

Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879–1885

ONE OF THE MOST PERSISTENT MYTHS that Canadian historians perpetuate is that of the honourable and just policy Canada followed in dealing with the Plains Indians. First enunciated in the Canadian expansionist literature of the 1870s as a means to emphasize the distinctive Canadian approach to and the unique character of the Canadian west,¹ it has been given credence by G.F.G. Stanley in his classic *The Birth of Western Canada*,² and by all those who use Stanley's work as the standard interpretation of Canada's relationship with the Plains Indians in the period 1870–85. Thus students are taught that the Canadian government was paternalistic and far-sighted in offering the Indians a means to become civilized and assimilated into white society by the reserve system, and honest and fair-minded in honouring legal commitments made in the treaties.³ The Plains Indians, and particularly the Plains Cree, are said to be a primitive people adhering to an inflexible system of tradition and custom, seeking to protect themselves against the advance of civilization, and taking up arms in rejection of the reserve system and an agricultural way of life.⁴ This traditional

1 Doug Owram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856–1900* (Toronto 1980), 131–4

2 G.F.G. Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions* (Toronto 1960)

3 *Ibid.*, 206–15

4 *Ibid.*, vii–viii, 196, 216–36. It should be noted that the traditional interpretation of a Cree rebellion in association with the Metis has been challenged by R. Allen, 'Big Bear,' *Saskatchewan History*, xxv (1972); W.B. Fraser, 'Big Bear, Indian Patriot,' *Alberta Historical Review*, xiv (1966), 1–13; Rudy Wiebe in his fictional biography, *The Temptations of Big Bear* (Toronto 1973) and in his biography of Big Bear in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* [DCB], xi, 1881–90 (Toronto 1982), 597–601; and Norma Sluman, *Poundmaker* (Toronto 1967). However, none of these

interpretation distorts the roles of both the Cree and the Canadian government, for the Cree were both flexible and active in promoting their own interests, and willing to accommodate themselves to a new way of life, while the Canadian government was neither as far-sighted nor as just as tradition maintains. Canada's principal concern in its relationship with the Plains Cree was to establish control over them, and Canadian authorities were willing to and did wage war upon the Cree in order to achieve this control.

Those who propagate the myth would have us believe that Canada began to negotiate treaties with the Indians of the West in 1871 as part of an overall plan to develop the agricultural potential of the West, open the land for railway construction, and bind the prairies to Canada in a network of commercial and economic ties. Although there is an element of truth to these statements, the fact remains that in 1871 Canada had no plan on how to deal with the Indians and the negotiation of treaties was not at the initiative of the Canadian government, but at the insistence of the Ojibwa Indians of the North-West Angle and the Saulteaux of the tiny province of Manitoba. What is ignored by the traditional interpretation is that the treaty process only started after Yellow Quill's band of Saulteaux turned back settlers who tried to go west of Portage la Prairie, and after other Saulteaux leaders insisted upon enforcement of the Selkirk Treaty or, more often, insisted upon making a new treaty. Also ignored is the fact that the Ojibwa of the North-West Angle demanded rents, and created the fear of violence against prospective settlers who crossed their land or made use of their territory, if Ojibwa rights to their lands were not recognized. This pressure and fear of resulting violence is what motivated the government to begin the treaty-making process.⁵

Canada's initial offer to the Saulteaux and Ojibwa Indians consisted only of reserves and a small cash annuity. This proposal was rejected by the Ojibwa in 1871 and again in 1872, while the Saulteaux demanded, much to Treaty Commissioner Wemyss Simpson's chagrin, farm animals, horses, wagons, and farm tools and equipment. Simpson did not include these demands in the written treaty, for he had no authority to do so, but he wrote them down in the form of a memorandum that he entitled 'outside promises' and which he failed to send to Ottawa. Thus, the original Treaties 1 and 2 did not include those items the Saulteaux said had to be part of a treaty before they

authors deals with Canada's Indian policy, and none examines what the Cree were doing in the period 1876–85.

⁵ Alexander Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories* (Toronto 1880), 37; Public Archives of Manitoba, Adams G. Archibald Papers (hereafter cited as PAM Archibald Papers, letters)

would agree to surrender their lands. Only in 1874, after the Indian leaders of Manitoba became irate over non-receipt of the goods that Simpson had promised them, was an inquiry launched, and Simpson's list of 'outside promises' discovered and incorporated in renegotiated treaties in 1875.⁶ It was only in 1873, after the Ojibwa of the North-West Angle had twice refused treaties that only included reserves and annuities, that the government agreed to include the domestic animals, farm tools, and equipment that the Ojibwa demanded. After this experience Canada made such goods a standard part of later treaties.⁷

Just as it was pressure from the Indians of Manitoba that forced the government of Canada to initiate the treaty process, it was pressure from the Plains Cree in the period 1872-5 that compelled the government of Canada to continue the process with the Indians of the Qu'Appelle and Saskatchewan districts. The Plains Cree had interfered with the geological survey and prevented the construction of telegraph lines through their territory to emphasize that Canada had to deal with the Cree for Cree lands.⁸ The Cree had learned in 1870 about Canada's claim to their lands, and not wanting to experience what had happened to the Indians in the United States when those people were faced with an expansionist government, the Cree made clear that they would not allow settlement or use of their lands until Cree rights had been clearly recognized. They also made clear that part of any arrangement for Cree lands had to involve assistance to the Cree in developing a new agricultural way of life.⁹

6 Public Archives of Canada, Record Group 10 Indian Affairs Files, vol. 3571, file 124-2, also vol. 3603, file 2036 (hereafter cited as PAC, RG 10, vol. file). See also Morris, *Treaties of Canada*, 25-43 and 126-7, for a printed account of the negotiations and the texts of the original and renegotiated treaties, pp 313-20, 338-42. Two articles by John Taylor, 'Canada's Northwest Indian Policy in the 1870's: Traditional Premises and Necessary Innovations' and 'Two Views on the Meaning of Treaties Six and Seven' in *The Spirit of Alberta Indian Treaties* (Montreal 1980), 3-7 and 9-45 respectively, provide a good account of the Indian contribution and attitude towards the treaties.

7 Morris, *Treaties of Canada*, 44-76; on pp 120-3 Morris demonstrates how he had to make Treaty 3 the model for the Qu'Appelle Treaty to get the Saulteaux and Cree of the Qu'Appelle River region to accept what he originally offered them. Compare Treaties 1-6 to see what the government was forced to concede. Also see Taylor's 'Traditional Premises' for Indian contributions to the negotiation process.

8 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3586, file 1137, Lieutenant-Governor Morris to Secretary of State for the provinces, 13 Sept. 1872; PAC, RG 10, vol. 3576, file 378 entire file; vol. 3609, file 3229; vol. 3604, file 2543; vol. 3636, 6694-1

9 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3612, file 4012, entire file; PAM Archibald Papers, W.J. Christie to George W. Hill, 26 Apr. 1871; Archibald to Secretary of State for the Provinces, 5 Jan. 1872; also letters in note 15; William Francis Butler, *The Great Lone Land*

In adopting this position, the Cree were simply demonstrating a skill that they had shown since their initial contact with Europeans in 1670. On numerous occasions during the fur trade era, they had adapted to changed environmental and economic circumstances, beginning first as hunters, then as provisioners and middlemen in the Hudson's Bay Company trading system, and finally adapting from a woodland to parkland-prairie buffalo hunting culture to retain their independence and their desired ties with the fur trade.¹⁰ Having accommodated themselves to the Plains Indian culture after 1800, they expanded into territory formerly controlled by the Atsina, and as the buffalo herds began to decline after 1850, the Cree expanded into Blackfoot territory.¹¹ Expansion was one response to the threat posed by declining buffalo herds; another was that some Plains Cree bands began to turn to agriculture.¹² Thus, when the Cree learned that Canada claimed their lands, part of the arrangement they were

(Rutland, VT 1970), 360–2, 368; PAC, Manuscript Group 26A, John A. Macdonald Papers, vol. 104, entire volume (hereafter cited as PAC, MG 26A, letters), PAM, Archibald Papers, Joseph Howe to Archibald, 30 June 1872; PAM, Alexander Morris Papers, Lt Governor's Collection, Morris to Minister of the Interior 7 July 1873 (hereafter cited as PAM, Morris Papers, letter); PAC, RG 10, vol. 3625, file 5366, Morris to Minister of the Interior, David Laird, 22 July and 4 August 1875; RG 10 vol. 3624, file 5152, Colonel French, Commissioner of the NWMP to the Minister of Justice, 6 and 19 August 1875; Morris, 170–1, RG 10, vol. 3612, file 4012, entire file; Adams G. Archibald Papers, Petition of James Seenum to Archibald, 9 Jan. 1871, and attached letters of Kehewin, Little Hunter, and Kiskion; Archibald to Secretary of State for the provinces, 5 Jan. 1872

- 10 Two excellent studies of the Cree in the pre-1870 era are those by Arthur J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Hunters, Trappers, and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay 1660–1870* (Toronto 1974), and David G. Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree*, xxxvii, Part II of Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History (New York 1940).
- 11 Ibid. An excellent study of the Cree expansion is the unpublished MA thesis by John S. Milloy, 'The Plains Cree: A Preliminary Trade and Military Chronology, 1670–1870' (Carleton University 1972); also Henry John Moberly and William B. Cameron, *When Fur Was King* (Toronto 1929), 208–12, describes part of the last phase of this movement. The shrinking range of buffalo and how the Cree reacted are also discussed in Frank Gilbert Roe, *The North American Buffalo: A Critical Study of the Species in Its Wild State* (Toronto 1951), 282–333.
- 12 Henry Youle Hind, *Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857 and of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition of 1858* (Edmonton 1971), vol. 1, p. 334; Irene Spry, *The Palliser Expedition: An Account of John Palliser's British North American Expedition, 1857–1860* (London 1964), 59–60; Viscount Milton and W.B. Cheadle, *The Northwest Passage by Land, Being the Narrative of an Expedition from the Atlantic to the Pacific* (Toronto 1970), 66–7; Edwin Thompson Perry, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri: Sioux, Arickaras, Assiniboine, Crees, Crow* (Norman, OK 1969), 99–137; J. Hines, *The Red Indians of the Plains: Thirty Years' Missionary Experience in Saskatchewan* (Toronto 1916), 78–80, 88–91

determined to make and succeeded in making was to receive assistance in adapting to an agricultural way of life. So successful were they in negotiating such assistance that when the Mackenzie government received a copy of Treaty 6 in 1876 it accepted the treaty only after expressing a protest concerning the too-generous terms granted to the Cree.¹³

