

Ritchot's Resistance: Abbé Noël Joseph Ritchot and the
Creation and
Transformation of Manitoba.

by

Philippe R. Mailhot

A thesis
presented to the University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
History

Winnipeg, Manitoba

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PHILIPPE R. MAILHOT

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ABSTRACT

The significance of Noël Joseph Ritchot, curé of St. Norbert from 1862 to 1905, has been noted by historians such as George F. Stanley and W.L. Morton. Passing references to Ritchot's importance as a close associate of Louis Riel in 1869, provide only a glimpse, however, of the priest's contribution to Manitoba's creation and subsequent transformation. The present study tells the story in fuller detail. The emphasis is on Ritchot's part in the Red River Resistance of 1869 and negotiation of the Manitoba Act in 1870, but a report of the priest's quest for the enforcement of the apparent settlement of the troubles at Red River concludes the work.

PREFACE

The story of the Red River Resistance of 1869-1870 has been told too often to warrant a comprehensive treatment within the discussion to follow. Here, the focus is upon abbé Noël Joseph Ritchot. While many historians acknowledge Ritchot did play a pivotal role in the creation of Manitoba, few have overcome the understandable preoccupation with Riel to do more than recognize the fact of Ritchot's presence. George Stanley, most notably, has assessed Ritchot's historical presence in the following terms: "It was Ritchot, more than any other person who was watching events and guiding the thoughts of the people to whom he ministered in his parish at St. Norbert."¹ Similarly, William L. Morton has written that it is "an unrecognized historical truth" that without Ritchot, the other members of the negotiating team sent from the Northwest to Ottawa "would not have had the half of what [they] had" and that the people of Red River and Canada owed him a great deal.² That story remains to be told in full.

¹ George F. Stanley, Louis Riel, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972), p. 56-57.

² W.L. Morton, ed., MANITOBA: The Birth of a Province. (Winnipeg: Manitoba Record Society Publications, 1984), p. 153. Morton is commenting on an assessment of Ritchot's efforts made by Judge John Black.

But one of the difficulties in describing Ritchot's career is that the St. Norbert priest chose to downplay his own contribution to the events just mentioned. Ritchot wrote little about his activities prior to his selection as one of the three delegates sent to Ottawa, and even more sparingly about his activities in events which followed. Other participants were more willing to write, and even to boast, of their exploits; Ritchot preferred to play the role of eminence grise even to the point of editorially toning down some of his own journals in later years. Fortunately, however, enough of the historical record has survived in the St. Norbert Parish Archives, the Archives of the Archdiocese of St. Boniface, the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, and the Public Archives of Canada to permit book-length examination of Ritchot's significance, and to elaborate the conclusions of Morton and Stanley.

The author wishes to acknowledge the unflagging support and patience exhibited by Professor D. N. Sprague in the supervision of this thesis. His assistance and comments did much to improve the depth of analysis and the quality of the text. Also deserving of mention is Mr. Kerry Dangerfield of the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Manitoba for his help in guiding me through various computing difficulties. The Historic Resources Branch of the Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Recreation must also be noted for providing the author with the

opportunity to prepare a general historical survey of the St. Norbert community which in many ways inspired the following work. Two of Ritchot's successors at St. Norbert, abbés Bernard Bélanger and Pierre Gagné, need also to be recognized for permitting unhindered access to the St. Norbert parish archives, as well as abbé Roland Bélanger and Mrs. Eveline Phaneuf at the Archbishop's Palace in St. Boniface for their assistance in consulting the Taché Papers. Special thanks are extended to my wife, Valerie Edwards, for her loving support over the past seven years. It is to her I dedicate this dissertation.

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Chapter I

THE MÉTIS PARISH OF ST. NORBERT

Documentation of the early settlement in the area of la Rivière Sale (La Salle River since 1975) is scanty. While it is likely some Métis had established the future community of St. Norbert prior to 1821, solid evidence for such occupation has yet to be found. It can, however, be inferred that as early as 1824 François Cloutier, Pierre Ducharme, Joseph Leclair, and François Sahys were settled in the vicinity.¹ By 1835 the lots north of the Sale had become quite settled. The HBC Census of 1835 lists seventy-two heads of families who eventually were granted Company titles to lands in what was to become St. Norbert.² When plotted on a map it becomes apparent the Métis settlement would have been advancing upriver from its base near the St. Boniface mission,

¹ These names are among those listed in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives on a document titled "Red River Settlement--Index to Plan by William Kempt", (Hudson's Bay Company Archives [HBCA] E6/11). The Plan of the settlement area has not been found. Nevertheless the same names appear in the 1835 Census of the Colony and according to a "Memoranda Respecting Grants of Land #1 and #2 (HBCA E.6/78), they were grantees of HBC lots near Rivière Sale. It should be noted that this second list does not take into account squatters, of whom there were likely several. The author wishes to thank Prof. D.N. Sprague for access to his machine readable files drawn from the above mentioned documents.

² Ibid.

which, as Catholics, they would have frequented. Such a situation would explain why most of the early grantees took up lands on the east bank of the river. Here again, the existence of squatters who occupied lots on the basis of tolerance and custom cannot be proved but can be surmised.

Further evidence of the southward expansion of occupation is provided by the extension of the HBC river lot survey over a mile south of la Rivière Sale in 1835-36. Conducted by George Taylor,³ the survey was an extension of the divisions done by Peter Fidler.⁴ The survey was the basis by which the Company granted title to the riverside lands to which it had been given clear title by the Selkirk executors. The shape of the lots were patterned after the river lot system of seigneurial Quebec. The nature of the holding provided the occupant with a woodlot along the river bank for fuel and building material, access to the rivers for water, fish, and transportation. Normally such lots were two miles deep and a few hundred feet wide. A custom of exclusive hay cutting rights on a two mile strip in back of the lot soon developed in response to the need for fodder to maintain the settlers' horses and livestock over the winter. The two mile "Hay Privilege" was later codified by the Council of Assiniboia.

³ H.E. Beresford, "Early Surveys in Manitoba," Manitoba Historical Society Transactions, Series 3, #9, (1954), p. 7-8.

⁴ Province of Manitoba, Peter Fidler, (Winnipeg: Historic Resources Branch Publications, 1982).

By the mid-1840's the population of Rivière Sale had grown to a point where local visits by missionaries from St. Boniface were justified. The establishment at St. Boniface of the Grey Nuns in 1844 provided Bishop Provencher with itinerant missionaries for the Métis settlers on the fringes of the Colony. Sister Lagrave, one of the founding nuns, was given the task of teaching catechism to the children at the Rivière Sale settlement.⁵ In 1853 the Council of Assiniboia named François Bruneau, Maximilien Genthon, Jean Baptiste Lépine, Solomon Hamelin, Michel Dumas, Narcisse Marion, and Joseph Charette as contractors for a road from Fort Garry to Pointe Coupée.⁶ This latter location was the site of another small settlement of Métis located nine miles south of la Rivière Sale.

Development was evident toward a more fixed religious establishment, as well. Under the supervision of Father Louis Laflèche, materials were gathered in 1854 for the construction of a small chapel.⁷ Actual construction of the building did not begin until June 1855 and even then, construction was slow.⁸ By October of the same year, Rivière

⁵ Archives Provinciale des Soeurs Grises de Montreal, (St. Boniface), hereafter APSGM, "Chroniques des Soeurs Grises", p. 10.

⁶ Lionel Dorge, Le Manitoba, reflets d'un passé, (St. Boniface: Les Editions du Blé, 1976), p. 150.

⁷ Dom Jean Paul Benoît, Vie de Mgr Taché, Archevêque de Saint-Boniface, (Montréal, Librairie Beauchemin, 1904), p. 201.

Sale still had no church or resident priest. As an early missionary, Father Joseph Jean-Marie Lestanc, later recorded: "J'allais tous les deux dimanches dire la messe à St. Norbert chez le vieux M. Tourond."⁹ But with a church under construction, a growing population, and regular visits by the clergy, the Métis settlement called Rivière Sale was on the verge of becoming the Roman Catholic Parish of St. Norbert.

The community of Rivière Sale became the third Catholic Parish of the Red River Colony when it was christened St. Norbert by Bishop Alexandre Taché on 30 November 1857. The first curé, Father Lestanc, was joined by two other Oblates, Father Eynard and Brother Kearny, who taught school.¹⁰

As a Red River parish, St. Norbert was not simply a community in a narrow religious sense. Perhaps the best description of what parish status meant was given by W.L. Morton in the suggestion that prior to 1870 they existed as quasi-autonomous settlements. The parishes were not only the ecclesiastical, but also cultural units of community. Each had its own social identification centred on the local

⁸ L.A. Prud'homme, Monseigneur Joseph-Noël Ritchot, 1825-1905, (Winnipeg: Canadian Publishers Limited, 1928), p. 13.

