

THE THATCHER GOVERNMENT IN SASKATCHEWAN AND THE REVIVAL OF METIS
NATIONALISM, 1964-71

Author(s): JAMES M. PITSULA

Source: *Great Plains Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 3/4 (SUMMER/FALL 1997), pp. 213-235

Published by: University of Nebraska Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23533208>

Accessed: 19-07-2019 16:03 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

University of Nebraska Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Great Plains Quarterly*

THE THATCHER GOVERNMENT IN SASKATCHEWAN AND THE REVIVAL OF METIS NATIONALISM, 1964-71

JAMES M. PITSULA

The 1960s was a significant decade in the history of the relationship between the government of Saskatchewan and Aboriginal peoples. Premier Ross Thatcher, who led the Liberal party to victory in the April 1964 provincial election, had a strong personal interest in the plight of Indians and Metis, and his government undertook a number of initiatives intended to improve their living conditions. At the same time, Indians and Metis themselves experienced a political awakening and became more assertive. One might have expected many positive achievements flowing from this combination of a well-intentioned government and an energized Aboriginal community. In fact, the opposite happened. As

James M. Pitsula is professor of history at the University of Regina, Saskatchewan. This is one of a series of articles he has recently published on the policies of Saskatchewan governments toward Indigenous peoples.

the 1960s progressed, the Thatcher government became more and more estranged from Aboriginal organizations. This paper explores the reasons for the misunderstandings and antagonisms.

In Canada, status Indians and Metis belong to different legal categories. Section 91, Subsection 24 of the British North America Act (now the Constitution Act) gave the federal government jurisdiction over "Indians and lands reserved for the Indians." Metis were not included. The Indian Act (1876) provided a legal definition of an Indian as any male person of Indian blood belonging to a particular Indian band, any child of such a person, or any woman who had lawfully married such a person. Until 1985, when the law was changed by the passage of Bill C-31, Indian women lost their status upon marrying someone who was not a status Indian. Nor did the children of such marriages have Indian status.¹ In addition, status Indians whose bands are located in Saskatchewan are treaty Indians, since the entire province is covered by treaties negotiated between Indian chiefs and the Government of Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

[GPQ 17 (Summer/Fall 1997): 213-35]

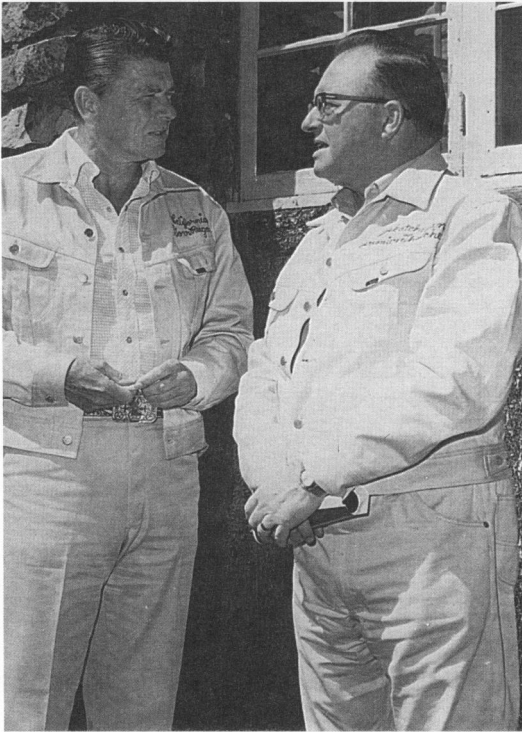


FIG. 1. Premier Thatcher of Saskatchewan and Governor Reagan of California at the Governors Conference in Montana, guests of Governor Babcock, 28 June 1967. Courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board

Unlike status Indians, Metis have no legal definition.² Generally speaking, they are considered to be people of mixed ancestry descended from the mingling of Indians and Europeans (French or English) in the fur trade.³ Unlike status Indians, Metis do not fall under Section 91, Subsection 24 of the BNA Act, they are not covered by the Indian Act, and they have no treaty rights and no land base. Therefore, although Metis have some common ancestry and cultural affinity with status Indians, they have a different political history. In the 1960s in Saskatchewan, Indians based their claims on the fulfillment of treaty obligations, and they very much resented being placed in the same category as Metis who had not signed

treaties. Consequently, it makes sense to discuss the two groups separately. This paper focuses primarily on the relationship between the Saskatchewan government and the Metis.⁴

JOBS AND INTEGRATION

The Thatcher government's interest in Aboriginal issues was evident soon after it took office. In September 1964 it convened a conference of people of Indian ancestry from across the province at the Bessborough Hotel in Saskatoon. The Premier told the conference that living standards for Indians and Metis were "deplorably low" and that he would help them find jobs and support themselves.⁵

This policy was consistent with Thatcher's right-of-center political philosophy, his belief in the value of individual self-reliance, and his disapproval of welfare dependency.⁶ He thought that if Aboriginal people could escape welfare and work for a living, a major step would have been taken to solve all their problems. They would gain self-esteem and confidence and integrate with the rest of society. Ultimately, Thatcher's Aboriginal policy was based on economic self-sufficiency. He considered cultural issues relatively unimportant, saying on one occasion: "What is their culture? Living in tents or dirty filthy shacks on a reserve? Culture is fine, but we've got to be realistic and bring them to where the jobs are, where the children can go to school and where they can live in a decent house."⁷ Thatcher's focus was on individual self-support; he had little interest in or sympathy for the Aboriginal people defining themselves as a community, much less affirming their cultural identity or pressing for the right to self-determination.

In March 1965 the government bureaucracy began to mobilize to implement its Indian and Metis program. A bill was introduced to establish an Indian and Metis branch within the Department of Natural Resources. Thatcher said the purpose of the branch was to "accelerate the process by which these people [Indians and Metis] become an integral part of

Canadian society.” The branch came into being on 1 April 1965 with an annual budget of \$475,000. The director was Ferd Ewald, who had a master’s degree in social work and, though raised in Saskatchewan, had most recently been employed as the supervisor of case work services for the John Howard Society in Toronto.⁸ Ewald was an advocate of community development, an approach to working with disadvantaged people that emphasized helping them identify their own problems, set their own goals, and devise their own solutions. Community development was based on the principle that, unless the people being assisted were themselves committed to the program, it would not succeed. Government-imposed, “top-down” solutions would not work. Community development meant the development of self-awareness, the capacity to make decisions, and the ability to take charge of one’s life.⁹

Although community development was originally listed as one of the functions of the Indian and Metis branch,¹⁰ it soon became clear that Premier Thatcher had little use for the concept. In fact, he said community development was “communism.”¹¹ He made it clear that the primary functions of the branch, in order of importance were: (1) placement of people of Indian ancestry in employment; (2) encouragement and development of educational resources for academic, vocational, and technical training; (3) promotion of practical economic projects such as roads, power, and telephones on reserves and in Metis communities; and (4) improvements to farming operations such as feeder lots, land clearance, and farm credit.¹²

The single-minded focus on job placement, at the expense of community development, frustrated Ewald. He pointed out that only a small proportion of those placed stayed in their jobs for more than a few weeks. He cited the case of thirty Metis placement candidates who were assigned to construction work at the South Saskatchewan River Dam but had returned home to Cumberland House after a few weeks of employment. Some said that the work

was too hard, others were lonely being away from their relatives and friends, and others wanted to do some moose hunting.¹³ One follow-up study of 600 placements indicated that 81 percent of the new hires had resigned their jobs after working an average 3.8 weeks.¹⁴ Ewald concluded that individuals needed more training and counseling, both before and after they had been placed in jobs. He believed the important objective was to win the trust and cooperation of Indian and Metis people so that, when they were ready, they would choose job placement as their own goal. Only then would they be ready to leave the rural setting and make the transition to a regular job routine and urban living.¹⁵ Unable to convince Thatcher of the necessity for community development prior to job placement, Ewald resigned in January 1967.¹⁶

His successor, Wylie Spafford, was not a social worker but an ex-Air Force officer. Spafford knew Thatcher personally and was quite willing to follow his direction in running the Indian and Metis branch.¹⁷ The nature of the relationship between the two men was evident from an exchange that took place concerning the benefits of extensive counseling prior to job placement. Thatcher stated emphatically, “We can get on this counseling kick too far.” When Spafford demurred, the premier delivered a stiff rebuke: “I just want you to remember your job is still to find jobs. And I will judge the branch by the number of job placements it makes.”¹⁸

In August 1968 the Thatcher government launched the Task Force on Indian and Metis Opportunity. The idea was to enlist the support of the citizenry in the campaign to place Aboriginal people in jobs, a plan similar to the one adopted by President Lyndon Johnson in the United States to find jobs for African Americans.¹⁹ As Thatcher explained at the inaugural meeting of the task force, the government needed help: “Because of the terrible complexity of the problem, because of the frustrations involved, we decided to solicit the advice and assistance of others in our society.” The task force could “provide us with a new,

fresh approach." These words were belied by the premier's announcement that the main objective was still to find "maximum employment for our native people."²⁰ The task force was not given free rein; it had to work within well-defined limits set by the premier.

