poor—like ourselves—and the biological motive of self preservation is strong within all mankind. . . They have not the ability to cope with the complications of a machine of superior intelligence and resources.[16]

Brady and Norris concluded that their efforts to persuade Tomkins and Dion to collaborate with them were getting nowhere. They also had to contend with growing dissatisfaction and confusion among the Metis. Brady and Norris were being pressed for information they didn't have. And Hamilton, despite his rebuff by Norris, was still agitating. Brady and Norris decided that their only hope lay in a general convention of the association.

Only Joe Dion, as president of the association, could call a general convention. When he refused Brady's request to do so, Brady himself called the convention, which was to be held at Lac Ste. Anne on July 27 during the Lac Ste. Anne pilgrimage. The convention call was supported by three members of the executive: Brady, Norris and Callihoo. Tomkins, however, also refused to participate. Lack of unity within the executive doomed the convention to failure. Dion, adding strength to Norris' charges of opportunism, wrote to Brady a week before the ill-fated convention informing him that due to "many requests from our Metis friends"[17] he and Tomkins were meeting with the Metis at Lac Ste. Anne on July 26.

The failed attempt to convene a general conference of Metis meant Norris and Brady had reached yet another impasse. The settlement scheme was now firmly in government hands, and Dion and Tomkins, as part of a four-man Metis committee, provided the government with credibility. Norris returned to his prospecting and Brady likewise withdrew to Lac La Biche. Since the public hearings in 1935 Brady had shown little enthusiasm for the colony scheme. The latest development seemed a final confirmation of his pessimism.

When Norris had recruited his reluctant colleage to the colony struggle in January, Brady shifted his activity to the Metis struggle in general. He returned—this time with Norris' help—to the promotion of

co-operatives among the Metis commercial fishermen.

In January 1939 Norris and Brady organized the Interlakes Fish Pool at Wabamun.[18] The Lac La Biche Independent Fish Pool, organized by Brady in 1934, had been the main co-op in the area for several years. Subsequently many smaller co-ops were established. In the winter and spring of 1938-39 Brady and others in the co-operative movement were pressing for a central selling agency which would remove control of the market from the private buyers. There was considerable optimism for the future of co-ops.

That optimism was short-lived. Both the co-ops themselves and the central selling agency were plagued with internal and external problems. There were squabbles between the smaller co-ops and the larger ones, and the private buyers and fish companies, with the complicity of provincial civil servants, engaged in continuous efforts to sabotage the co-ops.

Many Metis, revealing their traditional individualism, sold to private companies whenever they offered higher prices than the co-ops. Some co-ops had to rely on experienced white managers who had little personal commitment to co-operative principles.

The Alberta Co-op Fisheries Limited, the central selling agency, barely managed to get off the ground. Poor market conditions, a chronic problem with fresh water fisheries, combined with co-op squabbling, defeated the agency. Without such an agency it was next to impossible to maintain unity among the co-ops.

Norris was as pessimistic about Metis co-operatives as Brady was about the colony scheme. In September 1939 he wrote to his colleague: "In my mind Jimmy it will be no easy task to educate these Neestows into the rudiments of co-operatives."[19] Norris felt that the individualistic Metis tendency to abandon the co-ops for the short-term gain of higher private prices doomed the enterprises to failure. Brady could scarcely dispute that the task was a difficult one. But for Brady producer co-operatives represented the Metis' best long-term hope, economically and socially. No other economic strategy commanded the same attention from Brady as the co-ops, and he remained committed to the co-op movement throughout his many years as a political organizer among the Metis.

Co-operatives were common on the prairies. Co-operative principles were virtually the backbone of the farm movement: co-operative elevator companies, co-operative retail stores, agitation for a central selling agency for grain—all had played or would play a major role on the prairies. However, while Brady no doubt learned from these co-operative efforts, his use of co-operative principles had little to do with the farming co-ops. The latter were aimed principally at ensuring economic security for middle-class farmers. Brady's use of co-ops had a

much broader, anti-colonial purpose.