⁹ "Feu de R.P. Joseph Jean-Marie Lestanc, O.M.I.", Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface, XI, (1912), (hereafter LCSB), p. 219.

¹⁰ Dom Paul Benoît, Vie de Mgr Taché, p. 366-82.

church and dependent schools.¹¹

The missionary at St. Norbert had been given a vast, thinly populated parish to administer. The boundary stretched from the Rivière Sale settlement to the American border and southeast as far as the few Métis settled along Rivière aux Rats. At the time of its formation the population of the parish numbered about seven hundred.¹² Henry Youle Hind noted that the parish contained 101 Catholic families and not one Protestant.¹³ He also indicated that the bulk of the settlers in this parish were concentrated along the Red River for a few miles above and below the mouth of la Rivière Sale.¹⁴ Hind offered another suggestion concerning St. Norbert's economic significance:

Nine miles above Ft. Garry, La Rivière Sale joins the main stream. The buffalo hunter's trail to the great south western prairies on the Grand Coteau de Missouri passes up the south side of this river for a distance of thirty miles, cutting across the large and winding bends of the valley.¹⁵

¹¹ W.L. Morton, "The Red River Parish: Its Place in the Development of Manitoba", Manitoba Essays, ed. R.C. Lodge, (Toronto: The MacMillan Company of Canada, 1937), p. 90.

¹² Marcel Giraud, Le Métis Canadien: Son Rôle dans l'Histoire des Provinces de L'Ouest, (Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, 1945), p. 849.

¹³ Henry Youle Hind, Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857 and of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition of 1858, (London: 1860), p. 208.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 133.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 154.

This comment supports the assumption that St. Norbert was a rallying point for the Main River Party which set out to hunt bison on the prairies. It may also help explain why settlement came to Rivière Sale in the first place.

The curiosity is why the Bishop delayed recognition of parish status so long. Equally curious, was Lestanc's brief stay as St. Norbert's first priest. In October 1860 the Bishop recalled him to St. Boniface to administer the diocese while on a tour of the western missions, replacing him with Father Charles Mestre, a relative newcomer to Red River. He arrived two years previously to work in the Evêché at St. Boniface. Like Lestanc, Mestre was French and an Oblate. A letter written by the new appointee in June 1861 indicates that he was not happy with his posting. Referring to his appointment as a demotion, Mestre said he was sent from St. Boniface, "pour aller habiter Saint-Norbert avec les beaux titres de curé, de maîtres des novices, d'aumonier de religieuses et de pasteur en chef d'un troupeau."¹⁶ The troupeau, he remarked, was not one of biblical "lambs" but of cows. From this same letter we also learn the manner in which the parish supported its resident priest and his sizable household. The church's share of the past season's har-

¹⁶ Archives de l'Archevêché de Saint-Boniface (hereafter AASB), Fonds Taché, T 53454-500, Père Mestre to M.M.C. Religieuse de la Visitation, 11 juin 1861. All documents consulted at AASB were from the Taché collection, hence the prefix "T", followed by the page numbers will identify that collection.

vest or dîme amounted to eighty-five bushels of grain, barley and peas. Pew fees brought in some meat and enough fuel for the winter. Finally a few pounds were contributed via the collection plate. In spite of these seemingly plentiful receipts, Mestre was forced to require additional help from St. Boniface since his mission establishment contained eleven dependants. Mestre also spoke of the state of the church and its dependencies. In his view they were all of poor construction and were badly in need of repair.¹⁷

Mestre was no less critical of his parishioners who numbered nine hundred at the time. All except three families lived along the banks of the Red River. The exceptions in question lived on la Rivière Sale some thirty miles upstream, "dix lieues" by his reckoning. The new curé decried the tendency of the majority of his flock to rely on the buffalo hunt rather than farming. Mestre considered the hunt as the "triste habitude qui favorise leur paresse naturelle sans les faire sortir de la pauvreté extrême qui accompagne toujours leurs fortune d'un jour." The worst offenders in this regard were the hivernants who lived, according to their priest, as virtual nomads. They went out all summer and fall and even passed their winters on the prairies or in the parklands beyond the Red River Settlement. Their only real tie to the parish was to solemnize their marriages, attend to their Pascal duties, and bury

¹⁷ Ibid.

their dead (some of whom would have been dead for several months before being brought in for Christian interment in May or June).¹⁸

Almost from the moment of Mestre's appointment, Taché sought a Canadien replacement. In a note to the Bishop, 28 March 1862, Father Noël-Joseph Ritchot expressed reservations about such a western mission. Ritchot hesitated because he did not speak a word of English and did not have an aptitude for learning new languages. He feared he would simply be another burden on the western Bishop.¹⁹ It is not known how Ritchot's reservations were overcome, but two months later, the Vicar-General of the Montreal Diocese sent Ritchot a letter which gave him permission to proceed west. If after seven or eight years he might decide to return, he would be welcomed.²⁰

Whatever Ritchot had or had not been assured in his correspondence with Taché, his arrival in St. Boniface could not have come at a more propitious time for the western Bishop. Ritchot was appointed curé of St. Norbert almost on arrival. There he remained for the rest of his life. The turn of events was later described by Taché in his memoir of the first twenty years of his missionary work in the west.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ AASB, T 1280, Ritchot to Taché, 28 March 1862.

²⁰ Archives Paroissial de Saint-Norbert (hereafter APSN), A.F. Truteau to Ritchot, 19 May 1862.

After noting that Ritchot had arrived on 7 June 1862, Taché explained that on the previous Sunday word had reached St. Boniface that Father Mestre had been struck by a serious illness. Taché and Father Lacombe went to visit Mestre who had lost consciousness by the time they reached him. The next day the decision was made to bring Mestre back to Taché's home and to send the newcomer Ritchot to St. Norbert.²¹

Shortly after his installation, Ritchot wrote his parents informing them of his new responsibilities. The son of a habitant, Ritchot saw and described his parish in terms which illustrate an early enthusiasm for St. Norbert and its residents. He provided his family with details about the terrain, vegetation, and soil of the area still commonly referred to as Rivière Sale.

Tout le pays est en prairie il n'y a que le long des rivières et de distance en distance qu'il y a du bois. Ici derrière ce petit bois qui a dix ou douze arpents de long commencent les prairies c'est là que paçagent tous nos animaux, chevaux, vaches. C'est là aussi que l'on fait le foin.²²

²¹ Alexandre Taché, Vingt Années de Missions dans le Nord-Ouest de l'Amérique, (Montréal: Eusèbe Senecal, Imprimeur-Editeur, 1866), p. 175.

²² APSN, Ritchot to his parents, 28 June 1862. Ritchot's written French is plagued by missing accents, phonetically spelled words, and other shortcomings. The decision has been made to transcribe these idiosyncrasies as accurately as possible without editorial notation.

Like many of his religious predecessors at Red River, Ritchot condemned the buffalo hunt and the apparent aversion of the Métis to full-time field agriculture or more serious regard to appearance of their homes. Nonetheless, he did point out that despite all, the Métis were descendants of Canadiens. Their surnames were almost all familiar to him: St.Germain, Deschamps, de Repentigny, Delorme, Deslauriers, Lêtrou, Hémon, Léppine, Marsalais, Tournon, Marin, Maron, Champagne, and Maisonneuve. Their principal language was French but most also spoke several native tongues fluently.²³

By the mid-sixties, the old hunting economy faced severe crisis. The great herds of bison were becoming more difficult to find as the American frontier pushed westward. Faced with declining supplies of meat and revenues from pemmican production, many of the Métis began to raise more livestock of their own such as pigs, cows, chickens, and even sheep. As well, they also began to diversify their agriculture by planting cereal crops in addition to the vegetables they had grown in the past.²⁴ Something of a farmer in his own right, Ritchot provided his parishioners with the benefits of his experience.

²³ Ibid. The spellings are Ritchot's.

²⁴ Guillaume Charette, L'Espace de Louis Goulet, (Saint-Boniface: Editions des Bois Brûlés, 1976), p. 29.

Up until this period, the Métis homes tended to be single room squared log structures chinked and plastered with mud and protected by a thatched or clapboard roof. Internally they contained dirt or planked floors, an open fireplace, and little in the way of furnishings. Decoration consisted usually of no more than a few coloured prints of religious art. Ritchot agreed with other observers that the typical Métis home, as he found it, often presented an appearance of decay. The qualification that such was not the case in the mid-winter months is important since it suggests many Métis spent little time in their homes except during the winter season.²⁵ As greater numbers of Métis chose to abandon the declining hunt and the seasonal work for the HBC, and as better tools and materials became available at affordable prices, homes began to take on an appearance which coincided with the new lifestyle. Hand made shingles began to appear on rooftops and planks were used in lieu of mud siding. Since much of the necessary hardware came into the Settlement from St. Paul via the Pembina Trail, many Métis supplemented their incomes by working as independent carters. With increased traffic, others used their homes as wayside hostels providing room and board for travellers.