The task force included representatives from business, industry, the university, the teaching profession, cooperatives, labor unions, churches, and Indian and Metis people. Five subcommittees were set up, each of them dealing with an aspect of job placement: (1) finding additional jobs for people of Indian ancestry in the civil service and crown corporations, as well as municipal governments, school units, and hospitals; (2) locating additional employment for Native people in private industry; (3) seeking out Indian and Metis candidates who wished to take employment; (4) studying and recommending improvement of housing opportunities for Native people; (5) studying and developing educational upgrading and job training programs.²¹

Although the government's purpose was to rally everyone behind its Indian and Metis program, Metis leader Howard Adams sounded a dissenting note at the task force's first meeting. He appealed for a total program of assistance—not one that concentrated only on employment. Jobs were needed, but so were education, counseling, and skills in housekeeping. If these issues were not tackled, Indians and Metis would leave their jobs and relapse into their former state.²² Secondly, Adams maintained that Native people had a growing awareness of and pride in their distinct identity; they were not willing to be aggressively assimilated. Simply placing them in jobs, without in any way recognizing their culture and values, was a recipe for failure.²³ Adams's warning was ignored, a premonition of future troubles.

In a speech to the Legislative Assembly on 5 March 1969, Thatcher admitted that, although the Indian and Metis branch had operated for four years and had produced some good results, it represented only a beginning—"a faltering first step." Since 1965, more than

five thousand Indian and Metis people had been placed in jobs, but, the premier admitted, "many of these individuals have not remained permanently on the job." His solution was to upgrade the Indian and Metis branch to full departmental status to achieve "a decided stepping-up of an action program."²⁴ Experience had taught that there were numerous pitfalls in the job placement program. Job applicants had sometimes lacked the necessary educational qualifications, and housing was often unavailable where the jobs were located. These difficulties notwithstanding, Thatcher promised job placement would be continued and expanded. Although the premier was not satisfied with the efforts of the government to date, he did not discern a need for a change in policy direction. Instead of trying something new, for example, a shift to community development, the government opted for more of the same, delivered through a different bureaucratic structure.

Thatcher asked the Metis leader, Howard Adams, to be the deputy-minister of the new department. When he declined, the job went to James S. Sinclair, who had been head of the northern affairs branch of the Department of Natural Resources and a veteran of the department since 1946.²⁵ The department had three sections: an administrative branch, a placement and training branch, and an economic development branch. The administrative branch, with six staff members in 1971, provided administrative support and staff service to the department. The most important branch was placement and training with twenty staff members. It placed a total of 1886 Indian and Metis people in jobs in fiscal year 1969-70, and 1874 in 1970-71. The jobs were about evenly divided between government and the private sector. Most of them were short-term jobs rather than permanent placements, which suggests that a principal function of the department was to serve the casual labor needs of employers.²⁶ The key question as to how long workers remained in their jobs was unanswered because the department did not keep records of retention rates.

Thatcher repeatedly fired off memos urging that people of Indian ancestry be hired for government service. He wrote all cabinet ministers, deputy ministers, and crown corporation general managers in September 1966: "In the past year we have made some modest improvement in the employment of Indians. However, the overall result is still anything but satisfactory . . . May I repeat—I consider this problem to be vital, and I would like specific action."²⁷ About a year later, he reiterated: "I am quite dissatisfied with the number of Indians being hired in the Civil Service. After an initial splurge, very little has been happening. . . . May I see some quick action."²⁸ A few months later the premier said he was "still far from satisfied" with what had been accomplished. The problem seemed to be a shortage of qualified Aboriginal candidates. W. R. Parks, deputy minister of Natural Resources, where the Indian and Metis branch was housed, suggested that to mollify the premier, Native people be hired, even if they were not qualified: "If these employees do not pan out, the Premier will no doubt receive complaints directly from the departments concerned and it will take the 'heat' off us."²⁹ This was obviously not a good solution, but it showed the lengths to which senior bureaucrats would go to ease the pressure Thatcher was putting on them.

A better idea was the introduction in the civil service of an on-the-job training or supernumerary program. A review of the program for the period 1 January 1968 to 31 March 1971 showed total enrollees of 1059, of whom 359 moved on to permanent employment, 141 in the Saskatchewan public service, 67 in Saskatchewan crown corporations, and 151 in other employment. There were 354 terminations, 241 still in training, and 105 who had completed their on-the-job training and were qualified for employment but not yet placed.³⁰ The greatest number of qualified trainees were unskilled workers such as laundry workers, ward aides, domestics, and trade helpers who were employed in government institutions such as mental hos-



FIG. 2. *Howard Adams in the 1970s.* Courtesy of University of Saskatchewan Photograph Collection, #8308.

pitals, geriatric centers, and corrections facilities.³¹

The government also used moral suasion to encourage private employers to hire Aboriginal workers. In particular, companies that received government highway or bridge contracts were asked to reserve at least five percent of their work force for Indians and Metis.³² In 1970 this suggestion hardened into regulation when recipients of government contracts were legally bound to employ a minimum of 15 percent Native employees in areas where the population was predominantly Indian or Metis and 5 percent in other areas of the province. Hospitals in predominantly Native centers had to employ 15 percent staff of Native ancestry. The quota for hospitals in major urban centers was 6 percent, and for smaller hospitals and

special care homes 5 percent. These levels were to be attained by the end of the 1973-74 fiscal year.³³

Another function of the placement and training branch was to arrange for upgrading courses to be conducted by the Department of Education at a number of rural and urban communities throughout the province. Courses leading to grade twelve certificates were offered, as well as skill development and trades courses such as driver education, welding, radio and television repair, heavy equipment operation, motor vehicle mechanics, building construction, and forestry operations. Other courses led to certificates for semi-professional positions such as nursing assistants, bookkeepers, stenographers, and laboratory and X-ray technicians. Financial assistance was given to sixteen Indian and Metis students attending university in 1970-71 and to more than twenty others completing high school by correspondence or at night school.³⁴

Students who traveled from their isolated homes to attend upgrading and training courses in larger centers faced various difficulties. *Regina Leader-Post* reporter Eric Malling interviewed Steve Herman, twenty-two, a Chipewyan from La Loche, who lasted only two weeks in a vocational course in Meadow Lake. He liked the school, but not the Cree students at the house where he was boarding. They couldn't speak Chipewyan, and Steve couldn't speak Cree. He requested that they all speak English, but they continued to talk in Cree. "They might have been talking behind my back," Steve explained. "I just hit the road." Paul Fontaine, also from La Loche and twenty-two years old, went to Saskatoon for a similar course. He lasted three days. His mother explained that the teacher told the students they would have to make a speech in class every day. Paul, the only Indian in a class of whites, could not handle that. Other young men who had gone south said that, even if they liked school, they did not know what to do with themselves in the evenings. Loneliness made liquor and the pool halls an easy temptation.³⁵

HOUSING

Housing, or the lack thereof, was identified at an early stage as an important variable affecting the success of job placement. A letter to the government from G. B. Crawford, who operated a poultry processing plant in Wynyard, illustrated the problem: "Before they [Indians and Metis] can even start work, they have to find a place to live, and this is getting tougher all the time. During the decent weather, they sometimes live in tents near town, but this does not work when the cold weather sets in. There is a great shortage of housing in this town; decent houses are going at a very high rental, and the ones the average worker can afford are pretty small and often pretty cold. There is of course quite a bit of resistance to renting houses to Indians."³⁶

To alleviate the problem, the Department of Municipal Affairs bought houses in urban centers throughout the province for rental at subsidized rates. At the end of the 1970-71 fiscal year, a total of 145 houses had been purchased.³⁷ For many Native families, moving to the city meant a drastic change in their lives. Although the Indian and Metis Department did not formally recognize family counseling as one of its functions, placement officers, in practice, spent considerable time dealing with "marital problems, children taking bicycles, weedy backyards, broken windows, angry neighbours, drunken parties, and so on." J.S. Sinclair, deputy-minister of the Indian and Metis Department, conscious of the fact that the department was not equipped to provide adequate family counseling, recommended, late in 1970, that the Department of Welfare establish such a service.³⁸ It is unfortunate that this recommendation came so late in the government's term; by June 1971 Thatcher and the Liberals were out of power.