While willing to explore the alternative of agriculture, three Cree leaders in the 1870s sought means to guarantee preservation of the buffalo-hunting culture as long as possible. Piapot (leader of the Cree-Assiniboine of the region south of the Qu'Appelle River), and Big Bear and Little Pine (leaders of two of the largest Cree bands from the Saskatchewan River district) led what has been called an armed migration of the Cree into the Cypress Hills in the latter 1860s. All three men were noted warriors, and Big Bear and Piapot were noted religious leaders, but their prowess was not enough to prevent a Cree defeat at the Battle of the Belly River in 1870,¹⁴ and as a result they explored the alternative of dealing with the government of Canada, but in a manner to extract guarantees for the preservation of Cree autonomy. They were determined to get the government to promise to limit the buffalo hunt to the Indians – a goal that Cree leaders had been advocating since the 1850s.¹⁵ When Big Bear met with Treaty Commissioner Alexander Morris at Fort Pitt in September 1876, he extracted a promise from Morris that non-Indian hunting of the buffalo would be regulated.¹⁶

Big Bear refused to take treaty in 1876, despite receiving Morris's assurances about the regulation of the hunt. Little Pine and Piapot also did not take treaty when the treaty commissions first came to deal with

13 Morris, *Treaties of Canada*, 77–123 and 168–239, discusses the negotiations of Treaties 4 and 6 with the Cree and how he was forced to modify his offer. Also described is the Cree concern about their land. The reaction of the Mackenzie government is detailed in PAC, RG 10, vol. 3636, file 6694-2 and in particular, Minister of the Interior Report to Privy Council, 31 Jan. 1877 and order-in-council, 10 Feb. 1877.

14 Milloy, 'The Plains Cree' 250–62; Alexander Johnson, *The Battle at Belly River: Stories of the Last Great Indian Battle* (Lethbridge 1966)

15 Henry Youle Hind, vol. 1, pp 334, 360–1, carries reports of Mistickoos or Short Stick's comments on a council of Cree leaders that resolved to limit white and Metis hunting privileges. Viscount Milton and W.B. Cheadle, *The Northwest Passage by Land, Being the Narrative of an Expedition from the Atlantic to the Pacific*, 66, 67, contains comments on the Cree determination to limit non-Indian involvement in the hunt. PAM, E. Adams Archibald Papers, letter #200, Macdonald to Archibald, 14 Feb. 1871; letter #170, English halfbreeds to Archibald, 10 Jan. 1871, all stress that Cree were taking action to limit non-Indian involvement in the buffalo hunt.

16 Morris, *Treaties of Canada*, 241

the Cree. Oral tradition among the Cree maintains that all three leaders wished to see how faithful the government would be in honouring the treaties,¹⁷ but equally important for all three leaders was their belief that the treaties were inadequate and that revisions were necessary. Piapot thought Treaty 4 (the Qu'Appelle Treaty) needed to be expanded to include increased farm equipment and tools, and to stipulate that the government had to provide mills, blacksmith and carpentry shops and tools, and instructors in farming and the trades. Only after receiving assurances that Ottawa would consider these requests did Piapot take treaty in 1875.¹⁸ Big Bear and Little Pine objected to Treaty 6 (Fort Pitt and Carlton) because Commissioner Morris had made clear that in taking treaty the Cree would be bound by Canadian law. To accept the treaties would mean being subject to an external authority of which the Crees had little knowledge and upon which they had little influence. Neither Big Bear nor Little Pine would countenance such a loss of autonomy.

Big Bear had raised the matter of Cree autonomy at Fort Pitt in 1876 when he met Commissioner Morris. At that time Big Bear said: 'I will make a request that he [Morris] save me from what I most dread, that is the rope about my neck ... It was not given to us to have the rope about our neck.'¹⁹ Morris and most subsequent historians have interpreted Big Bear's statements to be a specific reference to hanging, but such an interpretation ignores the fact that Big Bear, like most Indian leaders, often used a metaphor to emphasize a point. In 1875, he had made the same point by using a different metaphor when he spoke to messengers informing him that a treaty commission was to meet with the Cree in 1876. At that time Big Bear said: 'We want none of the Queen's presents: when we set a foxtrap we scatter pieces of meat all around, but when the fox gets into the trap we knock him on the head; we want no bait ...'²⁰ A more accurate interpretation of Big Bear's words to Morris in 1876 is that he feared being controlled or 'enslaved,' just as an animal is controlled when it has a rope around its neck.²¹ In 1877, when

17 Interview with Walter Gordon, Director of the Indian Rights and Treaties Program, Federation of Saskatchewan Indians, Mar. 1974. Poundmaker made a similar statement in an interview quoted in 'Indian Affairs,' *Saskatchewan Herald*, 2 Aug. 1880. The importance of Big Bear, Piapot, and Little Pine cannot be underestimated, for of those Cree chiefs who took treaty only Sweetgrass had the standing of these men, and Sweetgrass died within a few months of taking treaty.

18 Morris, *Treaties of Canada*, 85–7. More detailed information on the adhesions of Piapot and Cheekuk is to be found in PAC, RG 10, vol. 3625, file 5489; W.J. Christie to Laird, 7 Oct. 1875

19 Morris, *Treaties of Canada*, 240 for the quotation. See p 355 for the clauses in Treaty 6 respecting acceptance of Canadian laws.

20 *Ibid.*, 174

21 Fraser, 'Big Bear, Indian Patriot' 76–7 agrees that Big Bear was not referring specifically to hanging but to the effect the treaty would have on the Cree.

meeting with Lieutenant-Governor David Laird, Little Pine also stated that he would not take treaty because he saw the treaties as a means by which the government could 'enslave' his people.²²

The importance of these three leaders cannot be underestimated, for they had with them in the Cypress Hills more than fifty per cent of the total Indian population of the Treaty 4 and 6 areas. By concentrating in such numbers in the last buffalo ranges in Canadian territory, the Cree were free from all external interference, whether by other Indian nations or by the agents of the Canadian government – the North-West Mounted Police.²³ Recognizing that these men were bargaining from a position of strength, Laird recommended in 1878 that the government act quickly to establish reserves and honour the treaties. He was aware that the Cypress Hills leaders had the support of many of the Cree in treaty, and that many of the Cree leaders were complaining that the government was not providing the farming assistance promised. As the number of these complaints increased, so did Cree support for Big Bear and Little Pine.²⁴

The Cree were concerned not only about the lack of assistance to farm, but when Canadian officials were slow to take action to regulate the buffalo hunt, Big Bear, Piapot, and Little Pine met with Blackfoot leaders and with Sitting Bull of the Teton Sioux in an attempt to reach agreement among the Indian nations on the need to regulate buffalo hunting.²⁵ These councils were also the forum where Indian leaders discussed the need to revise the treaties. On learning about the Indian council, the non-Indian populace of the West grew anxious, fearing establishment of an Indian confederacy which would wage war if Indian demands were rejected.²⁶ However, an Indian confederacy did not result from these meetings, nor was agreement reached on how the

22 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3656, file 9093, Agent Dickieson to Lt-Gov. Laird, 14 Sept. 1877

23 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3648, file 8380; vol. 3655, file 9000, Laird to Minister of the Interior, 9 May 1878

24 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3655, file 9000, Laird to Minister of the Interior, 9 May 1878; vol. 3636, file 9092, Laird to Superintendent-General, 19 Nov. 1877; PAC, RG 10, vol. 3670, file 10,771, Laird to Minister of the Interior, 12 Nov. 1878. PAC, RG 10, vol. 3672, file 10,853, Dickieson to Meredith, 2 Apr. 1878; vol. 3656, file 9092, Inspector James Walker to Laird, 5 Sept. 1877. Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa, file 1/1-11-3, Laird to Minister of the Interior, 30 Dec. 1878; Dickieson to Laird, 9 Oct. 1878; Walker to Laird, 4 and 26 Feb. 1879 (hereafter cited as DIAND, file, letter)

25 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3655, file 1002, Laird to Minister of the Interior, 9 May 1878; vol. 3672, file 19,853, Dickieson to Vankoughnet, 26 July 1878; PAC, MG 26A, E.D. Clark to Fred White, 16 July 1879

26 'News from the Plains,' *Saskatchewan Herald*, 18 Nov. 1878; 'From the Plains,' *Saskatchewan Herald*, 5 May 1879. 'Contradictory News from the West,' *Fort Benton Record*, 31 Jan. 1879

buffalo were to be preserved, because the Cree, Sioux, and Blackfoot could not overcome their old animosities towards one another.²⁷

When in 1879 the buffalo disappeared from the Canadian prairies and Big Bear and Little Pine took their bands south to the buffalo ranges on the Milk and Missouri rivers, most of the other Cree and Assiniboine bands also went with them. The Cree who remained in Canada faced starvation while awaiting the survey of their reserves and the farming equipment that had been promised. Realizing that many of the Cree were dying, the government decided that those who had taken treaty should be given rations. As well, the government appointed Edgar Dewdney to the newly-created position of Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the North-West Territory; a farming policy for the western reserves was introduced; a survey of Cree reserves was begun; and twelve farming instructors were appointed to teach the Indians of the North-West.²⁸