²⁵ Robert Gosman, "The Riel and Lagimodière Families in Métis Society 1840-1860," Parks Canada Manuscript Report No. 171 (1977), p. 61.

Unfortunately for many of the Métis, the changes in material culture could not have come at a worse time. Just as they were in the midst of adapting to the decline of the hunting and freighting cycle by converting to more intensive agriculture, natural disaster struck. The 1860's were years of floods, grasshoppers, plagues, and poor harvests. By 1868 the situation in the Colony had become desperate and famine emerged as a possibility. Both the secular and religious authorities sent out appeals to the United States, Britain, and Canada. Within the Colony, an "Executive Relief Committee" was organized to assess the needs of the individual parishes and supervise the distribution of food.

While the Settlement was still in the process of recovering from these natural disasters, the Métis began to realize that serious political and cultural changes were developing as well. For as long as they had existed as a people on the western plains, the Métis had regarded themselves as a collectivity whose opinion had to be considered by those who claimed to administer the land under the auspices of the British Monarch. They had demonstrated their resolve at Seven Oaks in 1816 and during the Sayer Trial in 1849 when they forced the HBC to halt prosecutions of free Traders. When it began to appear that the newly confederated Dominion of Canada was about to assume the administration of the Northwest without their consent or assuring them protection of their rights, the Métis once again made their concerns

known in one of the most debated episodes in the development of the western Canada.

Chapter II

THE RED RIVER RESISTANCE, JUNE 1869-NOVEMBER 1869

Ritchot's notes shed considerable light on the activities and motives of the Métis in their legendary resistance of 1869-1870. Although reserved in discussing his own role, Ritchot's recollections do indicate his own position. In regard to the origins of the troubles, Ritchot wrote that in itself, the transaction between Canada and the HBC did not displease the residents of Red River. However, the people did not approve the manner with which such an important matter was being treated. "On paraissait régler toute choses sans faire de cas des habitants de la Rivière Rouge, pas plus que s'il n'y en avait pas eu."¹ This neglect was made worse by the poor image of Canadians created in the Settlement by citizens of that country who had already arrived.

Upper Canadians had begun arriving in the Colony in the early 1860's as a vanguard who believed that the annexation of the Northwest to their province was both inevitable and imminent. While some had come simply to take up farms, others, especially the notorious Dr. John Christian Schultz,

¹ APSN, N.J. Ritchot, Cahier Historique I. This notebook contains a narrative of the early stages of the Resistance in Ritchot's handwriting. The date of its composition is uncertain since it is composed in the past tense.

hoped to profit by arriving ahead of the flood of immigration which everyone realized would follow the establishment of Canadian jurisdiction. Even some of the Canadians who had come west to work on the Dawson Road in 1868 ran into trouble for attempting to speculate in land.²

As was so often the case in frontier societies, land speculation was seen as the principal means by which fortunes might be acquired. The potential for profits were enormous since under the regime of the HBC, land was available simply for the taking. All one had to do in order to secure title from the Company was to register occupancy on the lands freed of aboriginal title by Selkirk during his visit to the Colony in 1817. The speculators believed that the Canadian government would recognize their land holdings after its assumption of the HBC's rights. Under the new regime, immigrants looking for wooded river front property were expected to swamp the territory. The choice parcels, of course, would already be in the hands of the speculators. Since only annexation would give cash value to the land, the Canadian speculators and their local imitators were the most vocal in their agitation against the the authority of the HBC and the administration of the Council of Assiniboia.

² Public Archives of Canada (hereafter PAC), MG26A, vol. 103, Macdonald Papers, p. 41402, N.J. Ritchot to G.E. Cartier, 30 May 1870.

Had the Canadians limited themselves strictly to land speculation and the promotion of Canadian authority, they might have been regarded benignly by the older residents of Red River. Unfortunately, the Canadians, or "Canadas" as they were derisively known, coupled their acquisitive activities with expressions of contempt for both the institutions and much of the population of the Settlement. Since this contempt often took on religious and racial overtones, the segment of Red River's population most offended by it were the Métis and their Catholic clergy.

The presence of speculators on lands near St. Norbert in June 1869 set into motion the first phase of organized resistance to Canadian ambitions in Red River. A number of Canadians, including Charles Mair, were seen staking claims on la Rivière Sale, upstream from St. Norbert and west of Pointe Coupée. Their appearance angered some of the local Métis who ordered the party to leave after refusing to accept their explanations.³

The Métis were long familiar with the imperial attitudes expressed by Schultz and other Canadians within the Colony and beyond. William McDougall later advised Macdonald that the Métis had been read stories from the Toronto Globe which told of how "the half breeds would all be driven back from the river & their land given to others, . . ." and that the

³ APSN, Father Ritchot, Cahier Historique I.

new regime would consist exclusively of Canadian administrators.⁴ They were thus not inclined to believe that a new Canadian authority would adjudicate disputed claims in a fair manner if the litigants were a Métis on the one hand and a Canadian on the other. Such fears concerning land were not limited to the river lots already in their possession. Concern extended to those areas within Assiniboia which had been regarded as their corporate territory, and on which the Métis either hunted or hoped to place their children in the future.

After St. Norbert's Sunday mass of 4 July, Jean Baptiste Tourond announced that a meeting was to be held the next day to consider the activities of the Canadians. Tourond had been one of the individuals who had confronted Mair and the others a few days previously. It is unclear whether the assembly was open to native settlers from the entire Colony or simply the Métis of St. Norbert. In either case, Tourond was elected as President and another St. Norbert resident, Jean Baptiste Lépine, was chosen as secretary.⁵ After discussion, the meeting passed a resolution which called on Tourond to organize a system of mounted patrols whose task was to protect Métis lands from the ambitions of speculators. Ritchot later described the land as "des terrains

⁴ PAC, Macdonald Papers, pp. 40751-58, William McDougall to Macdonald, 31 October 1869.

⁵ APSN, Ritchot, Cahier Historique I.

laissés [et] reconnus jusqu'alors par la coutume [et] l'usage, comme communes, ou comme appartenant par une entente nationale, a telle partie de la population."⁶ The territory excluded from "les étrangers" was bounded on the west by a line running from Turtle Mountain to "les petits trembles" on the Assiniboine (Poplar Point); and on the east by a line running between the American border and Lake Winnipeg which included the Métis settlement at Pointe des Chênes. The 49th parallel defined the southern limit. The north line followed the Assiniboine River as far as Fort Garry and then along the Red to a point slightly above the mouth of the Seine River.⁷

Having declared what is now south central Manitoba as their exclusive domain, the Métis set themselves to the task of defending it from encroachment. Within a week a Canadian squatter was chased away from a plot south of Pointe à Grouette (Ste. Agathe) and another group of claim stakers were routed from the banks of la Rivière Sale. The Métis were not content simply to evict the interlopers; all signs of occupation were obliterated by horsemen who pulled up stakes and filled in their wells.⁸

⁶ Ritchot to Cartier, 30 May 1870, supra.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

Throughout July and August tensions continued to rise in proportion to the increasing numbers of Canadian settlers and the approach of the expected "transfer" of Rupert's Land from the HBC to the Dominion of Canada. Most of the newcomers were confident of their future in a Canadian Northwest. Unfortunately, their optimism often seemed to be no more than arrogance to many established settlers and Métis who knew little about their own future under what was to them a foreign administration. Most of the Canadians headed beyond the area of the Forks towards Portage la Prairie where a Canadian colony was already well under way. Some would have preferred to occupy empty lots along the Red River south of St. Norbert.⁹ It is unclear whether they were deterred from those lots by the Métis. But whether in Portage or not, the trickle of Canadians presaged an invasion which was expected to follow the transfer and this made many uneasy, especially the Métis.

On 20 July, an attempt to harness Métis discontent was made by William Dease, one of the Métis members of the Council of Assiniboia. He had issued an invitation printed in the Nor'wester of 24 July and read after the Sunday services in the various parishes. The invitation appeared over the names of several leading Métis and Half-Breeds such as Dease, William Hallett, Joseph Genthon, and Pascal Breland.

⁹ AASB, T 6682-87, George Dugast to Bishop Taché, 24 July 1869.