RELOCATION

Another initiative of the late 1960s and early 1970s was the relocation plan. During 1969-70, eighteen families were assisted to

move from such remote northern communities as La Loche and Buffalo Narrows to urban centers.³⁹ *Leader-Post* reporter Nancy Gelber and Metis Society fieldworker Jim Sinclair paid visits to the homes of former La Loche residents now living in Moose Jaw. "All [the homes] were pin neat, Second World War vintage with television sets. All of the women said they have trouble with their television sets." Bernadette and Leon Janvier were taking training courses at the Saskatchewan Training School, she in tailoring and he in shoe repair. They were separated from their two daughters, aged six and eight, who lived with Mrs. Janvier's mother in La Loche because it was too expensive to hire a baby sitter in Moose Jaw. The Janviers' boarders, Sarah Herman and Mack Herman, also from La Loche, worked respectively as a nurse's aide and a ranch hand. Mack Herman said he liked his work, but missed hunting and fishing: "I haven't even seen one squirrel around here."

Another family consisted of George Herman, training as an upholsterer, and Helen, learning to be an occupational therapist. They, too, were separated from their children and complained of feeling isolated. Neither drove a car, and all their friends, except for three other transplanted families, were up north. Finally, there was the family of Joe and Cecile Herman, their two children, and one granddaughter. Cecile said she liked their house because it was warm. "I don't feel like going back now that we're down here and we have a job. The kids like it here, too," she said, as the family watched television and nibbled dried fish from the north and popsicles. All the relocated adults were pleased to be receiving wages, but worried that the training programs lasted only six months, and they knew that if they didn't find jobs, they would have to go on welfare.⁴⁰

The Indian and Metis Department, together with the Departments of Agriculture and Education, took over the Cutbank site, formerly the construction headquarters for the South Saskatchewan River Dam project. The site was transformed into a residential training center

for families and individuals of Native ancestry who wished to move from isolated rural areas to the city. The center provided instruction in basic living and employment skills needed for persons to function successfully in an urban setting. Courses in home and family management, child care, money management, academic upgrading, and trades were offered. It was expected that families would remain in the center for approximately two years, after which time they would be ready for a new life. In August 1970, Cutbank opened its doors to the first family from northern Saskatchewan.⁴¹

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In addition to the administrative and placement and training branches, the Indian and Metis department had a third branch—the economic development branch. With seven staff members in 1971, it helped people of Indian ancestry establish business enterprises by giving advice and guaranteeing loans to a maximum for each project of \$5000. Native-owned companies were also eligible for grants of up to \$2000. Native Metal Industries of Regina, for example, had sixty employees in 1971 and supplied scrap metal to a local steel and pipe maker.⁴² Other Native-controlled enterprises included tourist camps and outfitting businesses, service stations, a store, a trucking company, and cattle raising, pulp cutting, and market gardening ventures.⁴³

An overview of the Thatcher government's record in Indian and Metis programming during its seven years in office reveals impressive statistics. There were more than eight thousand job placements, though a large but indeterminate number of those placed in jobs quit after a brief interval. About three hundred new homes were built in northern Saskatchewan and 145 rental homes were purchased in urban centers for Indians and Metis moving to the city. More than \$300,000 was provided in grants for eighteen economic development projects. About \$2,500,000 was spent on training farms at Cumberland House, Ile a la Crosse, Green Lake, La Loche and other places. Some



FIG. 3. Premier Thatcher in his office with visiting Indian and Metis school children, c. 1966. Courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board.

5100 Indians and Metis attended upgrading and training programs at a cost of \$5,623,000.⁴⁴

Despite what on paper seemed an exemplary effort, a sense of frustration sometimes enveloped the government. At a meeting of the Task Force on Indian and Metis Opportunity in December 1969, Thatcher owned to the fact that the problems faced by Native people were almost as large as ever. He blamed the “amazing and shocking” lack of enthusiasm of the general community for the task force. While some companies had made a good contribution, others had done nothing. He urged trade unions to be more flexible with respect to Native hiring, and he castigated the teachers’ federation for not doing more. Even the churches were a target of his criticism: “We are not happy with the church organizations. We want their contribution extended and improved.”⁴⁵

These complaints did not prevent the government from complimenting itself on all the good it was doing for Indians and Metis. It commissioned a half-hour film entitled “A Better Citizen—Both of Us,” which was telecast province wide in 1970. The film opened with a series of shots of Indian and Metis northerners, both adults and children, fishing, preparing hides, and engaged in various other activities. The narrator reflected gloomily on their poor living conditions and their need to be brought into “the mainstream of Saskatchewan economic society,” but his commentary seemed at odds with the images captured by the camera. The northerners seemed healthy and happy as they carried out their tasks. Dr. Howard Nixon, dean of Physical Education at the University of Saskatchewan and chairman of the education subcommittee of the Indian and Metis task force, appeared

on screen to say: "The culture of the native people is dead. There is no foundation for it in hunting, trapping, fishing. Their society, as we know it, must change to be the same as our society. They must adjust to our white society." There followed vignettes of Indians and Metis "adjusting": Indian women mopping the floor, washing dishes, and working as hospital aides; an upgrading class in the north, the instructor dictating, "Oranges are good to eat," while the students copied the sentence in their notebooks; Indian and Metis farm workers, miners, and a man felling a tree as the narrator explained that Indians find work "in their natural habitat" rewarding; students being trained in barbering and radio/TV repair; women washing test tubes and men repairing shoes; a Native family living in the city, seated around the supper table eating macaroni. The film catalogued the government's Indian and Metis initiatives and urged, almost browbeat, the general public to support them. It closed with a statement from Indian and Affairs Minister Allan Guy, who alluded to the fact that the government needed to have the cooperation and advice of Indian and Metis people. This was the first hint in the film that Native people might have something to say about the programs implemented on their behalf.⁴⁶

The Thatcher government, during the 1971 provincial election campaign, claimed to be leading the rest of Canada in Indian and Metis programs, but Metis leader Howard Adams openly expressed disillusionment with the government's task force, calling it "window-dressing and a waste of time."⁴⁷ He insisted on changes to the Indian and Metis department: "This Department has done very little for our people, so far. It has helped mostly the white officials who get big salaries."⁴⁸ Allan Blakeney, the leader of the New Democratic Party, the main opposition to Thatcher's Liberals, responded by promising to abolish or drastically overhaul the department: "We are going to attempt to wipe out the paternalism of the past and start again, face to face . . . One thing is certain, the Liberal governments and bureaucracies at Ottawa and Regina have gone

about it in the wrong way. They're still following the Great White Father approach."⁴⁹

Why had the Thatcher government so significantly failed to keep in touch with the thinking of the Metis, the very people it was trying to help? The key was Thatcher himself, who never really listened to Indian and Metis people but imposed his own ideas on them. His focus on economic issues to the exclusion of all else, his downgrading of the importance of cultural identity, and his focus on individual achievement rather than community development led inevitably to a clash with the Metis leadership.

REVIVAL OF METIS NATIONALISM

Perhaps the clash would have been less severe had it not been for the revival of Metis nationalism in the 1960s.⁵⁰ A number of factors created an environment conducive to Aboriginal activism: the spill-over effects of the civil rights movement in the United States, the anti-poverty movement in Canada and the United States, the reverberations from the Quiet Revolution in Quebec and Quebec's claims for "special status," the emerging nationalism of de-colonizing third world countries, the youth movement and activism on Canadian campuses, and the demographic pressures arising from a soaring Aboriginal birth rate and migration from rural areas to urban centers.⁵¹ In Saskatchewan an impetus to the rebirth of Metis nationalism came, ironically, from the Thatcher government itself. When the government invited about one hundred delegates of Indian and Metis ancestry to a conference in Saskatoon in September 1964, a group of about twenty five Metis took advantage of the occasion to discuss the reactivation of an organization to represent their interests. They elected Malcolm Norris and Don Nielson as co-chairmen and authorized them to establish a "central agency" in Prince Albert.⁵²

Because the Thatcher government disliked Malcolm Norris's left-leaning politics, he was fired from his provincial government job as of

1 January 1965. Norris found employment as the executive-director of the Prince Albert Indian-Metis Friendship Centre, but only temporarily, since the government found a way to oust him from that position, too. The province withheld the center's annual grant as long as Norris was director, forcing the board to accept his resignation. When MLA Bill Berezowsky attacked the government for persecuting Norris, Deputy Premier Dave Steuart replied, "He [Norris] was a Communist, Bill, and we had no use for him," to which Berezowsky retorted, "I will tell you that whether he was a Communist or a Fascist, or anything else, he was a man who loved his own people and who was willing to give his life for his people."⁵³