The new Indian Commissioner quickly sought to use rations as a means of getting control over the Cree. In the fall of 1879 he announced that rations were to be provided only to Indians who had taken treaty. To get the Cree into treaty more easily and to reduce the influence of recalcitrant leaders, Dewdney announced that he would adopt an old Hudson's Bay Company practice of recognizing any adult male Cree as chief of a new band if he could induce 100 or more persons to recognize him as leader. He expected that the starving Cypress Hills Cree would desert their old leaders to get rations. As a means of demonstrating Canada's control over the Cree, Dewdney ordered that only the sick, aged, and orphans should receive rations without providing some service to one of the government agencies in the West.²⁹

27 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3672, file 10,853, M.G. Dickieson to Vankoughnet, 26 July 1878; *Opening Up the West: Being the Official Reports to Parliament of the North-West Mounted Police from 1874-1881* (Toronto 1973), Report for 1878, p. 21

28 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3704, file 17,858, entire file; vol. 3648, file 162-2, entire file. *Ibid.*, vol. 3699, file 16,580, order-in-council, 9 Oct. 1879; vol. 3766, file 22,541; E.T. Galt to Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, 27 July 1880; vol. 3730, file 26,279, entire file; vol. 3757, file 21,397, entire file

29 House of Commons, Ottawa, *Sessional Papers*, xvii (1885), Report No. 3, 157 (hereafter cited as CSP, vol., year, report); Edward Ahenakew, *Voices of the Plains Cree*, Ruth Buck, ed. (Toronto 1973), 26. Dewdney in adopting this tactic simply copied what the fur-trading companies had done in the past. The Cree tolerated such practices because they improved the opportunities to have better access to European goods. See Arthur J. Ray and Donald Freeman, 'Give Us Good Measure': *An Economic Analysis of Relations between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company before 1763* (Toronto 1978), passim. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, passim, deals with the same practice in the post-1763 period. Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree*, 105-10 discusses the nature of Cree political organization and leadership that explains their acceptance of such practices.

Dewdney's policies seemed to work, for when the Cree and Assiniboine who had gone to hunt in Montana returned starving, their resolve weakened. Little Pine's people convinced their chief to take treaty in 1879, but when Big Bear refused to do the same, almost half of his following joined Lucky Man or Thunderchild to form new bands in order to receive rations.³⁰

Taking treaty to avoid starvation did not mean that the Cree had come to accept the treaties as written; rather they altered their tactics in seeking revisions. Believing that small reserves were more susceptible to the control of the Canadian government and its officials, Big Bear, Piapot, and Little Pine sought to effect a concentration of the Cree people in an Indian territory similar to the reservation system in the United States. In such a territory the Cree would be able to preserve their autonomy, or at least limit the ability of others to control them; they would be better able to take concerted action on matters of importance to them.³¹

Soon after taking treaty Little Pine applied for a reserve in the Cypress Hills, twenty-seven miles north-east of the North-West Mounted Police post of Fort Walsh. Piapot requested a reserve next to Little Pine's, while ten other bands, including most of the Assiniboine nation, selected reserve sites contiguous to either Little Pine's or Piapot's and to one another.³² If all these reserve sites were granted, and if Big Bear were to take treaty and settle in the Cypress Hills, the result would be concentration of much of the Cree nation and the

30 Morris, *Treaties of Canada*, 366–7. DIAND, Treaty Annuity Pay Sheets for 1879. More than 1,000 Plains Cree took treaty for the first time in 1879 under Little Pine, Thunderchild, and Lucky Man. Others from Little Pine's and Big Bear's bands had already taken treaty a year earlier as part of Thunder Companion's band, while others joined Poundmaker, and the three Cree bands settled in the Peace Hills. A portion of the Assiniboine also took treaty under Mosquito in 1878, while many of the northern Saulteaux who had followed Yellow Sky took treaty in 1878 under the leadership of Moosomin.

31 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3745, file 29506-4, vol. 2. Ray to Reed, 23 Apr. 1883; vol. 3668, file 9644, Reed to Commissioner, 23 Dec. 1883. Although these materials refer to events in the Battleford district, as will be demonstrated, the tactics in 1883–4 were similar, if not exactly the same as those used in the Cypress Hills between 1879 and 1882. That they were not better recorded for the earlier period is due to the fact that the government had fewer men working with the Indians, and did not have as effective supervision in 1879–82 period as it did at Battleford. Also much of the police and Indian Affairs material relating to this region in the 1879–82 period have been lost or destroyed.

32 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3730, file 36,279, entire file; vol. 3668, file 10,440, Agent Allen to L. Vankoughnet, 11 Nov. 1878. CSP, vol. XVI (1883), Paper no. 5, p 197. *Settlers and Rebels: Being the Reports to Parliament of the Activities of the Royal North-West Mounted Police Force from 1882–1885* (Toronto 1973), Report for 1882, pp 4–6 (hereafter cited as *Settlers and Rebels*)

creation of an Indian territory that would comprise most of what is now south-western Saskatchewan.

Unaware of the intention of the Cree and Assiniboine leaders, Canadian officials in the spring of 1880 agreed to the establishment of a reserve for all the Canadian Assiniboine and reserves in the Cypress Hills for each of the Cree bands that wished them. In 1880, the Assiniboine reserve was surveyed, but the other Indian leaders were told that their reserves would not be surveyed until the following year.³³ In the interim, most of the Cree went to the buffalo ranges in Montana.

The Cree effort to exploit the remaining American buffalo ranges caused them much trouble. The Crow, the Peigan, and other Indian nations with reservations in Montana were upset by competition for the scarce food resource, and these people threatened to break the treaties they had made with the American government and to wage war on the Cree if the American authorities did not protect the Indian hunting ranges. These threats were renewed when the Cree began to steal horses from the Crow and Peigan. To add to their difficulties, American ranchers accused the Cree of killing range cattle. American officials, not wishing trouble with their Indians and wishing to placate the ranchers, informed the Cree that they would have to return to Canada. Most Cree bands, aware that if they did not leave voluntarily the American government would use troops to force them to move north, returned to the Cypress Hills.³⁴

They returned to find that Canadian officials were now aware of the dangers to their authority posed by a concentration of the Cree. A riot at Fort Walsh in 1880, which the police were powerless to prevent or control, assaults on farming instructors who refused to provide rations to starving Indians, and rumours that the Cree were planning a grand Indian council to discuss treaty revisions in 1881 all caused the Indian Commissioner much concern.³⁵ To avoid further difficulties over rations, in late 1880 Dewdney ordered that all Indians requesting

33 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3730, file 26,219, Report of surveyor Patrick to Superintendent-General, 16 Dec. 1880; vol. 3716, file 22,546, Assistant Commissioner E.T. Galt to Superintendent-General, 27 July 1880; vol. 3757, files 31,393 and 31,333; vol. 3757, file 20,034. PAC, MG 26A, vol. 210, Dewdney to Macdonald, 3 Oct. 1880

34 RG 10, vol. 3652, file 8589, parts 1 and 2, entire file; vol. 3691, file 13,893, entire file. The *Benton Weekly Record* throughout the spring and summer of 1880 carried reports of Cree and Assiniboine horse-stealing raids, and reports of what the Cree were doing in Montana. On 7 May 1880, the paper carried an article entitled 'Starving Indians,' which was a strong denunciation of Canada's Indian policy and the effect it had on the Cree.

35 PAC, MG 26A, vol. 210, Dewdney to Macdonald, 29 Oct. 1880; *Saskatchewan Herald*, 14 Feb. 1881

rations be given them, regardless of whether the supplicant was in treaty.³⁶ There was little that the government could do at this time about the proposed Indian council or the concentration of Cree in the Cypress Hills.

In the spring of 1881, Cree bands from all regions of the Canadian prairies left their reserves to go south to meet with Little Pine and Big Bear. Even the new bands Dewdney had created were going to the council in American territory. What was also disconcerting to Canadian officials were the reports that Big Bear and Little Pine, who had gone to Montana to prepare for the council, had reached an accommodation with the Blackfoot and had participated in a joint raid on the Crow. To all appearances the Blackfoot, the Indian confederacy the Canadian government most feared, would be part of the Indian council.³⁷

The Indian council was not held because the raid on the Crow led American officials to intervene militarily to force the Cree to return to Canada. With Montana stockmen acting as militia units, the American army prevented most Cree and Assiniboine bands from entering the United States. As well, the American forces seized horses, guns, and carts, and escorted the Cree to Canada.³⁸ The Cree-Blackfoot alliance did not materialize, for soon after the raid on the Crow, young Cree warriors stole horses from the Blackfoot and thereby destroyed the accord that Little Pine and Big Bear were attempting to create.³⁹

The actions of the American military in 1881 were extremely beneficial to Canada. Not only did the Americans prevent the holding of the Indian council, but by confiscating the guns and horses of the Cree, the Americans had dispossessed the Cree of the ability to resist whatever measures the Canadian authorities wished to take against them. The Canadian authorities also benefited from Governor-General Lorne's tour of the West in 1881, for many of the Cree bands

36 PAC, MG 26A, vol. 210, Dewdney to Macdonald, 26 Oct. 1880 and 23 Apr. 1880; *Saskatchewan Herald*, 14, 28 Feb. 1881

37 PAC, MG 26A, vol. 210, Dewdney to MacPherson, 4 July 1881; vol. 247, Galt to MacPherson, 14 July 1881; 'Edmonton,' *Saskatchewan Herald*, 12 Nov. 1881

38 Ibid., also PAC, MG 26A, vol. 210, Dewdney to Macdonald, 19 June 1881; vol. 247, Galt to Vankoughnet, 16 July 1881. PAC, RG 10, vol. 3739, file 28,748-1, Dewdney to Macdonald, 3 Apr. 1882; Fred White to Minister of the Interior, 9 June 1882; Freylinghausen to Sackville-West, 9 June 1882. *Saskatchewan Herald*, 1 Aug. 1881; 'Starving Indians,' *Benton Weeekly Record*, 14 July 1881; 25 Aug., 1 Sept., and 13 Oct. 1881

39 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3739, file 28,478-1, C.G. Denny to Commissioner, 24 Oct. 1881; vol. 3768, file 33,642; vol. 3603, file 20,141, McIlree to Dewdney, 21 June 1882. Glenbow Institute, Calgary, Edgar Dewdney Papers, v, file 57, Irvine to Dewdney, 24 June 1882 (hereafter cited as Dewdney Papers, vol., file, letter). *Saskatchewan Herald*, 24 June 1882; *Edmonton Bulletin*, 17 June 1882

that had gone to the Cypress Hills in the spring went north in late summer to meet Lorne to impress upon him the inadequacy of the treaties and the need to revise them.⁴⁰ Thus, Lorne's tour prevented the concentration of most of the Cree nation in the Cypress Hills.