Breland later denied having allowed his name to be used for such a purpose.¹⁰

The meeting itself was somewhat disorganized and its purpose unclear to many of those who chose to attend. Father Georges Dugast, whose contemporary report to Taché offers a useful synopsis, claimed that if the details were ever published in Canada, the residents of Red River would be taken for fools.¹¹ The well attended meeting first heard from Dease who declared that he was calling on the Métis to claim their rights which he said had been sold to Canada by the HBC. According to Dease, the £300,000 paid by Canada was owed not to the Hudson's Bay Company, but to the Métis. When asked, Dease refused to invite the HBC's local Governor, William Mactavish, to speak on the rights of the Company. He argued instead that the Métis should overthrow the Company government before the transfer was complete. The public treasury would then be expropriated in order to indemnify the Métis for the loss of their rights. At that point John Bruce told Dease he was astonished a man of Dease's position would propose such things. The would-be insurrectionist was after all a sworn member and magistrate of the government he proposed to overthrow. Bruce argued that Dease should be among the first to defend it. For his part, Bruce could not accept such a course. Thinking that

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Taché might be surprised to hear of such wisdom coming from the mouth of Bruce whom many regarded as slow witted, Dugast remarked, "Vous comprenez qu'on lui avait fais la leçon d'avance mais n'importe, il s'en est bien acquitté."¹² It is not specified who might have coached Bruce prior to the meeting. The leading candidates, however, would be Riel, Ritchot, Dugast or all three.

After further discussions, votes were taken and several unnamed residents of St. Norbert supported the idea of following Dease and naming him Governor. The large majority were opposed to precipitate action and filed out of the meeting. They even spoke of preparing a petition condemning the meeting and supporting a call for the removal of Dease from the Council of Assiniboia. According to Dugast, "Dease est reparti honteux comme un renard pris par une poule."¹³

For his part, Ritchot believed that Dease had acted under the inspiration of Schultz in his advocacy of rebellion against the HBC. The St. Norbert curé regarded Dease as a man "sans princippe et aussi hignorant qu'orgueilleux."¹⁴ The purpose of the meeting had been only to trouble and divide the Métis and was seen in that light. The only effect was to place the Métis on their guard against similar attempts.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ APSN, Ritchot, Cahier I.

That Dease might have acted as a frontman for Schultz and company is not surprising in light of his later activities. Furthermore, in advocating the overthrow of the HBC and claiming a right to the purchase money, Dease was implicitly challenging the title of the HBC to the region. This denial of the Company's rights was the central theme of the Canadian Party in Red River and of the expansionist movement in Upper Canada.¹⁵

After having arranged for the purchase of Rupert's Land in the spring of 1869, the Canadian Government continued preparations for what they expected would be a smooth assumption of control in the fall, including the famous survey of land by Colonel John Stoughton Dennis. On his first day in the Colony, late in the summer of 1869, Dennis saw strong indications of the crisis created by the arrival of the surveyors. A meeting with Mactavish in turn prompted a visit with Father Lestanc who was administering the diocese in the absence of the Bishop. The Canadian's effort to have the well-intentioned priest explain the survey from the pulpit failed in the face of resistance from other clergy.¹⁶ The same day he wrote to McDougall that he had found that "a

¹⁵ W.L. Morton, "Introduction" to Alexander Begg's Red River Journal and other Papers Relative to the Red River Resistance of 1869-1870, ed., W.L. Morton, (Toronto, The Champlain Society, 1956), pp. 32-33.

¹⁶ George Dugast, Histoire Véridique des faits qui ont préparé le Mouvement des Métis à la Rivière Rouge en 1869, (Montréal: Beauchemin, 1905), p. 51.

considerable degree of irritation exists among the native population" in regard to the surveys and the prospect of a rush of settlers. Furthermore, the Métis "had gone so far as to threaten violence should the surveys be attempted to be made."¹⁷

The question whether the protestations of Canada's good intentions were well founded is open to debate, even though A.C. Roberts makes a strong case that Canada and Dennis "had no intention of ignoring the existing river lots by surveying over them with the continuous township survey."¹⁸ Still, it must be pointed out that the surveyors failed to take into account the legally defined hay privileges which existed for two miles back of the river lots. Moreover, the draft "Order-in-Council for Uniting Rupert's Land and the North Western Territory to the Dominion of Canada" contained one solitary provision regarding existing land holdings. It read simply "All titles to land up to the 8th March 1869 conferred by the company are to be confirmed."¹⁹ Application of that sole provision would have resulted in the conversion of only a minority of the Red River land titles into freeholds supported by Crown Patents. Most of the settlers, in-

¹⁷ Canada Sessional Papers, Vol. 4, #12, 1870, (hereafter CSP 1870), Dennis to McDougall, 21 August 1869; also cited in A.C. Roberts, "The Surveys in the Red River Settlement in 1869", The Canadian Surveyor, (1970)

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 242.

¹⁹ PAC, Macdonald Papers, p. 40208.

cluding the newly arrived Canadians and especially the Métis, held their lands according to the "custom of the country." This convention held that unoccupied land was free for the taking and that purchases were made not of land, but of improvements to the land. The HBC, the nominal owners of the soil, along the Red and Assiniboine rivers, never insisted on the purchase of river lots or on the registration of transactions.²⁰ Finally, there was the reality of the perception among the Métis and their clergy that Canada was moving too fast to accommodate the new arrivals, and ignoring the concerns of the older settlers.

The depth of such feeling was recorded by Dugast a week before the arrival of Dennis. His letter to Taché says much about the fears of the old settlers in Red River as the Canadian presence grew over the summer of 1869 and deserves to be quoted at length. After first telling his Bishop that the surveyors were expected to arrive within days, Dugast warned that they had better tread carefully if they wished to avoid trouble. Dugast then related what the Métis had been telling their priests on a daily basis:

Comment se fait-il, que puis qu'on ne nous à pas vendus commes des esclaves: un gouvernement étranger ait le droit de venir ici nous faire des lois, prendre possession d'un pays qui nous appartienent, sans nous consulter en rien. Nous ne

²⁰ The casual attitude of the HBC towards its role as a landlord was evident as early as 1857 when George Simpson appeared before a British Select Committee investigating the administration of the Company's territories. See A.S. Morton, History of the Canadian West, p. 820.

reconnaissons aucune autorité aux officiers publics qu'ils nous envoient, et nous ne voulons pas leur en reconnaître. Si dans l'assemblée de Monsieur William Dease nous n'avons pas voulu prendre fait et cause avec lui alors, c'était afin de montrer que nous avons d'autres moyens de faire respecter nos droits. Si le gouvernement Canadien croit avoir droits de nous donner comme un proie au aventuriers du Haute Canada, il sera trompé. Nous ne refuserons pas de faire partie de la confederation, mais nous sommes des hommes et nous n'y entrerons pas comme un troupeau. ²¹

Dugast's letter also pointed out that Father Ritchot was not only aware of these sentiments but condoned them.

On behalf of the clergy, Dugast asked Taché for advice on how they might conduct themselves and added that "Monsieur Ritchot surtout désirerait fort recevoir de Votre Grandeur des avis pour se conduire dans cette affaire difficile."²² It would appear, however, that Dugast and Ritchot had already made up their minds. There is no record of Ritchot ever asking Taché for guidance. Furthermore, the reaction of Dugast and Ritchot to the arrival of the surveyors etc, was as angry as that of the Métis. Ritchot later wrote of

De nouveaux arrivés sous la présidence d'un nommé Dennis revêtu de titres pompeux, entouré d'employés paraillement revêtus de titres de colonel, majeur, capitaine; enfin jusqu'au dernier valet de cette expedition qui voulait se revêtir d'un titre et d'un air de grandeur.²³

²¹ AASB, T 6734-37, Dugast to Taché, 14 August 1869, Emphasis in original.

²² Ibid.

²³ APSN, Ritchot, Cahier I.

Nonetheless, Ritchot's major complaint was that neither the surveyors nor Dennis could produce documentary evidence justifying their activities on behalf of the Canadian Government.

For his part, Dennis altered his original plan to have his crews resurvey the existing river front holdings of the Colony as described by the HBC in its "Land Register B." The land was still in crop and the temper of the community verged on violence. Dennis opted first to establish the southern limits of the territory. This done, his crews proceeded to a point ten miles west of Pembina where they began running a meridian line to the level of the projected eleventh Township. It was to be in reference to this "Principal Meridian" that all the subsequent Townships were to be laid out. The first of these was to be located near "Oak Point" on the eastern edge of the prairie near the site of present day Ste. Anne des Chênes. Its location near the point where the still incomplete Dawson Road emerged from the swampy woodlands seemed to make it an ideal terminus for the first wave of Ontario settlers expected to arrive on the heels of the Transfer.²⁴

Dennis' intentions met with immediate reaction on their being made known. He was warned "de ne pas mettre le pied de ce côté-la s'il tenait à garder sa tête sur les

²⁴ Roberts', "Surveys in Red River", p. 241.