Despite the Thatcher government's campaign against him, Norris continued his efforts to build up the Metis organization. The founding convention of the Metis Association of Saskatchewan was held 3-4 April 1965 in Prince Albert with twenty delegates and seven associate members in attendance. The association had 16 locals, 281 paid-up members, and 125 who had not yet paid.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, in March 1965, a rival organization called the Metis Society came together in Regina under the leadership of Alex Daniels.⁵⁵ Malcolm Norris and Don Nielson traveled to Regina to meet with Daniels in the hope of mending the split, but their mission was unsuccessful. Daniels argued that the Metis in the north were closer to the Indian way of living while those in the south were more assimilated to white society. There was also a language barrier. In contrast to the northern Metis, who spoke mostly Cree, their southern counterparts spoke a mixture of English, French, and Cree. Politically, Norris and Daniels were not in the same camp. Norris was an enemy of the Thatcher government, and Daniels, who worked as a placement officer in the provincial Indian and Metis branch, was a friend.⁵⁶

Not surprisingly, the provincial government threw its support behind Daniels and the Metis Society and sought to undermine Norris and the Metis Association. In September 1966, Joe

Amyotte, who had been elected Metis Society president, asked for a government grant and received \$500.⁵⁷ With grant in hand, Amyotte now pressed for the amalgamation of the Metis Society with the Metis Association, a maneuver that Norris strongly resisted. He opposed government grants on principle, believing they would make the Metis organization a tool of the government. Amyotte and the Metis Society won the power struggle. A general convention of the two organizations on 13 May 1967 approved their amalgamation under the name of the Metis Society of Saskatchewan with headquarters in Regina and Joe Amyotte as president.⁵⁸ Shortly afterward, in December 1967, Malcolm Norris died.

In the spring of 1967, Amyotte requested a substantial increase in provincial government funding from \$500 to \$31,500, but the province responded with a grant of only \$1000 for fiscal year 1967-68.⁵⁹ The Metis Society continued lobbying for more funds, noting that the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians was receiving \$65,000 compared to the Metis's \$1000. The money would be used to set up an office, hire a permanent secretary and two field workers. The society pointed out that the time was ripe for assistance to the Metis: "because of the Negro riots in the USA, people are concerned over the treatment of the minority groups here."⁶⁰ In 1968-69, the provincial grant to the Metis Society was boosted to \$10,000, and then, later in the year, supplementary grants of \$5490 for field work and \$2000 to cover the cost of the annual meeting were given, bringing the total to \$17,490.⁶¹ The money was spent on organizational work in the scattered Metis communities, helping the people to identify their needs and establish local organizations.⁶² The Metis Society grant went up again in 1969-70 to \$20,000, plus \$2000 for the annual meeting, considerably less than the \$60,000 requested.⁶³ With the increased funding, the Metis Society expanded from nine local chapters, mainly in the south, to forty-five chapters covering most of the province. Short courses were held for local chapters teaching them how to conduct meet-

ings and organize their affairs. In addition, the society publicized the provincial government's adult education programs and selected suitable candidates for upgrading courses. It also conducted housing surveys and organized AA groups.⁶⁴

Although provincial government funding had increased substantially, it was less generous than appeared on the surface. In April 1965 Saskatchewan had signed a five-year, federal-provincial Agricultural Rehabilitation and Development Act (ARDA) agreement, replacing the previous agreement which had expired. The new agreement, unlike the old, included programs benefitting Indian and Metis people.⁶⁵ Thus, although the grant to the Metis Society was funneled through the provincial government, the federal government reimbursed the province for half the amount.

With the demise of the Metis Association, the way was clear for the Thatcher government to have a comfortable relationship with the Metis Society. The government's triumph was short-lived, however, because no sooner had the Metis Association disappeared than the Saskatchewan Native Action Committee (SNAC) came into being in April 1968. It issued a radical-sounding leaflet entitled "Up the Revolution," which proclaimed: "Integration is not the solution, especially not forced integration. We oppose Whitey's attempts to assimilate our people, our culture, traditions and philosophies into his supreme society."⁶⁶

SASKATCHEWAN NATIVE ACTION COMMITTEE AND HOWARD ADAMS

SNAC was headed by Howard Adams, a well-educated and articulate leader whose thinking was based on a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the position of Native people in Canadian society. Adams grew up in St. Louis, Saskatchewan, an old Metis community south of Prince Albert. His political and intellectual development was shaped by his experience as a student at the Berkeley campus of the University of California, where



FIG. 4. *Howard Adams today.* Courtesy of Howard Adams.

he completed his doctorate in 1966. He was struck by the parallels between the plight of African Americans in the United States and Aboriginal people in Canada. Both faced discrimination, economic oppression, and political powerlessness. Adams wrote:

The more I became involved, the clearer colonialism became. I was very moved when I heard Malcolm X speak to the students about black nationalism. Afterwards, I wanted time to think of the beautiful things he had said. The ideas he expressed about black nationalism were so important that I could not put them out of my mind. I kept trying to fit them into the Indian/Metis situation at home. Nationalism seemed to be the spirit that motivated black people to a new sense of pride and confidence. Like the black people, I began to reject my feeling of inferiority and shame, and to become proud of my Indian heritage and native nation.⁶⁷

Returning to Saskatchewan to take up a teaching post at the University of Saskatchewan, Adams became aware of a cultural and political awakening among Indian and Metis people. He prepared a report on social conditions in the west side communities of northern Saskatchewan and found that "the state of [political] consciousness was surprisingly high among the people. . . . They were open in talking about problems and confrontations—police brutality, housing, and the need to organize with political muscle. I hadn't expected this at all but it was obvious they had been involved in real political struggle." Adams sought out Malcolm Norris and found him at a meeting of the Metis Association in Prince Albert. The veteran leader welcomed Adams's support and saw in the young academic a possible future president of the Metis Association.⁶⁸

The two basic premises of Adams's 1975 book *Prison of Grass* were: "we live in a white racist society" and "racism is the product of economics." He argued that the Europeans who had come to North America wanted to profit from the natural resources and reduced Aboriginal people to a subhuman level so that they could be readily exploited as cheap labor. The racism that originated in the fur trade became so deeply entrenched in Canadian society that, even though cheap Indian labor was no longer required for the Canadian economy, racism endured and permeated the government, church, schools, and courts. Adams maintained that images of white supremacy were present everywhere in movies, television, and books. Indians and Metis were taught to feel inferior and to accept as inevitable that all positions of authority—teacher, priest, judge, Indian agent—were held by whites. Children internalized negative images of themselves and often felt shame and self-hatred.⁶⁹

Indians and Metis were not allowed to have their own history. Adams recalled that, as a young boy, he and his friends were never told about the Metis heroes of the resistance led by Louis Riel in 1885. His parents and grandparents were too ashamed to claim their own

history. The schools taught the language, literature, and history of the colonizer, forcing Aboriginal students "to deny their language, culture, and essential being." This led to the inculcation of what Adams called the "white ideal," the tendency for people of Indian ancestry to seek acceptance and success in white society. The white ideal operated at a subconscious level, deeply influencing thought and behavior. Everything white was considered beautiful and held in high esteem; everything non-white was judged ugly and worthless.⁷⁰

A central tenet of Adams's thought was that the imperialism and colonialism of Canada's past continued into the present: "We are told that the enemy, colonialism, is the historical oppressor. But we must make no mistake that our oppression is in the forms and institutions of colonialism, and its manifestations, such as racial stereotypes, Indian bureaucracies, welfare, prisons, etc."⁷¹ The persistence of colonialism led to poverty, lack of employment, and segregation of Indians and Metis into menial and low-paying jobs. Adams held that racism resulted in the social, cultural, and economic underdevelopment of Aboriginal society. Any Aboriginal person who dared to stand up for his rights was crushed by such means as denial of welfare payments or harassment by police.

Adams rejected integration as the means to overcome colonialism, so he was fundamentally opposed to the core principle of the Thatcher government's Aboriginal policy. Adams believed that Canadian society was so racist that only those Indians and Metis whose appearance was white enough to allow them to pass as whites would be truly accepted. Integration under these terms strengthened rather than transformed the white supremacy system. Adams wrote that, for those who bore "the indelible print of Indian appearance," there was no alternative to segregation.⁷²

Although Adams was a "separatist" rather than an integrationist, he did not rule out the possibility, at some future time, of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians living together in a single community based on equality and



FIG. 5. *Metis mother and two children, northern Saskatchewan, possibly Green Lake.* Courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board.

justice. He doubted, however, that this would happen as long as Canada remained a capitalist country.⁷³ For Adams, capitalism was inherently racist because the desire to make profits led to the dehumanization of certain groups in order to exploit their labor, so only in a socialist society would exploitation and racism be wiped out.