The threat posed to Canadian authority in the North-West by concentration of the Cree was clearly recognized by Dewdney and other Canadian officials in late 1880. They saw how the Cree had forced officials to placate them and to ignore their orders in 1880 and 1881. This convinced both Dewdney and Ottawa that the Cree request for contiguous reserves in the Cypress Hills could not be granted. Dewdney recognized that to grant the Cree requests would be to create an Indian territory, for most of the Cree who had reserves further north would come to the Cypress Hills and request reserves contiguous to those of the Cypress Hills Cree. This would result in so large a concentration of Cree that the only way Canada could enforce its laws on them would be via a military campaign. To prevent this, Dewdney recommended a sizeable expansion of the Mounted Police force and the closure of Fort Walsh and all government facilities in the Cypress Hills. This action would remove all sources of sustenance from the Cree in the Cypress Hills. Dewdney hoped that starvation would drive them from the Fort Walsh area and thus end the concentration of their force.⁴¹

Dewdney decided to take these steps fully aware that what he was doing was a violation not only of the promises made to the Cypress Hills Indians in 1880 and 1881, but also that by refusing to grant reserves on the sites the Indians had selected, he was violating the promises made to the Cree by the Treaty Commissions in 1874 and 1876, and in the written treaties. Nevertheless, Dewdney believed that to accede to the Cree requests would be to grant the Cree de facto autonomy from Canadian control, which would result in the perpetuation and heightening of the 1880–1 crisis. Rather than see that situation continue, Dewdney wanted to exploit the opportunity presented to him by the hunger crisis and disarmament of the Cree to bring them under the government's control, even if it meant violating the treaties.⁴²

In the spring of 1882 the Cree and Assiniboine were told that no further rations would be issued to them while they remained in the

40 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3768, file 33,642, entire file

41 PAC, MG 26A, vol. 210, Dewdney to Macdonald, 19 June 1881; vol. 247, Galt to Vankoughnet, 16 July 1881. *Saskatchewan Herald*, 1 Aug. 1881. 'Starving Indians,' *Benton Weekly Record*, 14 July 1881. See also *Benton Weekly Record*, 25 Aug., 1 Sept., and 13 Oct. 1881.

42 Morris, *Treaties of Canada*, 205, 218, 352–3

Cypress Hills. Only if the Indians moved north to Qu'Appelle, Battleford, and Fort Pitt were they to be given assistance, and at those locations only treaty Indians were to be aided. The Mounted Police were ordered to stop issuing rations at Fort Walsh and the Indian Department farm that had been located near Fort Walsh was closed. Faced with the prospect of starvation, without weapons or transport to get to the Montana buffalo ranges, and knowing that if they were to try to go south the Mounted Police would inform the American military authorities, many Cree and all the Assiniboine decided to go north.⁴³ Even Big Bear discovered that his people wanted him to take treaty and move north. In 1882, after taking treaty, he, along with Piapot and Little Pine, promised to leave the Cypress Hills.⁴⁴

Only Piapot kept his promise and even he did not remain long at Fort Qu'Appelle. By late summer of 1882, Piapot was back in the Cypress Hills complaining about how he had been mistreated at Qu'Appelle, and making the Cree aware of how they could lose their autonomy if the government could deal with them as individual bands.⁴⁵ On hearing this report, the other Cree leaders refused to leave the Fort Walsh region and insisted upon receiving the reserves promised them in 1880 and 1881. North-West Mounted Police Commissioner Irvine feared a repetition of the incidents of 1880 if he refused to feed the Cree and believed that the hungry Cree would harass the construction crews of the Canadian Pacific Railway for food, which would lead to a confrontation between whites and Indians which the police would be unable to handle and which in turn might lead to an Indian war. Therefore Irvine decided to feed the Cree.⁴⁶

Dewdney and Ottawa were upset by Irvine's actions. Ottawa gave specific instructions to close Fort Walsh in the spring of 1883. When Irvine closed the fort, the Cree faced starvation. As it was quite evident that they could not go to the United States, and as they would not

43 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3604, file 2589, entire file. See also *Settlers and Rebels*, 1882 Report. See also Dewdney Papers, v, file 57, White to Irvine, 29 Aug. 1882. RG 10, vol. 3604, file 2589. 'The Repatriated Indians,' *Saskatchewan Herald*, 5 Aug. 1882. 'From the South,' *Saskatchewan Herald*, 21 May 1882; 'Back on the Grub Pile,' *Saskatchewan Herald*, 24 June 1882

44 Dewdney Papers, v, file 57, Irvine to Dewdney, 24 June 1882 and 25 Sept. 1882. *Settlers and Rebels*, 1882 Report, pp. 4, 5. CSP, XVI (1883), Paper no. 5, p 197. RG 10, vol. 3604, file 2589. 'Repatriated Indians,' *Saskatchewan Herald*, 5 Aug. 1882.

45 Ibid.; Dewdney Papers, iv, file 45, White to Dewdney, 12 Oct. 1882. *Saskatchewan Herald*, 14 Oct. 1882. 'Big Bear and Others,' and the 'I.D.,' *Edmonton Bulletin*, 21 Oct. 1882

46 Dewdney Papers, iv, file 45, White to Dewdney, 17 Oct. 1882. PAC, MG 26A, vol. 289, Vankoughnet to Macdonald, 2 Nov. 1882

receive reserves in the Cypress Hills, the Cree moved north. Piapot moved to Indian Head and selected a reserve site next to the huge reserve set aside for the Assiniboine. Little Pine and Lucky Man moved to Battleford and selected reserve sites next to Poundmaker's reserve. Big Bear went to Fort Pitt.

The move to the north was not a sign of the Cree acceptance of the treaties as written, nor of their acceptance of the authority of the Canadian government. Big Bear, Little Pine, and Piapot were aware that the other Cree chiefs were dissatisfied with the treaties, and were also aware that if they could effect concentration of the Cree in the north they would be able to preserve their autonomy, just as they had done in the Cypress Hills in the 1879–81 period. Therefore, the move to the north was simply a tactical move, for no sooner were these chiefs in the north than they once again sought to effect a concentration of their people.

By moving to Indian Head, Piapot had effected a concentration of more than 2,000 Indians. This number threatened to grow larger if the council he planned to hold with all the Treaty 4 bands to discuss treaty revisions were successful. Commissioner Dewdney, fearing the results of such a meeting in 1883, was able to thwart Piapot by threatening to cut off rations to any Indians attending Piapot's council and by threatening to arrest Piapot and depose any chiefs who did meet with him. Although Dewdney, in 1883, prevented Piapot holding a large council by such actions, Piapot was able to get the Treaty 4 chiefs to agree to meet in the late spring of 1884 for a thirst dance and council on Pasquah's Reserve, near Fort Qu'Appelle.⁴⁷

While Piapot was organizing an Indian council in the Treaty 4 area, Big Bear and Little Pine were doing the same for the Treaty 6 region. Little Pine and Lucky Man attempted to effect a concentration of more than 2,000 Cree on contiguous reserves in the Battleford district, by requesting reserves next to Poundmaker, whose reserve was next to three other Cree reserves, which in turn were only a short distance from three Assiniboine reserves. Another 500 Cree would have been located in the Battleford area if Big Bear's request for a reserve next to Little Pine's site had been granted. Only with difficulty was Dewdney able to get Big Bear to move to Fort Pitt.⁴⁸ However, he was unable to prevent Big Bear and Little Pine from sending messengers to the Cree

47 PAC, MG 26A, XI, Dewdney to J.A. Macdonald, 2 Sept. 1883. PAC, RG 10, vol. 3682, file 12,667, Dewdney to Superintendent-General, 28 Apr. 1884

48 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3668, file 10,644, Reed to Commissioner, 23 Dec. 1883. Robert Jefferson, *Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan* (Battleford 1929), 103

leaders of the Edmonton, Carlton, and Duck Lake districts to enlist their support for the movement to concentrate the Cree.⁴⁹

Dewdney was convinced that the activities of Big Bear, Piapot, and Little Pine were a prelude to a major project the Cree planned for the following year, 1884. He was also aware that his ability to deal with the impending problem was severely limited by decisions taken in Ottawa. The Deputy Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, Lawrence Vankoughnet, was concerned about the cost of administering Dewdney's policies, and he ordered reductions in the level of assistance provided to the Cree and in the number of employees working with the Cree.⁵⁰ In making these decisions, Ottawa effectively deprived Dewdney of his major sources of intelligence about the Cree and their plans. It also deprived Dewdney of a major instrument in placating the Cree – the distribution of rations to those bands which co-operated.

