

Thus, Father André led the Metis into the camp of their enemies as supporters of the very policies that were rapidly spelling disaster for them, while their natural political allies were rejected at the polls.

To add to the economic woes of the people living along the Saskatchewan River, the bitterly cold winter of 1883-84 passed slowly into an exceedingly dry, windy spring. In June, when the seeds were barely rising out of the parched soil, light rains finally came, providing some hope for the stunted crops. Then a plague of grasshoppers struck and left the fields stripped bare.¹⁴ With the loss of their crops and gardens, the spectre of starvation once again threatened not only the ragged Indian bands who had refused to settle on reserves, but also the Metis of the district.

These difficulties added to the misery imposed upon the Metis through their unwisely directed support for the Conservative candidates of the district. There is no question that these candidates supported government policies designed to evict the Metis from the lands they occupied. This was made clear in a letter from Lieutenant Governor Dewdney to Sir John A. Macdonald in which Dewdney admitted that government plans to settle Metis land claims would do absolutely nothing for most of the Metis of the district.¹⁵ However, the Liberal Reform group, which had been rejected by the Metis voters in 1883, had presented a platform of policies that demanded responsible government and democratic rights for the people of the North West Territories, specifically including the Metis.¹⁶

The Liberal Reform group fully understood the federal government's system of structured regional disparity contained in the National Policy. They knew that the policy was designed to exploit western farmers through a system of high tariffs, and again in the marketplace, so that the eastern merchants and industrialists could obtain sufficient capital to launch Canada into its own belated industrial revolution. They knew that the only hope for the people of the North West Territories lay in the creation of a provincial government (within the framework of Confederation).¹⁷ Because of their failure to attract the Metis to their cause, however, the Popular Movement never achieved political office. Nevertheless, during the political campaign of 1883, the flamboyant William Henry Jackson became a well-known public figure. Never a man to mince words, Jackson summed up the people's struggle at a political meeting in Prince Albert:

The issue is plain and simple, the people's rights against monopolies, cliques, rings and clap legislation.¹⁸

However, the common people were not able to see through the subterfuge of the Conservative clique despite William Henry Jackson's often brilliant analyses. Instead, Father André swung Metis support away from Dr. Porter. The election of 1883 really set the stage for the tragedy that followed because

it ended any hope of success for the Liberal reform movement. Father André's deceit split the Metis from the poor European settlers, separating the two groups permanently.

When the Popular Movement failed to win a seat on the North West Council in 1883, its members attempted to educate people through the creation of "non-political" bodies. In particular, they hoped to organize opposition to government policy by organizing a direct form of protest through the creation of the Farmers' Union. William Henry Jackson, who owned a small farm, was especially active in setting up the new group. He hoped that the Farmers' Union would have the capacity, as a "non-political" vehicle, to bring together the disparate elements and ethnic groups within the region — the Halfbreeds, the poor European farmers and the Metis. In fact, he hoped that the Farmers' Union would mold these groups into an effective political force that would provide a strong opposition to the Conservative party. The long-term goal of the Farmers' Union was the same as that of the Popular Movement — to establish local responsible government through the creation of a new province.¹⁹

Like the Liberal Reform group, the Farmers' Union voiced its dissent in printed material that was distributed to those farmers who could read. Through this medium they complained about the federal government's land and railway monopolies that worked for eastern interests, the high tariffs, the granting of land to favoured individuals for less than its intrinsic value, and the handing out of secret government-development information to political favourites.²⁰

Although the Farmers' Union acquired only a small membership, the group was quite clearly a threat to the Conservative machine because of the incisive analysis applied to the local political situation by William Henry Jackson. Jackson was an excellent public speaker. As well, he headed a small underground political publication called *Voice of The People* that was circulated for a brief period in Prince Albert.²¹ Jackson intended to unite the people of the Northwest against the policies of the federal government, but he wanted to do more as well. He was a man with a vision of a new society where ancient prejudices and class divisions had no place. He was therefore especially dangerous to the clique of Conservatives who still maintained power over the region.