Within the capitalist system that Adams condemned as irredeemably racist, how could “separatism” for Indians and Metis be attained? Adams distinguished between revolutionary nationalism and radical nationalism. The former occurred in such Third World colonies as Cuba and North Vietnam where liberation forces took up arms to secure territorial autonomy. Adams did not endorse revolutionary nationalism in this sense for the Aboriginal

people of Canada. Indians and Metis lacked the power to overthrow the government, reclaim the land, and set up a separate state. Instead, he recommended radical nationalism, the goals of which were “economic, social and cultural autonomy, and control over all political affairs concerning the natives as a nation, beginning with complete local control of Indian reserves, Metis communities, and native urban ghettos.” Self-government required two things: constitutional authority and economic independence. The constitution had to be amended to enshrine Aboriginal rights, and funds had to be provided for economic development. Adams suggested the promotion of farming and the establishment of light industries in Aboriginal communities. Such enterprises would be locally controlled

with no interference from government bureaucrats or non-Aboriginal supervisors. Since the Canadian government was willing to give millions of dollars in aid to Third World countries, it could surely give similar assistance to underdeveloped communities at home.⁷⁴

As Indians and Metis advanced toward self-government, Adams foresaw a danger coming from within the Aboriginal community. Since a favorite tactic of colonial rulers was to cultivate a middle-class elite within the oppressed group, Adams derided "Uncle Tomahawks" on the government payroll who adopted the government's point of view and smothered grass-roots radicalism, and he declined to serve as Thatcher's deputy minister for Indian and Metis affairs. Another government tactic was to fund Aboriginal organizations on the understanding that they would not bite the hand that fed them. Organizations that succumbed to government control suppressed Indian and Metis people more effectively than did any government agency.⁷⁵

Although Adams eschewed violence as the means to liberation, he did not rule it out altogether. Although a call to arms under existing conditions would be a call to martyrdom, as the Aboriginal movement gained momentum and formed alliances with other oppressed groups, "there may come a time when guerrilla violence will be necessary and appropriate, and we must not hesitate to use it."⁷⁶ In a 1969 interview he was even more definite, predicting that in the struggle for justice in Canada, violence would be "inevitable."⁷⁷

Possibly because of these allusions to violence, Adams became an object of fascination for the media, which invariably referred to him as a "militant" and "red power advocate." He told the *Regina Leader-Post* in 1967 that "if red power means political power in the hands of the Indian, the movement is well under way in Saskatchewan. . . . The movement can't be held off. People are already talking in terms of demonstrations." He emphasized that red power did not mean "the kind of thing you think of in connection with the Detroit riots." Questioned about a statement allegedly made

by a radical activist that young Indians had been asked to go to Cuba, Adams denied any connection between Castro and Canadian Native people: "Trying to link red power with Cuba is wrong. We are in a special position here." Adams categorically repudiated a SNAC pamphlet that advocated setting up a guerrilla warfare committee. He said the pamphlet's author had acted on his own and did not represent the views of the association. SNAC would fight for colonized peoples but would reject "fringe elements who are too action-oriented."⁷⁸

Adams's organization tested the political waters by running a candidate in the Meadow Lake constituency in the 1968 federal election. The candidate was Carole Lavallee, a twenty-five-year-old treaty Indian from Cowessess reserve who was enrolled in social sciences courses at the Regina campus of the University of Saskatchewan. She ran fourth, polling 604 votes to the victorious Conservative party candidate's 7324. She blamed her defeat, in part, on "uncle tomahawks" who looked for favors from the government. Premier Thatcher commented that SNAC's foray into politics was: "an exercise in futility, but it's a free country. . . . We hired Dr. Adams and we pay his salary. We just wish he would do more work for his people and less agitating." The reference to Adams's salary apparently related to the fact that he had a teaching position at an institution funded by the government. Thatcher did not have the power to fire a university faculty member, but Rose Bishop, the wife of Rod Bishop, Lavallee's campaign manager, was less fortunate. Shortly after the election, she was dismissed from her clerical job with the provincial government.⁷⁹

On 2 October 1968, as the tension between the SNAC and the government heightened, a highly ironic ceremony unfolded on the grounds of the Legislative Building in Regina. The government formally unveiled the statue of Louis Riel it had commissioned from sculptor John Nugent. A crowd of about three thousand, very few of whom were Metis, heard

tributes to the Metis leader from Premier Thatcher and Prime Minister Trudeau. Trudeau praised Riel as a “fighter for his people,” and Thatcher honored him as “a brilliant figure, a man of exceptional leadership qualities, a man fiercely proud of his heritage.” The premier retrospectively enlisted Riel as a supporter of the provincial government’s policy of “bettering the living standards of native people,” conveniently overlooking other aspects of Riel’s legacy.⁸⁰ The Metis who opposed Thatcher’s policies naturally resented the premier’s appropriation of a Metis hero. They were also offended by the statue itself, since Riel was depicted naked from the waist down. Nap Lafontaine was delegated by the Metis Society to talk to Thatcher, who explained that the statue was “new art” and “that new art won’t be appreciated for 50 years.” Lafontaine replied: “Appreciated! That thing won’t be there that long.”⁸¹

In order to undermine the SNAC, the Thatcher government bolstered its rival, the Metis Society, with a grant of \$2000 to organize a conference in July 1968. Municipal Affairs Minister Clarence Estey made the government’s position clear: “It is my hope that your organization will be the voice of the Metis in our province. Splinter groups can only weaken your organization. Indeed, splinter groups are often formed by a very small group, and more often for personal gain and prestige.” Adams responded to this thinly veiled attack by saying that Estey feared grassroots political activity because it threatened his power. Adams promised to use blunt language with the government, to which Thatcher replied, “You’re likely to get blunt speeches back.”

The Thatcher government’s strategy of attacking the SNAC and supporting the Metis Society backfired when, in April 1969, Howard Adams won the presidency of the Metis Society at the annual convention in Prince Albert. The meeting attracted about 125 Metis and non-treaty Indians, including 80 voting delegates from 45 locals. The three candidates for president were Joe Amyotte,

the incumbent, Howard Adams, and Rod Bishop. Premier Thatcher, who was invited to give the banquet address, was asked whether it was true that, if certain persons were elected, the government would take away the society’s \$20,000 grant. “I don’t think so,” the premier replied. “I’ll wait and take a look.” In response to groans from the audience, he added that he expected the Metis Society “to give us officers we can work with.” Bishop, thinking the premier’s remark might have been directed at him, withdrew from the contest because he knew how important the grant was to the society. The election shaped up as a battle between the “moderates,” who supported Amyotte, and the “militants,” who backed Adams. Despite the premier’s threat, Adams won a narrow victory and declared: “We will not be pushed down any more. I consider that we are now the vanguard or the forefront of a liberation movement.” Adams did not entirely disavow comparison between himself and Louis Riel: “This comparison is made continuously by my own people and by white people because—they even say I look like Louis Riel—because, in emotion I’m sort of the evangelistic type of leader, and because I am a militant . . . There’s no doubt about it. I’m a revolutionary.”

The reference to Riel and Adams’s self-description as a “revolutionary” once again raised the specter of violence. In July 1967 the *Toronto Globe and Mail* had published a story about a draft report entitled “Indians and the Law,” which had been prepared by the Canadian Corrections Association for the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. According to the *Globe and Mail*, the report warned that “in many communities in the West, with substantial numbers of Indian people living on the fringes of cities and towns, relationships between the Indian and the non-Indian residents are severely strained, and a precarious and explosive situation exists.”⁸⁴ The *Leader-Post* gave front-page coverage to the story, running it under the heading, “Indian-White Racial Hostilities Said Near Explosion Point in West.” At the top of the



FIG. 6. *La Loche in northern Saskatchewan as seen from the top of the fire tower, August 1956.* Courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board.

same page, the banner headline read, “Death Toll in Detroit Riots Climbs to 33.” The juxtaposition of the stories implied that Canada could soon have its own version of the civil turmoil agitating American cities. The *Leader-Post* sent a reporter to Kamsack and Carlyle, two towns located close to Indian reserves. After random non-scientific interviews of a number of Indians and non-Indians, he concluded that the *Globe and Mail* story was a false alarm: “Indians, to be sure, are highly dissatisfied and strongly critical of many aspects of white society and voiced near-hatred for some individual whites—but on the whole they regard the white man as a friend reasonably easy to get along with.”⁸⁵