Vankoughnet's economy measures led to further alienation of the Cree. In some areas, notably in the Fort Pitt, Edmonton, and Crooked Lakes regions, farming instructors were assaulted and government storehouses broken into when Indians were denied rations. The incident on the Sakemay Reserve in the Crooked Lakes area was quite serious, for when the police were called upon to arrest those guilty of the assault, they were surrounded and threatened with death if they carried out their orders. Only after Assistant Indian Commissioner Hayter Reed had agreed to restore assistance to the Sakemay band to the 1883 level and had promised not to imprison the accused were the police allowed to leave with their prisoners.⁵¹

The violence that followed the reductions in rations convinced Dewdney that starving the Cree into submission was not the means to control them. He wanted to use coercion, but this required an expansion of the number of police in the West. Therefore, he

49 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3668, file 10,644, Reed to Commissioner, 23 Dec. 1883. *Edmonton Bulletin*, 9 Feb. 1884; *Saskatchewan Herald*, 24 Nov. 1883

50 PAC, MG 26A, vol. 289, Vankoughnet to Macdonald, 4, 10 Dec. 1883; vol. 104, Deputy Superintendent-General to T. Quinn, 21 Sept. 1883; Dewdney to Superintendent-General, 27 Sept. 1883; Deputy Superintendent-General to Reed, 10 Apr. 1884; vol. 212, Dewdney to Macdonald, 2 Jan. 1883 [sic! Given the contents of the letter, it is obvious Dewdney forgot that a new year had begun the previous day], vol. 91, Dewdney to Macdonald, 24 July 1884, another letter but without a date, which was probably written in the first week of Aug. 1884; vol. 107, entire file. PAC, RG 10, vol. 3664, file 9843, entire file

51 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3616, file 10,181. Burton Deane, *Mounted Police Life in Canada: A Record of Thirty-One Years in Service, 1883–1914* (Toronto 1973), 140–53. Isabell Andrews, 'Indian Protest against Starvation: The Yellow Calf Incident of 1884,' *Saskatchewan History*, xxviii (1975), 4–52. *Edmonton Bulletin*, 7 Jan., 3 Feb., 7, 28 July, and 4 Aug. 1883

recommended that more men be recruited for the Mounted Police. In addition, Dewdney wanted to ensure that jail sentences were given to arrested Indians so that they would cause no further problems. Having seen the effects of incarceration on Indians, Dewdney was convinced that this was the means to bring the Cree leaders under control. However, what was needed in his opinion were trial judges who 'understood' Indian nature at first hand and who would take effective action to keep the Indians under control. Therefore, Dewdney wanted all Indian Department officials in the West to be appointed stipendiary magistrates in order that all Indian troublemakers could be brought to 'justice' quickly. As Dewdney stated in his letter to Prime Minister John A. Macdonald: 'The only effective course with the great proportion [of Indian bands] to adopt is one of sheer compulsion ...'⁵²

Dewdney used the policy of 'sheer compulsion' for only a few months in 1884. He found that his efforts to use the Mounted Police to break up the Indian councils and to arrest Indian leaders only led to confrontations between the Cree and the police. In these confrontations the police were shown to be ineffectual because they were placed in situations in which, if the Cree had been desirous of initiating hostilities, large numbers of Mounted Police would have been massacred.

The first incident which called the policy of compulsion into question was the attempt to prevent Piapot from holding his thirteenth dance and council in May 1884. Assistant Commissioner Hayter Reed, fearing that the council would result in a concentration of all the Treaty 4 bands, ordered Police Commissioner Irvine to prevent Piapot from attending the council. Irvine was to arrest the chief at the first sign of any violation of even the most minor law. To be certain that Piapot broke a law, Reed promised to have an individual from Pasquah's reserve object to the council being held on that reserve in order that the accusation of trespass could be used to break up the meeting, which all the bands from Treaty 4 were attending.⁵³

With a force of fifty-six men and a seven-pounder gun, Irvine caught up with Piapot shortly before the chief reached Pasquah's reserve. Irvine and the police entered the Indian camp at 2 A.M., hoping to arrest Piapot and remove him from the camp before his band was aware of what happened. However, when they entered the camp, the police found themselves surrounded by armed warriors. Realizing

52 Dewdney Papers, v, file 58, Dewdney to Superintendent-General, 29 Feb. 1884; PAC, MG 26A, vol. 211, Dewdney to Macdonald, 6 Oct. 1883; vol. 212, Reed to Dewdney, 15 Feb. 1884; Dewdney to Macdonald, 16 Feb. and 9 Apr. 1884

53 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3682, file 12,667, Dewdney to Superintendent-General, 28 Apr. 1884; vol. 3686, file 13,168, entire file; vol. 3745, file 29,506-4(2), Reed to Colonel Irvine, 18 May 1884

that any attempt to arrest the chief would result in a battle, Irvine decided to hold his own council with Piapot and Reed. This impromptu council agreed that Piapot should receive a new reserve next to Pasquah, in return for which Piapot would return to Indian Head temporarily.⁵⁴

The agreement reached between Piapot and Irvine and Reed was a victory for Piapot. By getting a reserve at Qu'Appelle again, Piapot had approximately 2,000 Cree concentrated on the Qu'Appelle River, and he was able to hold his council and thirst dance, for after going to Indian Head, he immediately turned around and went to Pasquah's. Reed and Irvine were aware of Piapot's ruse, but did nothing to prevent his holding the council, for they were aware that the Cree at Qu'Appelle were prepared to protect Piapot from what the Indians regarded as an attack on their leader. Realizing the effect that an Indian war would have on possible settlement, and that the police were inadequate for such a clash, the Canadian officials wished to avoid giving cause for violent reaction by the Cree.⁵⁵ Piapot acted as he did because he realized that if any blood were shed the Cree would experience a fate similar to that of the Nez Percés, Blackfoot, and Dakota Sioux in those peoples' conflicts with the United States.

Dewdney and the police were to have a similar experience when they attempted to prevent Big Bear from holding a thirst dance and council at Poundmaker's reserve in June 1884. Dewdney feared that Big Bear's council, to which the old chief had invited the Blackfoot and all the Indians from Treaty 6, would result in a larger concentration of Cree than Little Pine had already effected at Battleford. Dewdney also believed that he had to undo what Little Pine had accomplished, and refused to grant Little Pine and Lucky Man the reserve sites they had requested next to Poundmaker. Big Bear was again told that he would not be granted a reserve in the Battleford district. Dewdney believed that the Cree chiefs would ignore his order to select reserve sites at some distance from Battleford, and that this could be used as a reason for arresting them. To legitimize such actions on his part, Dewdney asked the government to pass an order-in-council to make it a criminal offence for a band to refuse to move to a reserve site the Commissioner suggested.⁵⁶ In order to avoid violence when he attempted to prevent

54 Ibid., vol. 3745, file 29,506-4(2), Reed to Irvine, 18 May 1884; Irvine to Comptroller Fred White, 27 May 1884; White to Vankoughnet, 19 May 1884

55 Ibid., Agent Macdonald to Commissioner, 29 May 1884; vol. 3655, file 9026, Dewdney to Superintendent-General, 13 June 1884

56 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3745, file 29,506-4(2), Reed to Superintendent-General, 19 Apr. 1884. Similar report in vol. 3576, file 309B. PAC, MG 26A, file 37, Dewdney to Macdonald, 3 May 1884. Dewdney's request and actions were contrary to what the

Big Bear's council and ordered the arrests of Lucky Man and Little Pine, Dewdney instructed the Indian agents at Battleford and Fort Pitt to purchase all the horses, guns, and cartridges the Cree possessed. He increased the size of the police garrison at Battleford and ordered the police to prevent Big Bear from reaching Battleford.⁵⁷

All Dewdney's efforts had little effect, for Big Bear and his band eluded the police, reached Battleford, and held their thirst dance. The Cree refused to sell their arms, and even the effort to break up the gathering by refusing to provide rations had no result other than to provoke another assault on a farm instructor on 17 June 1884. When the police sought to arrest the farm instructor's assailant, they were intimidated into leaving without a prisoner. When a larger police detachment went to the reserve on 18 June, the police were still unable to make an arrest for fear of provoking armed hostilities. Only on 20 June, when the thirst dance had concluded, were the police able to arrest the accused and only then by forcibly removing him from the Cree camp. This was done with the greatest difficulty for the police were jostled and provoked in an effort to get them to fire on the Cree. That no violence occurred, Superintendent Crozier, in charge of the police detachment, attributed to the discipline of his men and to the actions of Little Pine and Big Bear, who did all that was humanly possible to discourage any attack on the police.⁵⁸

The events at Battleford frightened all parties involved in the confrontation. Big Bear was very much disturbed by them, for he did not want war, as he had made abundantly clear to Dewdney in March 1884, and again to the Indian agent at Battleford, J.A. Rae, in June. However, he did want the treaties revised and establishment of an Indian territory.⁵⁹ Agent Rae was thoroughly frightened and wanted

Cree had been told about how reserve sites could be chosen, as were the government's actions in denying the Cree reserves in the Cypress Hills and forcing them to move north. See Morris, *Treaties of Canada*, passim. PAC, RG 10, vol. 3576, file 309B, Vankoughnet to Dewdney, 10 May 1884; MG 26A, vol. 104, Dewdney to Superintendent-General, 14 June 1884. Campbell Innes, *The Cree Rebellion of 1884: Sidelights of Indian Conditions Subsequent to 1876* (Battleford 1926), 'Fineday Interview,' 13–15. *Saskatchewan Herald*, 19 Apr. and 17 May 1884

57 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3576, file 309B, Reed to Superintendent-General, 19 Apr. 1884. Reed to Vankoughnet, 19 Apr. 1884; Ray to Commissioner, 23 Apr. 1884; Reed to Superintendent-General, 20 May 1884. Dewdney Papers, III, file 36, Dewdney to Macdonald, 12 June 1884

58 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3576, file 309B, Ray to Commissioner, 19, 21 June 1884; Crozier to Dewdney, 22 June 1884. Jefferson, 108–9. Innes, *The Cree Rebellion of 1884*, 13–17, 28

59 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3576, file 309B, Ray to Commissioner, 28 June 1884; see also Rae to Dewdney, 9 June 1884. Innes, 'McKay Interview,' 44. PAC, RG 10, vol. 3576, file 309A, Dewdney to Ray, 5 July 1884

Dewdney and Ottawa to adopt a more coercive policy designed to subjugate the Cree. Superintendent Crozier argued for a less coercive policy, for unless some accommodation were reached with the Cree, Crozier believed that out of desperation they would resort to violence.⁶⁰

On hearing of the events of May and June 1884, Ottawa decided that Dewdney, who was now Lieutenant-Governor in addition to being Indian Commissioner, was to have complete control over Indian affairs in the North-West Territories. As well, the Prime Minister informed Dewdney that more police were being recruited for duty in the West and that the Indian Act was being amended to permit Dewdney to arrest any Indian who was on another band's reserve without the permission of the local Indian Department official.⁶¹ Dewdney was thus being given the instruments to make his policy of compulsion effective.