épaules."²⁵ Oak Point was considered to be occupied satisfactorily by Métis residents who knew it as Pointe des Chênes and later as Ste. Anne des Chênes. The community had experienced less than satisfactory dealings with Canadians working under John A. Snow on the Dawson Road. A healthy antipathy had developed for the Canadians who spent a good deal of time gloating over how things would change once Canada assumed control and new settlers overran the country. The Canadian propensity for land staking was not ignored either. More seriously, the manner in which the Dawson work was conducted did much to reinforce the impression that a Canadian regime would favour newcomers over the original settlers. Instead of paying the work crews in cash, the paymaster of the project, Charles Mair, provided credits which could only be redeemed at a local store established by Schultz. What was apparent to the Métis was that an official of the Dominion, Snow, had seen fit to conduct his affairs in such a way as to profit the hated Schultz and Mair, as well as other newcomers who were employed on the road. Dennis' decision to dispatch his crews south to the area west of Pembina avoided direct conflict, at least momentarily.

The news of William McDougall's appointment as the new Governor of the territory after the transfer further disturbed the Métis. As Minister of Public Works, McDougall

²⁵ AASB, T 6774-77, Dugast to Taché, 29 August 1869.

had been the man responsible for the sending out the road and the survey crews. He had also been one of the leading advocates of Canadian "annexation" of the Northwest and one of the ministers who had negotiated the purchase of the territory from the HBC. To the suspicious clergy and Métis, it seemed evident that McDougall was the head of the same cabal to which Schultz, Mair, Snow, and Dennis all belonged.²⁶

The Métis reaction to the news of the proposed appointment was even stronger than it had been in regard to the arrival of the surveyors. It was declared that if McDougall presented himself in the country as Governor, "il sera aver-ti de reprendre bien vite le Chemin de Toronto."²⁷ The news of McDougall's appointment acted as a catalyst in that many of the Settlement's traditional leaders began to realize the immediacy of the takeover. Ritchot later wrote of various meetings held from August to October with the goal of protesting the methods employed in the establishment of the new regime. The most concise statement of the thinking behind such gatherings is provided by Father Lestanc who wrote his Bishop that "Le désir générale semble d'être de résister à l'invasion Ontarienne et de prouver qu'il a un peuple à la Riv. R. et qu'il faut compter avec ce peuple."²⁸

²⁶ See Morton, "Introduction", Begg's Red River Journal, p. 23.

²⁷ AASB, Dugast to Taché, 29 August 1869.

²⁸ AASB, T 6881-84, Lestanc to Taché, 20 October 1869.

The writings of Ritchot and Dugast both suggest the meetings were being called by the community's perceived leaders. However, Ritchot wrote that soon, "soit [par] manque d'énergie ou manque d'esperance dans la succès de l'entreprise, ils abandonèrent tous."²⁹ The collapse of these movements was also attributed by the St. Norbert curé to a number of other factors. The Canadians within the Colony busied themselves preparing for what they had long seen as the inevitable arrival of Canadian authority by preparing the "best house in the country" for the Governor. As well, the Canadian agents in the Colony awarded transportation contracts to locals who Ritchot regarded as holding money dearer than honour or the independence of their country. Ritchot also felt that the employees of the HBC were sympathetic to the Transfer. Insofar as the English Half-Breeds were concerned, Ritchot charged that their Upper Canadian Protestant clergy were pressuring them to accept the change. Finally, there were the merchants in the colony and not a few Métis who favoured the change in expectation of the wealth it might bring them.³⁰

In the midst of these different opinions, and after seeing the flagging efforts of their customary leadership, a group of Métis, "seulement excités par un jeune homme de

²⁹ APSN, Ritchot, Cahier I; see also AASB, T 6778-81, Dugast to Taché, 31 August 1869.

³⁰ Ibid.

leurs," named several among themselves to consider the state of the country and to see if means could at least be found "de faire une protestation manifeste contre l'injustice et l'injure faites à la nation par le Canada."³¹

The emergence of the twenty-five year old Riel and the movement he and Ritchot led is not well documented beyond the information already presented. Riel's selection as a leader among the Métis is, however, not surprising. Like his father, the younger Riel was considered Métis although he had slight native ancestry and had been educated in Lower Canada from the age of twelve. Education had vaulted Riel's father into the leadership of the Métis in their free trade conflict with the HBC which had culminated in the Sayer Affair of 1849. Doubtless, the younger Riel was likewise elevated during the summer of 1869. As Louis Sr. had worked with the sympathetic Father Belcourt, so would his son with Father Ritchot. The association of Riel and Ritchot in the summer and fall of 1869 and beyond is well known, but the roots of their political alliance remain obscure. The two had at least known each other since September of 1868, shortly after Louis' return to the settlement from Montreal and various intervening stops in the United States.³² Whether they continued to meet or correspond over the winter and

³¹ Ibid.

³² Provincial Archives of Manitoba (hereafter PAM), MG3, D1, #9, Riel Papers, Sara Riel to Louis, 7 September 1868.

fall is unknown. The question of whether it was Riel or Ritchot who led the Métis is academic. That Riel was the acknowledged leader of the militant Métis is beyond dispute. Whether Riel in turn was led or guided by Ritchot remains something of a mystery. It is evident that Ritchot was an important influence on Riel and on the movement he led. The continuing enigma is to what extent.

What is beyond doubt is that an organized protest came into public view on 11 October 1869. On that day the right of Canadian officials to conduct Dominion business in the as yet unannexed territory was challenged by Riel, Tourond and several others who advised the surveyors under A.C. Webb that they could proceed no further.

The events leading up to the now legendary confrontation between the Dominion surveyors and the Métis residents of Red River were recorded by Ritchot in the following manner. After being assured by Riel and Ritchot that they were within their rights and that honour demanded a protest against Canada's pretensions, the Métis resolved "de s'opposer à l'injustice et de repousser l'injure et le honte de tout leur pouvoir et d'employer tout ce que la justice et la droit leur permettait aux risques même de paraître imprudents et téméraires."³³ The first step in this redemption of honour was the stopping of Webb's survey party as it approached the

³³ APSN, Ritchot, Cahier I.

river lots of St. Vital while laying out a reference line from the meridian to Oak Point. The event itself is described fully elsewhere.³⁴ Here, it is only necessary to mention that the body of St. Vital men who intercepted Webb's crew was said by Ritchot to be under the leadership of "Louis Riel, jeune homme du pays (et de talent) ayant fait son cour d'Etude et secretaire du comité français et J. Bte. Tourond, président du premier comité qui avait été remplacé par un autre comité."³⁵ It is evident that Tourond's committee, with which Ritchot had been associated, had evolved into another under the leadership of Riel. That Ritchot saw no reason to discontinue his support of the militants can be taken for granted given the informed nature of his notes.

The stopping of the surveys on Métis land and Riel's refusal to yield to the private pleas of the HBC authorities to desist acted as a fillip to the movement. In the first instance, according to Ritchot, Riel resisted the flattery and threats of the Councillors of Assiniboia. Secondly, he was able to ascertain from his conversations that Canada had as yet no legal rights in the territory. "Ce dénouement fit connaître le jeune Riel à ses compatriottes, lui gagna la confiance de ce voisinage et l'encouragea dans son entre-

³⁴ See A.C. Roberts, "Surveys in Red River."

³⁵ APSN, Ritchot, Cahier I.

prise."³⁶

Riel also found encouragement from the words of Ritchot and the actions of the other priests in the settlement. In a rare and subsequently edited reference to the nature of their personal association, Ritchot first noted that Riel spent much of his free time praying before the altar of his church. During one of these sessions he seems to have asked the curé either for some kind of approval of his plans or a confirmation of his belief that his actions would have divine sanction. Either or both questions can be inferred from Ritchot's reply which he recalled in the following terms: "lequel sans les approuver à cause de la presque impossibilité de les voir réussir, en approuvait la justice et la générosité et espérait que la providence pourrait au moins s'en servir pour l'honneur de la nation Mitis."³⁷

As rumours mounted of McDougall's approach at the head of two hundred men armed with modern sixteen shot repeating rifles and arms for his supporters in the Colony, a sense of fear overcame the Métis and likely Riel as well. Ritchot noted that all the priests were offering the Holy Sacrifice in the hopes that the souls of purgatory would be freed to

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., the portion of the page where Riel is asking this question has been torn out in an obvious attempt to conceal Riel's question.

intervene on behalf of their brothers.³⁸ With the personal encouragement of Ritchot and the more general sympathy of the clergy, Riel and the militants moved on to the next stage of the resistance. This would result in the isolation of the Governor-Designate and his officers from the Colony, which would forestall a de facto assumption of Canadian authority and a junction with the supporters of that authority already within Red River.