The possibility of racial violence did not go away, however. Nap Lafontaine, vice-president of the Metis Society, detected trouble in

the north: “It was pretty rough up there for a while. Green Lake and some of those places.”⁸⁶ Howard Adams alleged that two trappers from La Loche, last seen on 21 October 1968, might possibly have been killed by Natives acting for “white supremacists.” Although reporter Eric Malling, who visited La Loche in March 1969, found no one willing to back Adams’s claim, he did find a high level of frustration and hostility in the community. Wylie Spafford, director of the provincial Indian and Metis branch, agreed: “I’ve never felt so much electric tension throughout the whole area. I felt that there was a feeling of unrest.” He added, however, that, in his view, the unrest was not close to erupting.⁸⁷

One of the causes of discontent in the community was the Department of Natural Resources enforcement of a minimum mesh size

for fishing nets. Many fishermen owned nets with 3°-inch mesh, smaller than the allowable minimum of 5 inches. Department officers, intent upon conserving the fish stock, were seizing the nets and prosecuting the fishermen. The Natives argued that the lakes in the north were being fished out by the big companies and the mink ranchers, to the detriment of local people who depended upon fishing for their livelihood. As tension mounted, unknown persons destroyed a Department of Natural Resources boat. One unnamed individual admitted attempting to light forest fires to earn the \$6.25 a day paid for fighting them and to distract DNR officials from enforcing fishing regulations. Another grievance was the government's insistence that able-bodied men work for their living rather than receive welfare. In 1968 ninety-one families in La Loche were cut off social assistance, forcing them to move into the bush where it was easier to obtain wood for fuel and rabbits for food.⁸⁸

Wylie Spafford, among others, suggested that trouble in La Loche had been stirred up by members of the Company of Young Canadians, an organization of community workers that had been set up by the federal government to help the poor and disadvantaged. The local CYC worker was Bob Luker, a twenty-two-year-old Carleton University student described as "soft-spoken, almost shy. His shabby red beard, he explains half-seriously, constantly invites people to label him a Communist." He occupied his time writing letters on behalf of welfare applicants and trying to set up a school lunch program. In March 1969 the Metis Society called a meeting in La Loche attended by about 350 people. About half the speakers blamed Luker for the community's problems and demanded that he leave town. Someone said the CYC worker might be a Russian spy for all they knew; another suggested he might be Howard Adams's contact person because "he was always writing letters at night." Luker replied that he did not know Adams and never wrote letters to him. He did write a lot of letters, he admitted, but they were to his mother, father, and two brothers.

A few people then came to Luker's defense. Luke Jedry, a white taxi driver, said that Luker had not done much, but at least he spent his paycheck in the village. A hesitant teenaged girl mentioned that La Loche would not have had a school bus if Luker had not organized a petition demanding it. Bertrand Mathieu, the Catholic priest, suggested that Luker cooperate more closely with the leaders in the community: "He told me he was a Catholic but I've never seen him in the church."⁸⁹ In the end, no vote was taken concerning Luker's expulsion, and he remained in La Loche.

Returning from the north, Eric Malling called on Howard Adams at his suburban bungalow in Saskatoon. There was one picture hanging on the wall of his den, that of Louis Riel. In the course of the interview, Adams took three books from the shelf: the diary of Che Guevara, a manual on guerrilla warfare, and Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. When asked what tactics Native people should use to take the power to run their own communities, he replied, "The first rule is to never let the enemy know your tactics." He mentioned various non-violent measures—sit-ins, picket lines, boycotts, "anything that will help to remove department of natural resources despots from the north."⁹⁰ If Native anger escalated to violence, Adams said he would give his support.

Under Adams's leadership, the Metis Society began publishing *New Breed*, a monthly newspaper. The first issues celebrated the rebirth of Metis nationalism: "Our numbers are rising again and our people are regaining their pride. In due time we will regain our status as the first Canadians." The Metis would no longer accept discrimination and humiliation or sit back passively and accept their fate. The time had come to fight. As for integration, *New Breed* declared in capital letters: "HELL—NO! We do not want to be integrated into the white race. What we do want is to be recognized as an individual race with a unique, true Canadian culture; a people well able to govern our own affairs."⁹¹ To help rekindle Metis nationalism, on 19 and 20 July 1969 the Metis

Society sponsored a mass rally at Duck Lake, the site of a victory over the North-West Mounted Police in 1885. The festivities included a field day, square dance, football games, chuck-wagon and pony races, and the ceremonial burning of school history textbooks that were deemed "racist and inferiorizing."⁹²

According to J. S. Sinclair, deputy-minister of the provincial Indian and Metis department, moderates within the Metis Society were concerned that Adams's policies could lead to reduced government financial support. On the other hand, the deputy-minister observed, Adams was simultaneously under fire from "a small radical minority." His position seemed precarious and the unity of the Metis Society doubtful. Sinclair warned Clarence Estey, the Indian and Metis Department Minister, that "precipitous action by the government could lead to the complete breakup of the Society or possibly the strengthening of a very militant group among the Metis people."⁹³

Possibly to consolidate his support in the Metis Society, Adams attacked the provincial government in February 1970, charging that 879 Indians and Metis in northern Saskatchewan were starving. Despite Welfare Minister Cy MacDonald's insistence that the accusation was baseless, the story was given nationwide publicity. The federal government dispatched a four-man delegation led by Dr. Stanley Haidasz, parliamentary secretary to the Health and Welfare minister, to investigate. Dr. Haidasz, attired in a green-striped, double-breasted suit, entered poor, run-down houses and introduced himself: "I'm parliamentary secretary to Health and Welfare Minister John Munro." After he left one house in Meadow Lake, the bewildered occupant, Mrs. Rosalie King, asked a reporter, "Whose secretary is he? Who is his boss?" The inspection team, following their whirlwind tour, found no outright starvation, but reported malnutrition and confused welfare policies. They condemned "shocking" housing conditions and questioned the practice of cutting northerners off welfare in the middle of winter.⁹⁴

CONTINUING METIS NATIONALISM

Shortly after this episode, Adams announced he would not seek reelection as president of the Metis Society. Premier Thatcher, who in 1969 had thought well enough of Adams to ask him to serve as deputy minister of the Indian and Metis department, now described him as a "strange person," who could have accomplished much had he not been so preoccupied with "stirring up trouble."⁹⁵ Adams's successor was Jim Sinclair, characterized by the *Leader-Post* as a "tough fighter," who had picked himself up from skid row and decided to complete his high school education. He had read Eldridge Cleaver and was knowledgeable about the civil rights movement in the United States.⁹⁶ When three members of the Black Panthers came to Regina in December 1969, Sinclair conferred with them. The visit caused quite a stir, and Regina's radical newspaper, *The Prairie Fire*, hoped the Indians and Metis would take a lesson: "What the Indians and Metis hopefully learned from the Panthers is that it is possible to control one's destiny, and if white racist capitalists stand in the way and use terror, then it is only natural to defend oneself—by whatever means necessary."⁹⁷ Jim Sinclair said he would not initiate violence, "but should any other Metis group, he would be there. I'd have to. We have to stick together when we fight for our rights."⁹⁸

The first meeting between the premier and the new Metis Society president did not go well. Thatcher complained that Sinclair had no constructive suggestions: "All they want is more money for a bigger grant and I didn't agree to that." Sinclair said the premier threatened to cut off the society's \$20,000 grant unless it complied with the government's wishes: "That's childish. He's supposed to be a smarter politician than that."⁹⁹ In any case, the Saskatchewan government's \$20,000 grant in 1969-70 (half of which was reimbursed by Ottawa under the ARDA agreement) was paltry in comparison with the \$120,000 the Alberta government gave to the Metis Association of Alberta or the \$56,000 the Manitoba

government gave to the Manitoba Metis Society.¹⁰⁰

Government-Metis Society relations deteriorated further when more than two hundred angry Metis confronted provincial and federal government officials at a meeting in Meadow Lake in August 1970. Government representatives expressed surprise at the turnout and the vehemence of the attacks on welfare, housing, employment, and education programs. No cabinet ministers attended the meeting, leaving the civil servants to face the barrage. The audience cheered Jim Sinclair when he said the provincial Indian and Metis department was worried that the Metis Society would become too strong to be kept under the government's thumb. The department's deputy minister defensively replied: "I don't deny there have been situations which our staff has not handled properly . . . but I hope you don't think that because of some unhappy situations our entire program is a failure."¹⁰¹ Adding insult to injury for the provincial government was the fact that the meeting had been paid for with a grant from the federal government.