Dewdney did not, however, immediately make use of his new powers. He still intended to prevent concentration of the Cree, and rejected the requests Big Bear, Poundmaker, Lucky Man, and others made for a reserve at Buffalo Lake, and later rejected Big Bear's, Little Pine's, and Lucky Man's renewed requests for reserves next to Poundmaker's.⁶² However, rather than following a purely coercive policy, Dewdney adopted a policy of rewards and punishments. He provided more rations, farming equipment, oxen, ammunition, and twine, and arranged for selected Cree chiefs to visit Winnipeg and other large centres of Canadian settlement. If the Cree were not satisfied with his new approach, he would use force against them. To implement this new policy, Dewdney increased the number of Indian Department employees working on the Cree reserves, for he wanted to monitor closely the behaviour of the Indians, and, if necessary, to arrest troublesome leaders.⁶³

While Dewdney was implementing his new policy, the Cree leaders continued their efforts to concentrate the Cree in an exclusively Indian territory. Little Pine went south to seek Blackfoot support for the

60 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3576, file 309B, Ray to Dewdney, 23 June 1884; Crozier to Dewdney, 23 June 1884

61 Dewdney Papers, III, file 37, Macdonald to Dewdney, 18 July 1884, 11 Aug. 1884, and 2 Sept. 1884; IV, file 45, Macdonald to White, 15 Sept. 1884. PAC, RG 10, vol. 3576, file 309A, Vankoughnet to Dewdney, 27 July 1884

62 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3576, file 309B, Ray to Commissioner, 30 June 1884; file 309A, Ray to Commissioner, 24, 29 July 1884. PAC, MG 26A, vol. 212, Dewdney to Macdonald, 14 July 1884; J.A. MacRae to Commissioner, 7 Aug. 1884; vol. 107, Ray to Commissioner, 29 July 1884

63 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3745, file 29,506-4(2), Dewdney to Superintendent-General, 7 Aug. 1884; vol. 3576, file 309A, Ray to Dewdney, 19 July 1884. PAC, MG 26A, vol. 104, Dewdney to Department, 19 July 1884

movement.⁶⁴ Big Bear, Lucky Man, and Poundmaker went to Duck Lake for a council with the Cree leaders of the Lower Saskatchewan district. The Duck Lake council, attended by twelve bands, was initiated by Beardy and the chiefs of the Carlton District. Beardy, who acted as spokesman for the Carlton chiefs, had been relatively inactive in the Cree movements in the 1881–3 period. He, however, had been the most vehement critic of the government's failure to deliver the farm materials promised by the treaty commissioners. In the 1877–81 period, Beardy was a man of little influence in the Carlton area, but when Mistawasis and Ahtahkakoop, the principal Cree chiefs of the Carlton District came to share his views, Beardy's standing among the Carlton Cree rose dramatically.⁶⁵

The Duck Lake Council, called by Cree leaders who Dewdney thought were loyal and docile, and of which the Commissioner had no foreknowledge, was a cause of much concern. Especially vexing was the detailed list of violations of the treaty for which the Cree demanded redress from the government. The Cree charged that the treaty commissioners lied to them when they said that the Cree would be able to make a living from agriculture with the equipment provided for in the treaties. However, rather than provide all the farming goods, what the government did, according to the Cree, was to withhold many of the cattle and oxen; send inferior quality wagons, farm tools, and equipment; and provide insufficient rations and clothes, and no medicine chest. The petition closed with the statement expressing the Cree sentiment that they had been deceived by 'sweet promises' designed to cheat them of their heritage, and that unless their grievances were remedied by the summer of 1885, they would take whatever measures necessary, short of war, to get redress.⁶⁶

Dewdney originally assumed, as did some newspapers across the West, that the Duck Lake Council was part of a plot by Louis Riel to foment an Indian and Metis rebellion. Dewdney's assumption was based on the fact that the Duck Lake Council was held a short time after Riel had returned to Canada. It was also known that Riel had attended it, and that he had advocated such an alliance and a resort to violence when he had met with the Cree in Montana in 1880.⁶⁷ Further

64 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3576, file 309B, Ray to Commissioner, 30 June 1884; file 309A, Ray to Commissioner, 24, 29 July 1884. PAC, MG 26A, vol. 212, Dewdney to Macdonald, 14 July 1884; J.A. MacRae to Commissioner, 7 Aug. 1884; vol. 107, Ray to Commissioner, 29 July 1884

65 PAC, MG 26A, vol. 107, Ray to Commissioner, 29 July and 2 Aug. 1884; J.A. MacRae to Commissioner, 29 July 1884

66 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3697, file 15,423, J.A. MacRae to Dewdney, 25 Aug. 1884

67 *Ibid.*, Reed to Superintendent-General, 23 Jan. 1885; Reed to Dewdney, 22, 25 Aug. 1884. PAC, MG 26A, vol. 107, J.A. MacRae to Commissioner, 29 July 1884; J.M.

investigation, however, made quite clear that Riel had little influence on the Cree. To allay the growing concern about the possibility of an Indian war, Dewdney had Hayter Reed issue a statement that nothing untoward was happening and that there was less danger of an Indian war in 1884 than there had been in 1881. Privately Dewdney admitted to Ottawa and his subordinates in the West that the situation was very serious.⁶⁸ After both he and Dewdney had met with Cree leaders throughout the West and after carefully assessing the situation, Hayter Reed stated that the government had nothing to fear from the Cree until the summer of 1885. What Reed and Dewdney expected at that time was a united Cree demand to renegotiate treaties.⁶⁹

What Reed and Dewdney had learned on their tours of the Battleford, Edmonton, Carlton, and Qu'Appelle districts in the fall of 1884 was that Big Bear, Piapot, and Little Pine were on the verge of uniting the Cree to call for new treaties in which an Indian territory and greater autonomy for the Cree would be major provisions. In fact, throughout the summer and fall of 1884 Little Pine attempted, with limited success, to interest the leaders of the Blackfoot in joining the Cree movement for treaty revision. Little Pine had invited the Blackfoot to a joint council with the Cree leaders on Little Pine's reserve scheduled for the spring of 1885.⁷⁰ If the Blackfoot joined the Cree, Ottawa's ability to govern the Indians and control the West would be seriously jeopardized.

At the moment that the Cree movement seemed on the verge of success, Big Bear was losing control of his band. As he told the assembled chiefs at Duck Lake in the summer of 1884, his young men were listening to the warrior chief, Little Poplar, who was advocating killing government officials and Indian agents as a means of restoring Cree independence. Big Bear feared that if Little Poplar's course of action were adopted the Cree would fight an Indian war that they were certain to lose.⁷¹

Ray to Commissioner, 2 Aug. 1884; MacRae to Commissioner, 5 Aug. 1884; vol.

212, MacRae to Commissioner, 7 Aug. 1884. PAC, RG 10, vol. 3756, file 309A, J.M.

Ray to Commissioner, 24, 25 July 1884. 'Big Bear Rises to Speak,' *Saskatchewan*

Herald, 5 Aug. 1882. *Saskatchewan Herald*, 25 July and 9 Aug. 1884

68 Ibid., PAC, RG 10, vol. 3756, file 309A, Commissioner to Ray, 7 Aug. 1884. Ray to Commissioner, 29 July 1884; see also in PAC, MG 26A, vol. 107. Dewdney Papers, vi, file 69, Crozier to Comptroller, NWMP, 27 July 1884. PAC, MG 26A, vol. 212, Dewdney to Macdonald, 8 Aug. 1884

69 PAC, MG 26A, vol. 107, Reed to Dewdney, 23, 24, 25 Aug., 4 Sept. 1884; Dewdney to Macdonald, 5 Sept. 1884

70 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3756, file 309A, Begg to Commissioner, 20 Feb. 1885; 'Indian Affairs,' *Saskatchewan Herald*, 31 Oct. 1884

71 Dewdney Papers, vi, file 66, Reed to Dewdney, 4 Sept. 1884

Dewdney was aware of Little Poplar's growing influence on the young men of Big Bear's and the Battleford Assiniboine bands; however, he wished to wait until after January 1885 before taking any action, because after that date the new amendments to the Indian Act would be in effect. These amendments could be used to arrest and imprison Little Pine, Little Poplar, Big Bear, and Piapot, and thereby, Dewdney hoped, destroy the movements these chiefs led.⁷² In anticipation of confrontations in 1885, Dewdney ordered that the guns and ammunition normally allotted to the Cree so they could hunt for food be withheld. In addition, Indian councils were prohibited, including the one scheduled for Duck Lake in the summer of 1885, to which all the Cree in Treaty 6 had been invited. Arrangements were made to place the Mounted Police at Battleford under Dewdney's command, and serious consideration was given to placing an artillery unit there also.⁷³