Acting in the belief that McDougall's approach represented a military as well as a political threat, the Rielites organized delegate selection meetings in the various parishes between the sixteenth and nineteenth of October.³⁹ The counsellors then met in the St. Vital home of John Bruce on the twentieth where they first resolved that a committee be struck and charged immediately with instituting the "laws of the prairie, according to the custom of the country." These resolutions meant that the Métis militants were invoking the military type organization of the communal buffalo hunt. Once this was done, several Captains were sent with their men to meet the expedition regarded as the cause of the troubles and turbulence among the nation. The expedition was described further as

sous la conduite de William McDougall qui s'avance dans le pays, contre le droit des gens, avec le titre de Gouverneur de ce pays au nom d'un

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Morton, "Introduction", Begg's Red River Journal, p. 47.

puissance étrangère et dont l'autorité est absolument inconnue à la nation.⁴⁰

By the next day the plan was changed. New information had determined that McDougall's escort was not an army but a small number of servants, would-be appointees, and women.⁴¹ Rather than sending a large military force to intercept McDougall and his companions, a diplomatic note was prepared and entrusted to four riders, including Riel, who were to hand it to McDougall when he reached Pembina. It was expected that this would take place on the twenty-second of October. The famous message read simply:

Monsieur,--Le Comité National des Métis de la Rivière Rouge intime à Monsieur W. McDougall l'ordre de ne pas entrer sur le Territoire du Nord-Ouest sans une permission spéciale de ce Comité.

Par ordre du Président, John Bruce Louis Riel,
Secrétaire

⁴⁰ APSN, Ritchot, Cahier II. This scribbler is the Minute Book of the Métis Council which sat for the most part in Ritchot's Presbytery. Although Riel was the secretary of these meetings, the notes are in Ritchot's hand. Unfortunately, Ritchot's desire to hide some of his own role and perhaps that of others from posterity has resulted in the notes being crudely edited in the same way his narrative (Cahier I), with ink blots and missing pages or sections of pages. Nevertheless, as will become apparent below, they remain an invaluable record of the Métis resistance movement prior to the capture of Fort Garry. The fact that the first meeting took place in Bruce's home was reported to Dennis by Chief Constable Mulligan. (CSP 1870, McDougall to Howe 31 October 1869).

⁴¹ PAC, Macdonald Papers, p. 40759-78, D.R. Cameron to Macdonald, Pembina, 3 November 1869. The presence of the women was the reason given by Joseph Rolette of that place for the alteration of the Métis' original plan. (Ibid.)

Daté à St. Norbert, Rivière Rouge ce 21e jour
d'octobre, 1869.⁴²

On the morning of the twenty-first, three riders appeared before Ritchot's door to pray and to ask if they were doing the right thing. Since the note had been drafted in his own home, Ritchot's answer should have been obvious. Nevertheless, he seems to have wanted to test the resolve of the men before him by assuming the role of an ignorant bystander. "Who is sending you?", he asked. "Our leaders," was the reply. On asking where these leaders were, Ritchot was told that one was riding along the east bank of the Red to a rendez-vous near Pointe Coupée, and that another was organizing a troop which would soon appear near Ritchot's door to await the news of their expedition. The St. Norbert priest then told them to follow the orders of their leaders but to be prudent and not to expose themselves too openly before McDougall's party. To that, one rider replied that only one man would present the note while the others were to observe the event at a safe distance and be ready to ride back with the news. "And, what if you are threatened?"; the reply was categorical: "Dans ce cas, Tête pour Tête, et je suis sur de mon coup, . . . car c'est moi qui doit porter la lettre."⁴³ The men were obviously prepared for trouble since each was carrying a gun, a revolver, and a knife.

⁴² CSP 1870, McDougall to Joseph Howe, 31 October 1869.

⁴³ APSN, Ritchot, Cahier I.

As the couriers rode away, the military arm of the Métis was being organized and deployed for home defence. André Nault and his men erected a rail fence across the Pembina Trail just before it veered eastward to cross la Rivière Sale a short distance from Ritchot's presbytery. The purpose of this barricade and the surrounding camp was to act as the final checkpoint for any individuals, goods, or weapons attempting to reach the settlement. Although McDougall's party was the primary object in view, "la barrière" was where all incoming and outgoing carts were stopped and searched for "dangerous objects" and where the mails were inspected. The Métis, however, were not simply content to wait at St. Norbert for McDougall to show up. If he failed to heed the diplomatic note and continued to proceed northward he was to be met first at "Marion's Lake" (near St. Jean Baptiste) and at Pointe à Saline (Aubigny) by mounted patrols under Benjamin and Baptiste Nault. Each group was to warn him again against proceeding further and would fall back on the St. Norbert position where he would be stopped and turned back, or worse.⁴⁴

While Ritchot had amused himself earlier in the day by playing the ingenué with the couriers, he exhibited a firmer tone when André Nault sought to leave the barrier site in

⁴⁴ PAM, MG3, A1, Red River Disturbances, #11, Affidavit sworn by William Hyman before William Cowan, Chief Magistrate of Assiniboia, 22 October 1869, and also MG3, B18, Sworn Statements of André Nault, et. al., re events of 1869-70.

order to find supplies for his men. Meeting Ritchot on the way, Nault was asked, "tu t'en vas déjà? Et bien, laisse le lieutenant-gouverneur entrer et tu verras ce qui t'arriverais. Tu as pris les armes; fais la guerre pour de bon. Prend des vivres où tu pouvais."⁴⁵ Chastised, Nault returned to his post. Ritchot then opened his own stores for the benefit of the main camp at St. Norbert on condition that his chickens be left alone.⁴⁶

In spite of temperatures which froze the surface of la Rivière Sale, the number of men at the St. Norbert camp grew over the next two days until over a hundred men were in place when Riel returned from Pembina on 23 October. McDougall had not arrived on the twenty-second as expected and Riel was unwilling to wait for him. Instead, he left the note in the care of Janvier Ritchot, the probable spokesman for the couriers previously mentioned. Riel's arrival was opportune since dissension and doubt were beginning to sap the morale of his followers who may have expected that they had been summoned to fight an invading army. The blocking of the road had aroused the rest of the Colony, and even a majority of the Métis were in doubt as to the course chosen by the militants. Father Ritchot ascribed much of this doubt to the intrigues of McDougall's "friends and parti-

⁴⁵ PAM, André Nault Affidavit, 27 December 1908.

⁴⁶ L.A. Prud'homme, "La Barrière à St. Norbert," La Liberté, 22 novembre 1927.

sans" whom he felt had spared nothing to divide the Métis.⁴⁷

The most persuasive argument presented by those who opposed the Riel faction warned that the prevention of McDougall's entry would have severe repercussions. They claimed it would be wiser for the Métis to let him enter the Territory and state his case before deciding what to do. Such a passive course was anathema to Riel, Ritchot, and the others who realized that once in the Colony, the Governor would be in a position to rally the Canadians and the English speaking settlers to his aid by virtue of his authority as an agent of the Queen. Far better to keep McDougall, the individual, out of the country in the first place, than attempt to challenge his authority once ensconced in Fort Garry. With support for the militant course flagging, Ritchot realized the time had come to face the opposition head-on in public. The opportunity was provided by Dease and Georges Racette who reproached the curé for billeting the militants. Ritchot answered them by suggesting they present their case against the militants the next day in the course of a special assembly.

The meeting began 24 October with Dease's sympathizers threatening to remove the barrier forcefully and clear the road for the Governor-designate. Tempers which were cooled during Ritchot's Sunday service reemerged as the meeting got

⁴⁷ APSN, Ritchot, Cahier I.

under way. After a good deal of futile argument and discussion, Ritchot was summoned from his presbytery to see if he might act as a mediator. After giving explanations as to how he viewed the discussion, the priest called for a vote on what he considered the basic question: "qu'il fallait protester contre le manière dont le Canada venait s'imposer dans le pays pour y gouverner."⁴⁸ Even Dease and his followers agreed with the fundamental question as posed by Ritchot. The vote was carried unanimously. Ritchot then advised the meeting to discuss the form the protest was to take. After lengthy deliberations, the majority of those assembled in the woods of St. Norbert voted to continue along the path set by those who vowed to prevent McDougall's entry. The minority who still opposed the militant action, vowed to remain aside and not to hinder the efforts of those under arms.

