

Red River Rebellion (or Resistance), 1869 - 1870

The first major push west after Confederation began with the purchase of the Northwest Territory, which belonged to the Hudson's Bay Company. With the possibility that they might be pushed off their land, the Métis (led by Riel) formed a **provisional government**. They **confronted** a survey crew that was staking out land west of the Red River for the anticipated arrival of Canadian settlers. The Métis stepped on their chain, signaling their intention to **oppose** the Canadian Government's plan to give their land to new settlers.

At this point, the British still **had yet to approve** the transfer of the territories to Canada. The Métis were not opposed to becoming Canadians, but they wished to **do so on their own terms**. Riel's militia kept the Canadian representatives from occupying the Settlement by blocking William McDougall, the Lieutenant Governor to be, from entering. It was Father Noel-Joseph Ritchot, parish priest of St. Norbert, however, that traveled to Ottawa to negotiate the terms of the Manitoba Act of 1870. This Act, which conceded **provincial status to Manitoba**, also confirmed **political rights, existing land ownership**, and use of the **French language**.

Since Canada had no authority over that territory, the provisional government at Red River was legitimate and had to be recognized. Its actions were not "rebellious" in the strict sense of the word. The word "resistance", though decidedly less dramatic, is generally preferred by historians as it more accurately describes the particulars of the **political situation** at the time.

North-West Rebellion (or Resistance), 1885

In July 1884, Riel settled in Batoche, which is now in **Saskatchewan**. This community was the major Métis farming settlement in the **unorganized part of the West** known at the time as the North-West Territories. Riel had been asked a month earlier by these Métis to help them **petition Ottawa** in regards to various grievances they had at the time.

By early 1885, Riel, believing that he was on a mission from God, decided to make a grand gesture to prove his points and win support. He seized the parish church in Batoche in March 1885 with an armed group of Métis. They used the church to form a **provisional government**, and demanded the surrender of nearby Fort Carlton.

The conditions in 1885 no longer favored the Métis as they had in 1869. The **North-West Mounted Police** had become a well-established presence in the West and the **Canadian Pacific Railway** - which could quickly bring in new military supplies and fresh personnel, if needed - was almost complete. **Fighting** between the police and the Métis lasted barely two months before **Riel was forced to surrender**. He was charged with **treason** in June 1885, and, he was **hung** in November that year.

Aboriginal leaders Big Bear and Poundmaker were also found **guilty of treason** and were sentenced to short, but harsh, jail terms. They would both die from disease soon after leaving jail. The message from the federal government was clear: it simply would not tolerate what it considered to be acts of treachery. The end result of the Resistance was the further **marginalization** of Western Canada's Aboriginal peoples.

Resistance or Rebellion - 15 marks

1. Why did the “Metis” resist/rebel? (2)

2. a) What did the Red River Resistance/Rebellion achieve? (4)

- b) What 2 obstacles helped stop the North-West Resistance/Rebellion? Why? (4)

- 3) Was it really treason? Did Louis Riel lead Rebellions or Resistances? (3)

- 4) How do you think other Canadians, from outside of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, viewed the “rebellions”? (1)

- 5) What effect might the “rebellions” have had on the relationship between European settlers (The Canadian Government) and the region’s First Nations and Métis? (1)