Brady's doubts about the government's colony scheme had taught him a political lesson: the Metis could not rely exclusively on the state, or government, to assist them in their liberation struggle. The key to that liberation was economic independence, and the government would not provide it. Like all workers the Metis needed some collective form of economic security. Commerical fishing and forestry were the future for the nomadic Metis and Indian, and as primary industries involving many small producers, trade or industrial unions were inappropriate. While Brady may have envisioned unions at some point in the future, he was never involved in organizing them among the Metis.

Brady seems to have viewed producer co-operatives as a transitional form of social organization for a people not yet an integral part of the Canadian working class. The producer co-ops would serve, politically, to teach the Metis the value of collective action. In order for the Metis to fashion their own future, to fight for self-determination outside the direction of government schemes, their nomadic individualism would have to be challenged. Without such a turnaround—which Brady believed the co-ops would accomplish—sustained collective political action by the hunters and trappers would be impossible.

Brady pinned his hopes for the co-operatives on the alliance between the "progressives" and the nomads. The struggle for Metis co-operative enterprises, Brady felt, was the core of the Metis national liberation struggle in the north. He wrote:

> If we begin with minor co-operative ventures, bringing about Metis rehabilitation depends to a great extent on the organizers or skilled technical workers who can be won step by step to the side of co-operative principles of organization.[20]

If government control of the nomads' future was to be challenged, the alliance between the nomads and the advanced elements of the Metis had to be maintained.

Brady's involvement with the colony scheme and his work with the co-operatives signalled his full-time return to the Metis' autonomous struggle. In 1939 the Communist Party's provincial secretary, Lawrence Anderson, wanted Brady to attend the five-week political course for Party militants, an opportunity Brady apparently declined.

In the latter half of 1939 Pete Tomkins invited Brady to organize a fishermen's co-op on the Atikameg Metis Colony at Utikuma Lake. The government was in favor of the co-op, and the lake had great potential as an excellent source of economic security for the settlers. For the first time since 1935 Brady and Tomkins were back together.

Soon Brady and Tomkins were working to rejuvenate the Metis

association. However, in a pattern which was by then well established, it was Malcolm Norris, back from the north, who took the initiative in the reorganizing effort. Norris again asked Dion to call a convention, but Dion's refusal effectively rendered the old organization dead. Norris then called a Metis conference to be held February 21, 1940. The announcement made no mention of the old association; it was simply a call to action: "It is imperative that serious consideration be given at this time to the many grave issues facing the Metis population." Among those grave issues were "Land tenure of colonists under the Metis Population Betterment Act; Rehabilitation measures; Forcible segregation mooted by cities, towns and municipalities; organization of provincial body and election of officers."[21]

Over a hundred Metis converged from across the province, testifying to support for a new movement. Much of the meeting was taken up with criticisms of the settlement scheme, and the conference endorsed Norris' cautious criticism of Tomkins and Dion for their passivity in Metis affairs. The Edmonton *Journal* reported that a twelve-man council, with Norris as chairman, was elected to initiate a revival of the association. Jim Brady was appointed, in absentia, councillor for Atikameg.

Brady's absence from the conference was the only sour note of the rejuvenation effort. It resulted from a personal conflict between him and Norris, a dispute which arose from Norris' renewed efforts to recruit Brady to the colonies struggle. Norris could be tactless in his calls to action but had always treated Brady with special care. This time he had apparently gone too far. As a gesture of protest against Norris' criticisms, Brady resigned his position on the new Metis council.

To mend the rift, Norris called on the services of one of Brady's CP colleagues, Harry Swanson. Swanson, referred to by Brady in his Journal as a "communist polemicist," was blunt with Brady. He had attended the conference and was impressed with its actions. He was also familiar with the offending letter that Norris had sent Brady:

> With regard to accusations of "self-preservation" they were private in character and based upon long acquaintance and camaraderie. . . [The letter] was an effort to arouse you from a seeming apathy re: organizational action. . . Your resignation. . . I certainly consider a mistake, in fact, a weakness that is not like you. . . You should, I think settle your question privately with Norris. If not you will certainly aid reaction in disorganizing your own people.[22]

Swanson's intervention succeeded. Brady withdrew his resignation and once again entered the complex politics of the colony scheme.