With the dissension among the Métis at least partially neutralized, Ritchot thanked the assembly for reaching a peaceful solution and declared that "comme citoyen de la Rivière Rouge, il partageait leur opinion et que leur partie avait toutes ses sympathies, ce qu'il n'avais pas encore voulu faire voire, vu qu'il y avait deux parties dans sa paroisse."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Ritchot's success was only temporary. In their attempts to convince the Métis to abandon their course, the Council of Assiniboia rekindled the emotions which Ritchot thought he had dispelled. The day following the raising of the barrier across the highway, William Hyman, a London Ontario native living in St. Norbert, swore out an affidavit before Dr. William Cowan, the Chief Magistrate of the Colony. After reporting the plans of the Métis and providing an estimate of their numbers, the Canadian called on the authorities to act swiftly or "a serious calamity is about to ensue--in an outrage which may be of a fatal character."⁵⁰

Faced with the aroused and organized will of the Métis, Cowan and the other authorities in the settlement could do little by way of forcing the Métis to desist without calling on the English half of the settlement to confront the French. Such a policy was beyond the powers or the will of a government that had no independent military force and had long depended on consensus to enforce its regulations. Nonetheless, an attempt was made, as had occurred after the stopping of surveys, to convince Riel of the errors of his ways. On this occasion Riel was summoned before a session of the Council of Assiniboia rather than simply meeting with Cowan and others. The result of the interview was a grudging agreement by Riel to pass the sentiments of the Council on to his followers. Frustrated in their own attempts to

⁵⁰ PAM, Hyman Affidavit, 22 October 1869.

dissuade Riel, the Council then turned to its two Métis members and asked if they might "collect immediately as many of the more respectable of the French community and with them proceed to the camp of the party who intend to intercept Governor McDougall and endeavour if possible to procure their peaceable dispersion."⁵¹ Roger Goulet refused to undertake the task, but the other, William Dease, took up the mission enthusiastically following the promise of financial support for his efforts.

According to Ritchot, Dease soon had twenty-five paid couriers riding throughout the parishes calling on the Métis to meet in assembly at St. Norbert on the twenty-seventh. The goal of the Council of Assiniboia was to have Dease pack a second assembly with moderate Métis in order to overturn the decisions taken 23 October. Ritchot, however, believed that Dease had far more dangerous plans. Dease was suspected of having his couriers spread rumours designed to frighten the men in the camp and to convince others to join in the effort to dissuade them from their course. Furthermore, Dease's party was said to be coming in arms. As these and more ominous stories reached St. Norbert, many came to believe that a major battle was about to occur. By 26 October the mood of the camp had changed dramatically from the good feelings of two days previous. Many of the men began to

⁵¹ Minutes of the Council of Assiniboia, 25 October 1869, cited in Stanley, Louis Riel, p. 64.

prepare for the worst through prayer. Dispensing communion to the troops, Ritchot had the assistance of Father Kavanaugh of St. François Xavier among others. For their part, the Métis erected a small shrine which Ritchot vowed to replace with a permanent votive chapel if the Métis triumphed over their enemies.⁵²

The twenty-sixth of October was in fact the darkest day for those in the still small assemblage at St. Norbert. Although the morale of the soldiers had been raised by the support of their priests and more accurate information about Dease's mission, the leadership remained distraught. According to Ritchot, the leaders better realized the dangers their loyal followers faced at the hands of their unscrupulous enemies and dupes. If the Journal is to be believed, Riel and the others were for a moment incapacitated by worry over the fate of their men and their own responsibilities. "Les plus nobles en verserent des larmes . . ." Ritchot consoled the leaders and "les assura contre toute esperance

⁵² Details of the various rumours of hundreds of men from all corners of the Colony and from the south descending on St. Norbert and of the religious fervour of the Métis are found in Ritchot, Cahier I; and in APSGM. The Chronicles of the St. Norbert community contain a letter from a Sister Curran which tells of the Métis stoically vowing to stand their ground in the face of superior numbers and weaponry in order to defend their rights. Even more interesting is a story which circulated of a large body of men riding from the north who were overcome by a paralyzing fear of being overwhelmed in the woods where in fact there was nobody. The suggestion is made by Sister Curran that the woods in question were indeed full of the souls of long dead Métis who had risen in aid of their brothers.

que de tout en lui, il n'en resulterait rien de nuisible au partie."⁵³ This assurance of clerical protection would have done much to soothe the spirits of the leaders and would have helped them prepare for the events of the next day.

Throughout the night of the twenty-sixth, Métis from all over the Colony converged on St. Norbert in a scene that must have reminded many of the early stages of the annual spring gathering for the old buffalo hunts. In characteristic style, Ritchot broke the arrivals down into various groups:

les uns avaient reçu de l'argent, à d'autre il en avait été promis; les courriers employés arrivaient aussi--les autres, et c'était le plus grand nombre, arrivaient pareillement; pour ces derniers la nouvelle seul du danger que couraient leurs frères les avait dessider à prendre les armes.⁵⁴

For all the apprehension which preceded it, the meeting was a fairly quiet affair. Both sides again presented their arguments before the gathering and divisions were called whether to persist in preventing McDougall from entering the Colony or abide by the Council's order to disperse. After the debate, the large majority voted against the positions presented by Dease. Dease and Racette were joined only by six unidentified Indians and a handful of others; "ce fut un vrai triomphe." In his notes, the priest claimed he only arrived at the assembly after the vote had taken place and

⁵³ APSN, Ritchot, Cahier I.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

applied himself to calming the atmosphere poisoned by the ensuing threats and insults.⁵⁵ Ritchot made another speech at the close of the assembly but unfortunately his notes on what he said have been torn out of the note book.

Another version of the same meeting is found in a memorandum prepared by Dennis for the benefit of McDougall, who had yet to reach Pembina. Dennis reported that Dease's party consisted of about eighty individuals who entered the "insurgent's" camp. According to Dennis' informant, Father Lestanc was present at the meeting but took little or no part in the deliberations. Ritchot and others, however, were less "scrupulous." Ritchot declared "in favour of the stand taken, and called upon the insurgents to maintain their ground." Ritchot's intervention "had the effect of even withdrawing then and there some twenty or thereabouts of Dease's party over to their side."⁵⁶

Ritchot's discussion of his purpose in attending this meeting is intriguing in that he claims that it was only prompted by the warning of "un ami;" of Dease's dangerous plans for a possible fight. The "amie" in question was William Mactavish since that is the name crossed out and replaced by the less definite phrase. The note, sent on the

⁵⁵ APSN, Ritchot, Cahier II.

⁵⁶ CSP 1870, J. S. Dennis to W. McDougall, 27 October 1869. A footnote to the memorandum suggests that Ritchot "raved and tore his gown, addressing the assemblage in the most frantic and excited manner."

twenty-sixth, called on Ritchot to use his influence and try to dissuade the militants from their course since all other efforts had failed. The passage which Ritchot may have regarded as his warning reads:

I am very desirous you should see the men, if you consider it possible, as the Council yesterday appointed Mr. W. Dease, with some others, to see the men who are now watching the road to Pembina, in the hope that they might be induced to disperse; but I confess I have have so little hope in Mr. Dease's success, that I prefer the risk of inconveniencing you, in the hopes that by your efforts beforehand, Mr. Dease's meeting with the other party may be unnecessary.⁵⁷

In his later recollections of the letter, William Cowan claimed that Mactavish had rescinded the Order-in-Council after learning that Dease's party was to appear in arms at St. Norbert. This and the knowledge that Ritchot was a "prime mover" among the French are what prompted Mactavish to send the note.⁵⁸ Whatever the case, Mactavish wanted to avoid an armed collision among the Métis and sought Ritchot's help in doing so.

Having lost yet another confrontation with the militants, Dease led his remaining supporters to a home in the vicinity of the militants.⁵⁹ The moderates went to the nearby home of

⁵⁷ Report of the Select Committee on the Causes of the Difficulties in the North-West Territories in 1869-70; Journals of the House of Commons, Appendix 6; 1874. (Hereafter Select Committee, 1874). Doc. #85. William Mactavish to Ritchot, 26 October 1896.

⁵⁸ Ibid., Cowan Testimony, p. 128.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Joseph Charette. There they ran up a bill for £3.3 on the credit of the Council of Assiniboia which Charette was still trying to collect seven years later.⁶⁰ Dease's party remained at Charette's for two or three days but soon dispersed out of fear of reprisals against their own families.⁶¹

Dease's efforts to subvert the leadership of Riel and Ritchot had ended in total disaster. Not only had he twice failed to win his case by argument, but his attempt to arouse the rest of the Métis against the militants had only increased their numbers as more became aware of the issues at stake. Prior to the twenty-seventh the Rielites had perhaps numbered only a little more than a hundred men. After the meeting their numbers were increased not only by the defectors from Dease's side, but also by the others who had rallied to the defence of the militants in the face of the rumours Dease was accused of spreading. Ritchot recognized the ironic turn of events in his remarks on the meeting which unfortunately also end his narrative. "De ce moment, le camp prit de l'importance et ce qui avait d'avant parut devoir ruiner et tuer le partie lui redonna la vie⁶².

⁶⁰ PAM, MG12, B4, Alexander Morris Papers, #1413, William Cowan to Alexander Morris, 7 February 1877.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² APSN, Ritchot, Cahier I.