To get improved intelligence, Dewdney hired more men to work as Indian agents with the Cree. These men were given broad discretionary powers and were to keep the Commissioner informed on Cree activities. As well, English-speaking mixed-bloods, many of whom had worked for the Hudson's Bay Company and had the confidence of the Cree, were hired as farm instructors. There would now be a farm instructor on each Cree reserve, with explicit instructions to keep the Indian Agent informed of what was happening on his reserve. Staff who had personality conflicts with any of the Cree leaders were either transferred or fired. Only Thomas Quinn, Indian Agent at Fort Pitt and his farming instructor, John Delaney, were not removed before March 1885, although both were slated for transfer.⁷⁴

Dewdney found that his most important staffing move was the employment of Peter Ballendine, a former Hudson's Bay Company trader much trusted by the principal Cree leaders. Ballendine's job was to ingratiate himself with Big Bear and report on that chief's comings and goings. Ballendine won the confidence of Big Bear and reported upon how wrong Dewdney's earlier efforts to break up Big Bear's band had been. Because so many of Big Bear's original followers either joined Lucky Man, Thunderchild, or Little Pine's bands, Big Bear by

72 Statutes of Canada, 43 Vict. I, cap. 27, 'An Act to Amend the Indian Act, 1880,' 12 Apr. 1884. PAC, MG 26A, vol. 107, Dewdney to Macdonald, 24 Aug. 1884

73 PAC, MG 26A, vol. 212, Reed to Dewdney, 7 Sept. 1884; vol. 107, Dewdney to Macdonald, 24 Aug. 1884

74 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3576, file 309A, Reed to Dewdney, 12 Sept. 1884; vol. 3745, file 29,506-4(2), Reed to Dewdney, 14 Sept. 1884; vol. 3704, file 17,799, entire file; vol. 3664, file 9834 and 9843; vol. 3761, file 30,836, entire file; Dewdney Papers, IV, file 45, Reed to Dewdney, 12 Sept. 1884; vol. IV, file 47, Crozier to Comptroller, NWMP, 4 Nov. 1884; V, file 57, Crozier to Dewdney, 30 Jan. 1885

On the basis of these and similar reports, Dewdney and the police were convinced that, although a number of councils were expected in 1885, no violence was to be anticipated from the Cree. Nevertheless, Dewdney wished to prevent the Cree from holding their councils. His strategy was to make the Cree satisfied with the treaties. He therefore admitted in February 1885 that the government had violated the treaties and ordered delivery to the Cree of all goods the treaties had stipulated. In addition, he ordered a dramatic increase in their rations. If this failed to placate them he planned to arrest their leaders, use the police to keep the Cree on their reserves, and to depose any chief who attempted to attend an Indian council.⁷⁸

Dewdney had the full support of Ottawa for his policy of arresting Cree leaders. The only reservations the Prime Minister expressed were that Dewdney have sufficient forces to make the arrests and that he provide enough evidence to justify the charges of incitement to an insurrection. Macdonald also volunteered to communicate with the stipendiary magistrates to assure their co-operation in imposing long prison terms for any Cree leader convicted of incitement.⁷⁹ Macdonald was willing to provide this assistance because Dewdney had earlier complained that he could not use preventive detention of Indian leaders because the magistrates 'only look at the evidence and the crime committed when giving out sentences,' rather than taking into consideration the nature of the man and the harm that he might do if he were released at an inopportune time.⁸⁰ All these preparations were complete when word reached Dewdney of the Metis clash with the Mounted Police at Duck Lake in March 1885.

The Riel Rebellion of 1885 provided Dewdney with a new instrument to make his coercive policy effective. The troops sent into the North-West to suppress the Rebellion could be used to destroy the Cree movement for an Indian territory. The Cree themselves would provide the excuse Dewdney needed virtually to declare war on the bands and leaders who had led the Cree movement for treaty revision. During March 1885, the Cree did engage in some acts of violence that Dewdney chose to label acts of rebellion.

These acts were unrelated to the Cree movement for treaty revision. In fact, these acts that led to the subjugation of the Cree were committed by persons not involved with the Cree movement for

78 PAC, MG 26A, vol. 117, Dewdney to Macdonald, 9 Feb. 1885. PAC, RG 10, vol. 3676, file 309A, Dewdney to Vankoughnet, 12 Feb. 1885

79 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3705, file 17,193, Vankoughnet to Dewdney, 5 Feb. 1885; Vankoughnet to Macdonald, 31 Jan. 1885; vol. 3582, file 949, Vankoughnet to Reed, 28 Jan. 1885. Dewdney Papers, III, file 38, Macdonald to Dewdney, 23 Feb. 1885

80 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3576, file 309A, Dewdney to Vankoughnet, 12 Feb. 1885

autonomy. It is one of the ironic quirks of history that the leaders of the Cree movement had little or nothing to do with the events which would destroy that movement to which they had devoted ten years of their lives. Nevertheless, they would be held responsible for the actions of their desperate and hungry people. To heighten the irony, it was the Metis movement, from which the Cree had held aloof, which would give Dewdney the excuse to use military force to subjugate the Cree.

The Duck Lake clash coincided with a Cree Council on Sweetgrass Reserve. The council of the Battleford area Cree had been called to consider how they could press for increased rations. When word reached the Cree at Sweetgrass of the clash at Duck Lake, they felt that circumstances would make Indian Agent Rae willing to grant them more rations. Thus the Cree, taking their women and children with them to demonstrate their peaceful intent, set out for Battleford. Fear and panic prevailed at Battleford, for on learning of the Cree's approach, the town's citizens assumed that the Cree had thrown in their lot with the Metis. The town was evacuated; most townspeople took refuge in the Mounted Police post.⁸¹

When the Cree arrived at Battleford they found the town abandoned. They sent word to the police post that they wished to speak to the Indian Agent, who refused to leave the safety of the post. The Cree women, seeing the abandoned stores and houses filled with food, began to help themselves. Then, fearing arrest by the police, the Cree left town. On the way back to their reserves, as well as on their way to town, the Cree assisted a number of Indian Department employees and settlers to cross the Battle River to get to the police post, thus demonstrating the pacific nature of their intentions.⁸²

Rather than returning to their individual reserves, the Cree went to Poundmaker's, for as the leader in the Battleford district to whom the government had shown much favour in the past, Poundmaker was seen as the man best able to explain to the government what had happened at Battleford. A second significant reason was the deaths of two prominent Cree leaders: Red Pheasant, the night before the Cree left for Battleford, and Little Pine, the night they returned. As it was the practice of the Cree to leave the place where their leaders had expired, both bands left their reserves and went to Poundmaker's, who, given the fears the whites had concerning a Cree and Metis alliance, might possibly defuse any crisis. Thus, in March 1885, Poundmaker became the spokesman of the Battleford Cree.⁸³

No sooner were the Cree at Poundmaker's than they were joined by

81 Jefferson, *Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan* 125

82 *Ibid.*, 126–8. PAC, MG 26A, deposition, William Lightfoot to J.A. MacKay, 31 May 1885

83 Jefferson, *Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan* 127, 130, 138

the local Assiniboine, who insisted that a soldier's (war) tent be erected, for events at the Assiniboine reserves convinced them that an attack on the Indian camp was imminent. The Assiniboine explained that when word had reached them of the Duck Lake fight, a few of their young men sought revenge on farming instructor James Payne, who was blamed for the death of a girl. The girl's male relatives killed Payne and murdered farmer Barney Tremont. The Assiniboine now assumed that the Canadian authorities would behave in a similar manner to the Americans and blame all Indians for the actions of a few individuals.⁸⁴

Erection of the soldier's tent meant that the warriors were in control of the camp and that Poundmaker and the civil authorities had to defer to them. It was at this time that the Metis appeal for aid was received. The Cree refused to assist the Metis, although they expected an attack on their camp. Watches were set on the roads, and protection was offered to the Metis at Bresaylor for the settlers there had earned the enmity of the Batoche Metis. As long as no military or police forces came towards the Cree camp, the Cree remained on their reserves and did not interfere with anyone going to or leaving Battleford. The Mounted Police detachment from Fort Pitt and Colonel Otter's military unit arrived in Battleford without encountering any Indians. Nevertheless, reports from the police and local officials maintained that the town was under siege.⁸⁵

While the Battleford Cree were preparing their defences, Big Bear's band was making trouble for itself. Big Bear was absent from his camp when the members of his band heard about the fight at Duck Lake. Wandering Spirit and Imases sought to use the opportunity presented by the Metis uprising to seek revenge for the insults and abuses perpetrated against the Cree by Indian Agent Thomas Quinn and Farming Instructor Delaney. Quinn had physically abused some of the Indian men, while Delaney had cuckolded others before he brought a white bride to Frog Lake in late 1884. Big Bear's headmen demanded that the two officials open the storehouse to the Cree, and when they refused to do so, they were murdered. This set off further acts of violence that resulted in the murder of all the white men in the camp save one.⁸⁶

On his return to camp Big Bear ended further acts of violence.

84 Innes, 'Fine Day Interview,' 185. Sluman, *Poundmaker*, 199–200, 184–5. Jefferson, *Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan*, 130–8

85 Desmond Morton, *The Last War Drum* (Toronto 1972), 98–102. Jefferson, *Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan*, 125–40

86 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3755, file 30,973, Reed to Commissioner, 18 June 1881; see also material cited in note 72 above. William B. Cameron, *Blood Red the Sun* (Edmonton 1977), 33–61, vividly describes the slaughter at Frog Lake.