At the provincial Liberal party convention in the fall of 1970, the Metis Society presented a thorough-going critique of the operations of the Indian and Metis department. The brief stated that the department's programs were insufficient and that policy decisions were made behind closed doors without consultation with the people affected. The job placement figures put out by the department were bogus, counting each person placed in a temporary job as a job placement, concealing the fact that the same people were circulating through the system. The brief declared: "We believe that the Liberal party is using this as a political football to mystify the public and, moreover, the Metis people of Saskatchewan." The Metis Society demanded decision-making power in the planning and implementation of housing programs and in the selection of teachers for their communities. It requested Metis court workers and translators to assist those who did not understand courtroom procedures and an in-patient treatment center in

the Prince Albert area for the rehabilitation of alcoholics. The petition concluded with the declaration: "We, the Metis people demand recognition as a People. Through legislation and rejection by our two parent cultures, we are now a whole new nation of people. Vive le Metis."¹⁰²

The document ran exactly counter to the policy of the Thatcher government. The government wanted integration; the society proclaimed the existence of a Metis nation. The government wanted to control the employment, housing, education and other programs it delivered to people of Indian ancestry; the Metis Society wanted self-determination and self-administration. The deputy-minister of the provincial Indian and Metis Department summed up the situation from his perspective: "We continue to find good acceptance of our program from individuals and groups of Metis but a vociferous few in the organization seem to have as their aim the formation of a separate Metis community or entity—almost a Metis reserve."¹⁰³ As Metis Society vice-president Nap Lafontaine observed, the issue was control: "My theory is this way. He had control of those people. If I'm the minister in the Indian and Metis department, and they're all working for me, I control. . . He [Thatcher] was a man, as far as I was concerned, that wanted control." Lafontaine added: "At that time, if you worked for the government you were out as far as our organization was concerned. We didn't want anybody tied in with the government. Because there was such a feeling between the Metis people and the government. There was no trust."¹⁰⁴

To compensate for the lack of provincial funding, Jim Sinclair turned to the federal government. A Metis Society delegation had a meeting with cabinet ministers in Ottawa in April 1970 and requested \$150,000. Adams argued that if the government was unresponsive, more radical elements could take control of the movement: "I think we have to be on guard against the possibility of violence because the young people are becoming quite militant and there also are Metis people in

Saskatchewan who are inclined to think along lines that are not constructive and not in the best interests of working together with the government."¹⁰⁵ Federal money began to flow. In 1971 the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation gave \$23,000 for a housing study and \$125,000 to develop a housing program, the Department of Health and Welfare approved assistance of \$75,000 per year for three years for a community development program, and the Department of Secretary of State granted \$226,000 for core administration and a communication workers program.¹⁰⁶

The Thatcher government was none too pleased with these developments. Allan Guy, provincial Indian and Metis Minister, wrote Robert Stanbury, federal minister responsible for the Department of Secretary of State: "The Metis people, however, are strictly the responsibility of the province. So, while we are pleased to see the federal government's concern and financial assistance, we would appreciate being advised what grants you are prepared to make to the Metis Society before they are made."¹⁰⁷ Stanbury denied that Metis were "strictly the responsibility of the province," maintaining that the Department of Secretary of State had a broad mandate for citizenship development activities among all Canadians.¹⁰⁸ The truth was that there was no love lost between the federal Liberals and their provincial counterparts, who were several degrees to the right of the federal party. When Thatcher personally asked the federal government not to help the Metis Society, Ottawa turned a deaf ear.¹⁰⁹

CONCLUSION

The Thatcher government's relations with the Metis Society ended in angry argument and recrimination. Seven years earlier, when the government was first elected, it had been filled with high hopes and a desire to improve the living conditions of Aboriginal people. The government had more than good intentions; it had a plan. The plan, which remained consistent from 1964 to 1971, was to place as

many Aboriginal people as possible into jobs. The program was implemented first by the Indian and Metis branch of the Department of Natural Resources and later by a separate Indian and Metis Department with outside support from the Task Force on Indian and Metis Opportunity. Job placement was supported by upgrading and training workers and providing housing for them when they moved to urban centers. No doubt many people were grateful for the jobs, education, and housing they received from the Thatcher government, but the plan had a fundamental flaw. It was based entirely on the economic integration of individuals into mainstream society, and it ignored the cultural and political claims of the Metis as a group. As Metis nationalism and the Metis Society revived and grew stronger, the Thatcher government seemed insufferably paternalistic. Under leaders like Malcolm Norris, Howard Adams, and Jim Sinclair, the Metis articulated their desire for recognition as a people and for self-determination. The stronger the Metis Society became, the farther it diverged from the Thatcher government.

The provincial government's strategy for defeating the Metis Society was to cultivate "cooperative" leaders, undermine "uncooperative" leaders, and strictly limit the size of the society's grant. Government spending on Metis programs was channeled through the Indian and Metis Department, preventing the Metis Society from developing as a program delivery organization or bureaucracy. The infusion of federal money after 1970 gave the Metis Society independence and weakened the provincial strategy.

The whole dialogue between the Thatcher government and the Metis was set against the backdrop of racial strife in the United States and the possibility of violence spreading to Canada. The language of colonization, oppression, and liberation, the spectacle of the urban riots in the United States, the tactics of the Black Panthers, the speeches of Malcolm X, and the writing of Eldridge Cleaver influenced the thinking of Metis leaders. Whether US-inspired radical ideology penetrated the

rank and file membership of the Metis Society is less certain, and violence was generally kept at the level of rhetoric, not action.

What was crucial for Saskatchewan Metis was the reclaiming of their history, cultural identity, and self-confidence. The rebirth of Metis nationalism, as expressed by the Metis Society, collided with the ill-conceived, if perhaps well-intentioned, policies of the Thatcher government. As the decade of the 1960s came to an end and the 1970s began, time ran out on the Thatcher government in more ways than one. The government suffered defeat in June 1971, and the Metis policies for which it stood were discarded. A new paradigm based on Aboriginal rights and self-government was to replace the old paradigm based on individual opportunity and integration.

NOTES

1. Hana Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy 1880-1920: A Comparative Study of Canadian and U.S. Policy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), pp. 19-20.

2. When the Alberta government established a Royal Commission to investigate the conditions of the "Half-Breeds," the Commission accepted the definition of Metis given by the Metis Association of Alberta: "anyone with any degree of Indian ancestry who lives the life ordinarily associated with the Metis." The association later extended its definition to include anyone who considered himself/herself a Metis, and who was accepted by the community as such. The Alberta government, for the purposes of the Metis Population Betterment Act in 1940, defined Metis as "a person of mixed white and Indian ancestry having not less than one-quarter Indian blood," but not including "either an Indian or non-Treaty Indian as defined in the Indian Act." Olive Patricia Dickason, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), pp. 359-360. Such attempts at precise definition have not gained general acceptance. See Jennifer S. H. Brown, "Metis," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, volume 2, (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1985): 1124.

3. J. R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), p. 124.

4. For a discussion of the Saskatchewan government/treaty Indian relations see James M.

Pitsula, "The Thatcher Government in Saskatchewan and Treaty Indians, 1964-1971," *Saskatchewan History* 48 (1996): 3-17.

5. Speech, Ross Thatcher, Conference Between the Province of Saskatchewan and People of Indian Ancestry, 22-24 September 1964, J. R. Barrie Papers, R-10 VII 48a, Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB).

6. The most informative book on the Thatcher government is Dale Eisler, *Rumours of Glory: Saskatchewan and the Thatcher Years* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1987). Eisler quotes the premier (page 129) as having said: "Everyone has a place in this world, and I believe I've been chosen by God to get rid of these socialists."

7. *Regina Leader-Post*, 7 March 1969.

8. W. Churchman to John Cuelenaere, 22 March 1965, Barrie Papers, R-10 VII 53b, SAB.

9. Allan Guy to Cabinet Ministers and Government MLAs, 22 November 1965, Barrie Papers, R-10 VII 47a, SAB. Not everyone accepts this characterization of community development. For a critical view, see Arthur K. Davis, "A Prairie 'Dust Devil,' The Rise and Decline of a Research Institute," *Human Organization* 27 (1968): 63.

10. A Submission from the Government of Saskatchewan on the Administration of Indian Affairs, August, 1964, Barrie Papers, R10 VII 48a, SAB.

11. Ferd Ewald, interview by author, 24 May 1994.

12. Interdepartmental Committee on People of Indian Ancestry minutes, 13 January 1966, Barrie Papers, R-10 VII 55b, SAB.

13. Ferd Ewald to Ross Thatcher, 22 October 1965, Barrie Papers, R-10 VII 50a, SAB.

14. Ferd Ewald to Ross Thatcher, 30 March 1966, Barrie Papers, R-10 VII 50a, SAB.

15. Ferd Ewald to Dave Steuart, 29 November 1966, Barrie Papers, R-10 VII 53c, SAB.

16. *Leader-Post*, 12 January 1967.

17. James S. Sinclair, interview by author, 4 August 1993.

18. *Leader-Post*, 3 December 1968.