At times the Popular Movement seemed to be reaching its desired constituency through the *Voice of The People*. In it, Jackson outlined plans to start an agricultural marketing cooperative through the Farmers' Union. He wanted millers and merchants to be excluded from membership in the union because their occupations, he felt, placed them in economic opposition to the farmers. Jackson warned the members of the organization that Clarke and Sproat would attempt to co-opt them. He wrote:

When the mention was made of an agricultural society it was rumoured that Messrs. L. Clarke and Sproat were taking an interest in it, and that it was being organized in the Red Deer Hill district by Mr. Charles Adams, an intimate friend of L. Clarke and a late employee of the Hudson's Bay Company. These circumstances caused three things to appear to me not impossible. (1) That the society might be hampered by the admission of millers and merchants as members. (2) That politics might be introduced indirectly by an attempt to make the membership adopt and endorse certain disputed political questions. (3) That politics might be introduced directly by an attempt to confer the secretaryship on some tool or member of the political faction to which the above mentioned men belong, and through that medium summon a quorum of the faithful to endow their candidate with the prestige of nomination by the agricultural society.²²

It was not long before Jackson's warnings were proven correct. Lawrence Clarke managed to persuade the members of the union into allowing him and his entourage of merchants, millers and businessmen to take over their organization. Jackson rose at a meeting that was flooded with Clarke's supporters and beseeched the farmers not to allow these politicians and businessmen, whose interests conflicted with their own, to become members of the Farmer's Union.

Lawrence Clarke, who had just donated \$100 to the organization, responded to Jackson's speech by reminding the farmers of Jackson's youth and inexperience. As a consequence, the newcomers were allowed to become members, while young Jackson was refused permission to speak again at the meeting. Clarke and Sproat then demanded that all the people present pay one dollar to retain their memberships. A motion supporting this demand was passed by Clarke's followers. Since many of the farmers were poor and could not produce a dollar, they lost their memberships in the organization. Jackson reported:

The books were opened for the enrollment of members and outsiders of all sorts, mill owners, merchants, real estate agents and lawyers tabled their dollars and enrolled themselves as honest grangers, horny handed sons of toil.²³

Clarke's guile and prestige overwhelmed the ignorant farmers: they were cajoled into electing him and his friends to directorships in their own organization. To top it off, Lawrence Clarke was granted a lifetime membership in the Farmers' Union.

After the meeting was over, William Henry Jackson was evicted from the Farmers' Union, which was now composed mainly of mill owners, merchants, real estate people and businessmen. The uneducated rank-and-file members of the union simply were no match for the well-educated members of the Conservative clique. Young William Henry Jackson must have been seen as something of an eccentric, or a radical, by the simple folk of the

district. The power and prestige of Clarke's cohorts, together with Clarke's smooth tongue and generous gifts of cash, proved to be a winning combination against the philosophy of the Popular Movement, which must have been seen as abstract idealism by the members.

In this way, Lawrence Clarke, with the help of Father André, ensured that the Liberals would fail to achieve formal recognition through the electoral process; he then co-opted the Farmers' Union. However, the discontent that had engendered both the Popular Movement and the Farmers' Union did not go away, as Clarke had planned. It simply went further underground.

Although Clarke, André, and the Conservative party had the local political situation well in hand, neither Lieutenant Governor Dewdney, nor Prime Minister Macdonald, were apathetic toward the potential for organized resistance in the Northwest. William Henry Jackson was kept under police surveillance, as were the Metis leaders who were emerging between 1883 and 1885.²⁴ The federal Conservatives knew that regional dissatisfaction with Ottawa's policies ran deep. Police surveillance was therefore stepped up in the Northwest during the last months of 1884, when all the legitimate means of dissent had been diffused by Clarke and his allies.

This regional discontent was sharpened by the economic depression which had dealt a devastating blow to the Prince Albert region when plans for the CPR's transcontinental railway were changed in 1882. The new plans specified that the railway would run across the south of the Canadian prairies, almost two hundred miles away from Prince Albert. With this shift, the speculators' hopes and dreams of a quick and easy fortune were dashed. Gone too were the hopes and dreams of the farmers of the area who were now two hundred miles north of the only transportation system capable of taking their produce to the international marketplace.