Although unable to prevent a minor skirmish between his young men and a small police patrol, he convinced his warriors to allow the police detachment at Fort Pitt to withdraw from the post without being attacked and to guarantee safety to the civilian residents of the Frog Lake and Fort Pitt regions. Big Bear then led his people north, where he hoped they would be out of harm's way and not engage in further acts of violence.⁸⁷

Beardy also lost control of his band. He and the neighbouring One Arrow band had reserves next to Batoche. Before the clash with the police, the Metis had come to the One Arrow Reserve, captured Farming Instructor Peter Thompkins, and threatened the Cree band with destruction unless the Cree aided the Metis. Some of the younger men of One Arrow's band agreed to do so.⁸⁸ The Metis made the same threat against Beardy and his band, and although a few of his young men joined the Metis, Beardy and most of his people remained neutral.⁸⁹ It is doubtful that the Cree would have aided the Metis without the threat of violence. Earlier, the Cree of the Duck Lake region had threatened hostilities against the Metis, for the Metis had settled on One Arrow's Reserve and demanded that the government turn over to them some of One Arrow's Reserve. Ottawa, fearing the Metis more than the Cree in 1880, acquiesced. Over the next four years, one task of the local Indian Agent and the police was to reconcile the Cree with the Metis of the Batoche region.⁹⁰

The Cree acts of violence in March 1885 were the excuse Dewdney needed to justify the use of troops against them. He maintained that the Battleford, Fort Pitt, and Duck Lake Cree were part of the Riel Rebellion. Privately, Dewdney reported to Ottawa that he saw the events at Battleford and Frog Lake as the acts of a desperate, starving people and unrelated to what the Metis were doing.⁹¹ In fact, Dewdney had sought in late March to open negotiations with the Battleford Cree, but Rae refused to meet the Cree leaders. Subsequent efforts to

87 Cameron, *passim*

88 Charles Mulvaney, *The History of the North-West Rebellion of 1885* (Toronto 1885), 212–16. *Settlers and Rebels*, 1882 Report, pp 22, 26–7. PAC, RG 10, vol. 3584, file 1130, p. 1, Superintendent Herchmer to Dewdney, 5 Apr. 1885

89 *Ibid.*

90 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3697, file 15,446, entire file; vol. 3598, file 1411, entire file; vol. 7768, file 2109-2; vol. 3794, file 46,584

91 PAC, MG 27IC4, vol. 7, letters, Dewdney to White, Mar.–Apr. 1885. This correspondence reveals that in early Apr. Dewdney believed that he had to deal with an Indian uprising. However, he did admit that this impression was based on scanty and often faulty or false information. By mid-Apr., Dewdney makes clear to White, the NWMP Comptroller, that he did not believe that he was dealing with either an Indian uprising or a rebellion.

open negotiations ended in failure because there was no way to get a message to Poundmaker, and after Colonel Otter's attack on the Cree camp any thought of negotiations was dropped.⁹²

Publicly Dewdney proclaimed that the Cree were part of the Metis uprising. He issued a proclamation that any Indian who left his reserve was to be regarded as a rebel.⁹³ As well, to intimidate Piapot and the Treaty 4 Cree, Dewdney stationed troops on their reserves. To prevent an alliance of Blackfoot and Cree, Dewdney announced that he was stationing troops at Swift Current and Medicine Hat. Dewdney took these steps, as he confided to Macdonald, because he feared that the Cree might still attempt to take action on their own cause, and he was concerned because in the previous year the Cree had attempted to enlist the Blackfoot in the movement to revise the treaties.⁹⁴

The military commander in the North-West, General F.D. Middleton, was not as concerned about the problems with the Cree. He wanted to concentrate his attention on the Metis. Although he did send troops under Colonel William Otter to Swift Current, he refused to order them to Battleford to lift the alleged siege until he received word of the Frog Lake massacre. Otter was then ordered to lift the 'siege' and protect Battleford from Indian attack, but he was not to take the offensive. At the same time General Thomas Strange was ordered to bring Big Bear under control.

Otter reached Battleford without seeing an Indian. He was upset that he and his troops would not see action. He therefore proposed that he attack the Indian camp at Poundmaker's Reserve. Middleton vetoed the plan, but Dewdney welcomed it as a means to bring the Cree under government control. Taking the Lieutenant-Governor's approval to be paramount to Middleton's veto, Otter launched his attack. The engagement, known as the Battle of Cut Knife Hill, almost ended in total disaster for Otter's force. Only the Cree fear that they would suffer the same fate as Sitting Bull after the Battle of the Little Big Horn saved Otter's troops from total annihilation.⁹⁵

The tale of the subsequent military campaigns against the Cree by Strange and Middleton and the voluntary surrenders of Poundmaker and Big Bear is found in detail in Stanley's *Birth of Western Canada* and Desmond Morton's *The Last War Drum*. With Big Bear and Poundmaker in custody, Dewdney prepared to use the courts in the manner

92 PAC, MG 271C4, vol. 1, Dewdney to Begg, 3 May 1885; vol. 4, Dewdney to Middleton, 30 Mar. 1885. RG-10, vol. 3584, file 1130, Dewdney to Ray, 7 May 1885.

Jefferson, *Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan*, 128–33

93 PAC, RG 10, vol. 3584, file 1120. Proclamation of 6 May 1885

94 MG 26A, vol. 107, Dewdney to Macdonald, 6 Apr. 1885

95 Morton, *The Last War Drum* 96–110

he had planned before the Riel Rebellion. Both Cree leaders were charged with treason-felony, despite Dewdney's knowledge that neither man had engaged in an act of rebellion. Eyewitnesses to the events at Fort Pitt, Frog Lake, and Battleford all made clear that neither chief was involved in the murders and looting that had occurred. In fact, many of these people served as defence witnesses.⁹⁶ As Dewdney informed the Prime Minister, the diaries and letters of the murdered officials at Frog Lake showed that until the day of the 'massacre' there was 'no reason to believe that our Indians were even dissatisfied much less contemplated violence.'⁹⁷ Ballendine's reports indicated that there were no plans for violence, that the Cree were not involved with the Metis, and that they planned no rebellion. Dewdney believed that the Cree had not 'even thought, intended or wished that the uprising would reach the proportion it has ... Things just got out of control.'⁹⁸ As Dewdney related to the Prime Minister, had the people living in the region not been new settlers from the East, and had they not fled in panic, much of the 'raiding' and looting would not have occurred. In regions where people had not abandoned their homes no raiding occurred.⁹⁹ Therefore, the charges against Big Bear and Poundmaker were designed to remove the leadership of the Cree movement for revision of the treaties. They were charged to elicit prison sentences that would have the effect of coercing the Cree to accept government control. The trials were conducted to have the desired result, and both Big Bear and Poundmaker were convicted and sentenced to three years in Stoney Mountain Penitentiary.¹⁰⁰ Neither man served his full term, and both died a short time after their release from prison.

By the end of 1885, Dewdney had succeeded in subjugating the Cree. Big Bear was in prison, Little Pine was dead, and Piapot was intimidated by having troops stationed on his reserve. Dewdney had deprived the Cree of their principal leaders and of their autonomy. He used the military to disarm and impoverish the Cree by confiscating their horses and carts; he increased the size of the Mounted Police force, and used the police to arrest Cree leaders who protested against his policies; he broke up Cree Bands, deposed Cree leaders, and

96 Cameron, *Blood Red the Sun*, 195–204. Sandra Estlin Bingman, 'The Trials of Poundmaker and Big Bear,' *Saskatchewan History*, xxviii (1975), 81–95, gives an account of the conduct of the trials and raises questions about their conduct, particularly the trial of Big Bear. However, Bingman apparently was unaware of Dewdney and Macdonald's efforts to use the courts and whatever other means possible to remove Cree leaders.

97 PAC, MG 26A, vol. 107, Dewdney to Macdonald, 3 June 1885

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 Bingman, 'The Trials of Poundmaker and Big Bear,' 81–95

forbade any Indian to be off his reserve without permission from the Indian Agent.¹⁰¹ By 1890, through vigorous implementation of the Indian Act, Dewdney and his successor, Hayter Reed, had begun the process of making the Cree an administered people.

The record of the Canadian government in dealing with the Cree is thus not one of honourable fair-mindedness and justice as the traditional interpretation portrays. As Dewdney admitted in 1885, the treaties' promises and provisions were not being fulfilled, and Dewdney himself had taken steps to assure Canadian control over the Cree, which were themselves violations of the treaties. Thus, he had refused to grant the Cree the reserve sites they selected; he had refused to distribute the ammunition and twine the treaties required. His plans for dealing with the Cree leaders were based on a political use of the legal and judicial system, and ultimately he made use of the military, the police, and the courts in a political manner to achieve his goals of subjugating the Cree. Only by ignoring these facts can one continue to perpetuate the myth of Canada's just and honourable Indian policy from 1870 to 1885.

101 A very good account of Dewdney's actions to bring the Cree under government control after 1885 is to be found in Jean Lamour, 'Edgar Dewdney and the Aftermath of the Rebellion,' *Saskatchewan History*, xxiii (1970), 105-16. For a discussion of the use of the Indian Act as a means of destroying Indian cultural autonomy see John L. Tobias, 'Protection, Civilization, Assimilation: An Outline History of Canada's Indian Policy,' *The Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology*, vi (1976). For a discussion of specific use of this policy against the Cree, and how the Cree reacted see John L. Tobias, 'Indian Reserves in Western Canada: Indian Homelands or Devices for Assimilation,' in *Approaches to Native History in Canada: Papers of a Conference held at the National Museum of Man, October, 1975*, D.A. Muise, ed. (Ottawa 1977), 89-103.