19. *Leader-Post*, 9 July 1968.

20. Ross Thatcher, opening remarks, Saskatchewan Task Force on Indian Opportunity, inaugural meeting, 9 August 1968, Cy MacDonald Papers, R-64 VI 151, SAB.

21. Ross Thatcher, speech, 5 March 1969, Allan Guy Papers, R-47 I 14, SAB.

22. *Leader-Post*, 9 August 1968.

23. Inaugural meeting, Saskatchewan Task Force on Indian Opportunity, 9 August 1968, R-64 VI 151, Saskatchewan Task Force on Indian Opportunity, 13 September 1968, both MacDonald Papers, SAB.

24. Ross Thatcher, 5 March 1969, Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, *Debates*.
25. *Leader-Post*, 30 December 1968.
26. In 1969-70, 909 job placements were in government and 977 in the private sector. The corresponding figures for 1970-71 were 892 and 982; in 1969-70, there were 599 placements in permanent jobs and 1287 in short-term jobs. The corresponding figures for 1970-71 were 452 and 1422. *Annual Report*, Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department, 1969-70; 1970-71.
27. Ross Thatcher to all cabinet ministers, all deputy ministers, all crown corporation general managers, 23 September 1966, Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department Papers, R-354 1.1, SAB.
28. Ross Thatcher to W. H. Spafford, 15 November 1967, Barrie Papers, R-10 VII 50b, SAB.
29. W. R. Parks to W. H. Spafford, 18 January 1968, Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department Papers, R-354 1.1, SAB.
30. *Annual Report*, Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department, 1970-71.
31. William Fyles to David Dombowsky, 10 March 1970, Guy Papers, R-47 I 6, SAB.
32. Unidentified newspaper clipping, 10 April 1968, Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department Papers, R-354 1.2, SAB.
33. *Annual Report*, Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department, 1970-71.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Leader-Post*, 29 March 1969.
36. G. B. Crawford to Department of Natural Resources, 30 March 1966, Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department Papers, SAB.
37. *Annual Report*, Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department, 1970-71.
38. J. S. Sinclair to D. S. Dombowsky, 25 November 1970, MacDonald Papers, R-64 I 22, SAB.
39. *Annual Report*, Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department, 1969-70.
40. *Leader-Post*, 22 October 1969.
41. *Annual Report*, Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department, 1970-71.
42. Saskatchewan Task Force on Indian Opportunity minutes, 11 December 1969, Guy Papers, R-47 I 18, SAB.
43. *Annual Report*, Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department, 1969-70; 1970-71.
44. J. S. Sinclair to Mike Turgeon, 5 March 1971, Guy Papers, R-47 I 14, SAB.
45. *Leader-Post*, 11 December 1969.
46. "A Better Citizen—Both of Us," Armadale Productions, 1970.
47. *Leader-Post*, 5 June 1971; 12 December 1969.
48. Memo regarding "Indian and Metis Department of Provincial Government" by Howard Adams, 1 September 1971, Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department Papers, R-354 3.8, SAB.
49. *Leader-Post*, 11 June 1971.
50. Howard Adams states his belief that the Indian, Metis, and Inuit liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s "remains hidden from the public" because academics have ignored the topic. Howard Adams, *A Tortured People: The Politics of Colonization* (Penticton, British Columbia: Theytus Books, 1995), pp. 76-77.
51. Sally M. Weaver, *Making Canadian Indian Policy: The Hidden Agenda 1968-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 12-20. See also Donald Purich, *The Metis* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1988), pp. 158-66.
52. Murray Dobbin, *The One-And-A-Half Men: The Story of Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris, Metis Patriots of the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: New Star, 1981), p. 218.
53. D. Steuart; W. J. Berezowsky, 12 March 1969, Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, *Debates*.
54. Dobbin, *One-And-A-Half Men* (note 52 above), p. 221.
55. *Leader-Post*, 8 March 1965.
56. Dobbin, *One-And-A-Half Men* (note 52 above), p. 221.
57. Ferd Ewald to Joe Amyotte, 23 November 1966, Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department Papers, R-354 3.1, SAB.
58. Dobbin, *One-And-A-Half Men* (note 52 above), p. 240.
59. J. J. Fransen to Joe Amyotte, 5 May 1967, R-354 3.1, Metis Society of Saskatchewan, R-354 3.3, both Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department Papers, SAB.
60. Metis Society, Proposed Communication Program, Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department Papers, R-354 3.3, SAB.
61. K. J. Tarasoff to W. H. Spafford, 5 September 1968; "Metis Society of Saskatchewan," both Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department Papers, R-354 3.3, SAB.
62. W. H. Spafford to H. S. Gould, 8 April 1968; unidentified newspaper clipping, 6 July 1968, both Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department Papers, R-354 3.3, SAB.
63. Proposed Budget of the Metis Society for 1969-70; "Metis Society of Saskatchewan," both Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department Papers, R-354 3.3, SAB.
64. Report on Metis Society of Saskatchewan for fiscal year 1968-69, Indian and Metis Department Papers, R-354 3.6, SAB.
65. *Leader-Post*, 9 April 1965.
66. "Up the Revolution," n.d. (c. April 1968), MacDonald Papers, R-64 I 76b, SAB.

67. Howard Adams, *Prison of Grass: Canada from the Native Point of View* (Toronto: General Publishing, 1975), p. 176.
68. Dobbin, *One-And-A-Half Men* (note 52 above), p. 236.
69. Adams, *Prison of Grass* (note 67 above), pp. 3, 5, 8, 9.
70. *Ibid.*, pp. 152, 167.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 193.
74. *Ibid.*, pp. 193, 150.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
77. Interview with Howard Adams, 9 January 1969, "Red Power," The Pierre Berton Show, #1304, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College Library.
78. *Leader-Post*, 18 August, 1967, 2 November 1967, 30 May 1968.
79. *Leader-Post*, 21 May, 2 July, 30 April, 4 October, 1968.
80. *Leader-Post*, 1, 3 October 1968; *The Sheaf*, 4 October 1968.
81. Nap Lafontaine, interview by author, 31 July 1995. Lafontaine was right. The statue was subsequently removed.
82. *Leader-Post*, 6 July 1968.
83. *Leader-Post*, 29 April, 10 May 1969.
84. *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 26 July 1967. Interestingly, this sentence, alleged to be in the draft report, does not appear in the final, published version of the report. *Indians and the Law*, a survey prepared for the Honourable Arthur Laing, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, by the Canadian Corrections Association, August 1967.
85. *Leader-Post*, 26 July, 5 August 1967.
86. Interview (note 81 above).
87. *Leader-Post*, 26 March 1969.
88. *Leader-Post*, 26, 27 March 1969.
89. *Leader-Post*, 31 March 1969.
90. *Leader-Post*, 2 April 1969.
91. *New Breed* 1 (no. 3, February 1970).
92. *Prince Albert Herald*, 6 August 1969.
93. J. S. Sinclair to C. L. B. Estey, 4 December 1969, Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department Papers, R-354 3.3, SAB.
94. *Leader-Post*, 23, 27 February 1970.
95. Ross Thatcher, 12 March 1969; Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, *Debates, Leader-Post*, 25 March 1970.
96. *Leader-Post*, 4 May 1970.
97. *The Prairie Fire*, 25 November-2 December 1969.
98. *Leader-Post*, 4 May 1970.
99. *Leader-Post*, 28 May, 18 August 1970.
100. J.S. Sinclair to Clarence Estey, 4 December 1969, Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department Papers, R-354 3.3, SAB.
101. *Leader-Post*, 18 August 1970.
102. Metis Society of Saskatchewan, document presented to the Liberal Party of Saskatchewan annual convention, 30 November 1970, Guy Papers, R-47 I 3, SAB.
103. James S. Sinclair to Clarence Estey, 24 August 1970, Guy Papers, R-47 I 9, SAB. James S. Sinclair, deputy-minister of the provincial Indian and Metis department, is not to be confused with Jim Sinclair, president of the Metis Society of Saskatchewan.
104. Lafontaine interview (note 81 above). Lafontaine stated that if he wore a suit or carried a brief case when visiting a home in the north, he would be ignored. Anybody who was perceived as working for the government was distrusted.
105. *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 10 April 1970.
106. G. N. Sneyd to M. W. Sturby, 12 March 1971; R-354 3.7, J. S. Sinclair to G. R. Bowerman, 19 November 1971, R-354 3.8, Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department Papers, SAB.
107. Allan Guy to Robert Stanbury, 15 December 1970, Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Department Papers, R-354 8.3, SAB.
108. Robert Stanbury to Allan Guy, 28 January 1971, Guy Papers, R-47 I 11b, SAB.
109. *Rumours of Glory* (note 6 above), pp. 173-86, 258.