As the depression deepened in the Prince Albert region, the farmers became more militant. For the federal government, the worst possible scenario would be a union of militant farmers with the dispossessed Natives of the region. More than any other person, young William Henry Jackson embodied this threat. A police report dated August 5, 1884 stated:

William Henry Jackson . . . has a great deal to say, and I believe he does more harm than any breed among them.²⁵

In fact, officials of the federal government were so concerned about the degree of discontent among the farmers in the Prince Albert district that they no longer trusted the local militia. During the first week of July 1884, the police, under Colonel Hughton, disarmed Captain Hughe's troop of mounted rifles. This troop consisted of local militiamen whose sympathies favoured the local farmers.²⁶ This precaution was taken to ensure that vital arms and ammunition would not fall into the hands of the local malcontents. Yet, the

disarming of the militia was difficult to justify. If the militia was trusted by government officials, how could they rationalize the disarming of their own troops? The reason was given in a letter from Sir John A. Macdonald to Premier Aikins of Manitoba, describing the level of discontent in that province. The Manitoba militia was clearly not trusted by the federal government, nor was the militia of the Northwest. Macdonald wrote:

But should there be any agitation it will extend to the Half Breeds of Manitoba and will be encouraged by the demagogues of the Farmers' Union. Norquay has sent me a copy of an intercepted letter from one [farmer] to Purvis, the President of the union, urging an immediate rising and seizing of the stores and arms, and saying that the militia are mere boys.²⁷

In another letter dealing with the same concern, the prime minister wrote:

In the North West we have certain uneasy elements, to wit; (1) The Farmers' Union agitators (2) The French Half Breeds advised by Riel (3) The Indian element headed by such loafers as Big Bear, Pi-A-Pat, etc. The last, the Indian element, is not to be dreaded unless there is a white or Half Breed rising. If this should ever happen the Indians would be apt to join any insurgent body.²⁸

Prime Minister Macdonald could have included one more group among the “uneasy elements” in the Northwest — the speculators who made up the Conservative clique in Prince Albert. By 1884, Lieutenant Governor Dewdney was aware that this group was agitating among the Metis to create an armed uprising. He wrote to the prime minister, pin-pointing Lawrence Clarke as a central figure in this plot:

The fact is the Hudson's Bay Company required some freighting to be done and he [Clarke] cut down the rates below the recognized prices and the [Metis] became hostile towards him. At Prince Albert there is a certain clique which would like nothing better than to see a row so that money might be brought among them Subsequently to Clarke's telegram to me he evidently became alarmed and I hear he wrote a very sensational letter to Mr. Graham, at the same time asking Colonel Sproat to write you.²⁹

This letter shows that Dewdney was aware of Clarke's inflammatory actions against the Metis. Clearly, Dewdney knew of the subversive activities of Lawrence Clarke and other members of the Conservative clique in Prince Albert. Dewdney went on to describe to the prime minister possible motives for Clarke's actions. Dewdney recognized that Clarke was provoking the Metis in order to bring about a war in the Northwest so that prosperity would once again be generated in the Prince Albert region.

Because the government's plans for developing the West were blatantly in conflict with the needs of the people of the North West Territories, a

sophisticated and elaborate spy network had been implemented. The government's plans did not include the ownership of valuable farm lands by Indians and Metis. These privileges were designed for the colonization companies and the CPR. By mid-1884, Macdonald was receiving two different sets of information from the West. The government's own spy network speculated that the troubles would pass if only the Metis could receive minimal justice. The other viewpoint, purported by Clarke and his Conservative clique, suggested that armed rebellion was about to be launched. Dewdney left little doubt in his letter to Macdonald that Clarke was a leader of the "certain clique" that wanted a small war so that prosperity would once again return to the region. Prime Minister Macdonald may not have been displeased with the prospect of a small, carefully controlled rebellion in the Northwest. An uprising of this sort might well fit into his political plans for the salvation of the CPR and for the salvation of his government's National Policy.