It is difficult to determine what motivated Dease to act as he had during the early stages of the resistance. Ritchot, of course, believed him to be a paid tool of Schultz and Dennis, but such an interpretation is not necessarily the case. Dease had received a contract to supply the Survey team under Webb with a number of carts, draught animals, and men. Whether this arrangement constituted the purchase of his honour as Ritchot intimated is open to question.⁶³ Dease was after all a Councillor and would have felt he had a role to play on behalf of the Métis in face of the Transfer. It must also be recalled that Dease was not alone in his opposition to the Riel faction. Many others such as Pascal Breland, Charles Nolin, and Roger Goulet would slip in and out of neutrality or opposition to Riel as events unfolded. Dease's motives may have been no better or worse than any of these individuals. His mistake was that his alternative strategies of overthrowing the HBC government in July and allowing McDougall to enter in October were too similar to the positions advocated by the hated Canadians in the Colony.⁶⁴ Whatever his exact motivation, Dease was not content to accept defeat on the political stage. After the fiasco of the twenty-seventh, he asked Governor Mactavish

⁶³ Dease's role with the surveys is found in CSP 1870, in a Table representing the composition and pay of the two Survey parties. James McKay was the similar supplier to the party under Milner Hart.

⁶⁴ See Morton, "Introduction", p. 33 for a brief discussion of this point.

for enough guns and ammunition to arm a party of fifteen who would ride south to meet McDougall and escort him into the Colony via the old crossing of la Rivière Sale. Mactavish refused his dangerous request as did Dennis when he was approached by Dease for provisions.⁶⁵

On the heels of Dease's failure, other attempts were made by persons of influence to pacify the militant French. Two members of the Council of Assiniboia, William Fraser of the Middlechurch district and John Sutherland of East Kildonan, visited St. Norbert where they were taken to Ritchot's house. Ritchot attempted to convince them that any effort to deter the Métis would be futile before giving way to their insistence and taking them into the presence of the Métis Council. They were greeted by a Committee of ten who apparently were in the midst of a meeting. However, before they could proceed with their presentation, the envoys had to await the arrival of John Bruce.⁶⁶ The efforts of Fraser and Sutherland were no more fruitful than those of Dease. The two had been delegated by a number of their fellow Councillors who had met that morning with Dennis to consider the failure of Dease. Their message was to be that the Métis had no sympathy among the English. They reported the result

⁶⁵ CSP 1870, Dennis to McDougall, 27 October 1869.

⁶⁶ Bruce of course was the nominal leader of the militants but was generally regarded at the time, and by later historians, to be no more than a figurehead. Nothing has been found in Ritchot's papers to alter this perception.

of their mission to Dennis who in turn submitted the information to McDougall.⁶⁷ Dennis added that "the strength of the party, every member of which, so far as they [Fraser and Sutherland] saw, was completely armed, at about one hundred and fifty men."⁶⁸ The same dispatch noted that William Hallett, a prominent leader of the English Métis, attempted the same mission. When at one point he began to address the Council in "Indian" [likely Saukteaux] Ritchot called up from below the stairs demanding he speak in French.⁶⁹

The visits of Sutherland, Fraser, and Hallett seem to have taken place in the morning, since Ritchot would not have been there in the afternoon. In response to the aforementioned note sent by Mactavish, the St. Norbert curé descended to Fort Garry to meet with the Governor. The meeting was later described as a "warm discussion of the matter."⁷⁰ Mactavish at first felt that he had induced Ritchot to assist in restoring order. The authorities and Colonel Dennis soon learned otherwise. The next day Dease reported that after Ritchot's return to St. Norbert, the priest claimed that their movement had the support of Mactavish. To this, Dennis advised McDougall that "If Mr. Ritchot made any such assertion, he has stated it for the pur-

⁶⁷ CSP 1870, J.S. Dennis to McDougall, 28 October 1869.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Select Committee, 1874; Cowan Testimony, p. 128.

pose of intentionally misleading his party and maintaining his control over them."⁷¹

It is of course quite conceivable that Dennis was absolutely correct in charging Ritchot with having lied about the tenor of the meeting with the Governor. However, Ritchot later testified that in his note, Mactavish had asked him to remain among the Métis as a moderating influence. Since the Governor's name was among the few Ritchot tried to excise from his notes, some credence might also be given to Ritchot's interpretation. Without further evidence, one can only speculate about the nature of the meeting between the pacifist Governor of Assiniboia and the parish priest of St. Norbert. A plausible scenario would have Ritchot responding to Mactavish's note by visiting the Fort to explain his position. So far as the meeting itself is concerned, the Governor likely did ask Ritchot to play a moderating role among the Métis; but only after having failed to convince Ritchot to abandon his militant course. Ritchot would not be above turning this final request to advantage by suggesting to his associates that the Governor was prepared to tolerate a peaceful protest.

From the date of their decision to invoke the customary organization of the buffalo hunt 20 October, to Ritchot's meeting with Mactavish, the militants were in the main pre-

⁷¹ CSP 1870, Dennis to McDougall, 29 October 1869.

occupied with heading off possible diplomatic and armed threats to the cohesion of their followers. The end result, achieved before McDougall reached Pembina, was that the efforts of Dease, Dennis, Mactavish, and the Council only demonstrated the incapacity of their opponents to mount any kind of concerted effort to disperse them. In fact the size of the camp at St. Norbert, and the resolve of the men in it, were only increased by the efforts to quell the disturbance. As a means to deal with these increasing numbers and to eliminate the possibility of any further efforts to subvert their leadership, Riel and the others decided to give their organization a more formal character and to bind the general population more closely to it.

Although the Minutes of these deliberations exist in part, it is difficult to ascertain precise dates for many of the resolutions. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to suggest that the initial motions to formalize the make-up of the Métis Council followed Ritchot's meeting with Mactavish. The interview confirmed the Council of Assiniboia's incapacity to do anything either for or against the Métis in arms. The list of resolutions, in the same Ritchot notebook as those which were carried in the home of John Bruce on 20 October, begin with a statement to the effect that the "Council of the French-Canadian Métis" met at St. Norbert under the presidency of John Bruce. The fact that the Council had, till then, been meeting less formally is suggested by

the reference, in parentheses, that Riel was asked to act as secretary.⁷² The first resolution claimed that it was necessary to codify the laws of the prairie and that they would be in force among the Métis and any of their compatriots who might want to join them. The Code would only be lifted when "une Puissance Supérieure dument autorisées", replaced the Métis assemblies or their Council.⁷³

Acting on this motion, the committee then resolved that the new government would be composed of the elected representatives of the people, a president, a vice president and a secretary. The executive was to be chosen from amongst the representatives who would make the selection by secret ballot. Once the executive was chosen, the president's seat among the representatives was to be filled by a newly elected member. The secretary and the vice-president retained their duties as representatives from the parishes. Unfortunately, due to a missing page, resolutions three to seven are unknown. They may have dealt with the election process. When the text resumed with the eighth resolution, Louis Riel, seconded by François Dauphinais, declared that it was urgent to have the elected representatives swear an oath of fidelity to the people. The next motion, presented by Louis Lacerte and Baptiste Tourond, called on all the Councillors to swear to administer the Government and to make laws and

⁷² APSN, Ritchot, Cahier II.

⁷³ Ibid., emphasis in original.

ordinances to the best of their ability for the benefit of the people and the country. Riel then proposed that the people currently assembled be told of the code, and that their approval be sought in order to give it the force of law. A follow-up motion calling for an assembly at the barrier to explain the code was then presented by Patrice Breland. The "code du Sénat Métis dejas connu du peuple" would be once again explained to them at that spot.⁷⁴

The next two pages of Ritchot's Minute book have been torn out. His notes of the meeting at La Barrière, which took place 30 October, are limited to indicating that after the Code was explained, the assembly agreed that the "Métis Council or Senate" had the sole authority to name public functionaries and members of the military. Also on the same page, but covered with a fading blot of ink, is an almost illegible passage recording Ritchot's own nomination, acceptance, and swearing in as a member of the Métis Council.⁷⁵ Thus by the end of October, the party organization of the Métis was in place under the guidance of duly sworn officers and representatives who were in turn supported by several hundred sworn and armed men. This organization was in mark-

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid. It is fortunate that the ink which covers the text in question and other portions of both Cahiers seems to be fading at a faster rate than the text they were supposed to conceal. The legibility of these passages only becomes apparent on reading the originals which are still in the Archives of St. Norbert Parish.

ed contrast to the faltering Council of Assiniboia who on that same day met for the last time as the governing body of the Colony, and to McDougall's Government in waiting which arrived at Pembina that evening.

On reaching the HBC post two miles north of the frontier, McDougall was handed the note of 21 October. Janvier Ritchot had been waiting for him for over a week. The note, and a number of dispatches prepared by Dennis apprising him of the seriousness of the Métis, and of failed efforts to break up the movement, were enough to convince the Governor-Designate to remain where he was. McDougall was not taken completely by surprise by these events. He had begun hearing rumours of impending trouble almost as soon as he had reached St. Paul. On reaching Fort Abercrombie, he was concerned enough to place the 350 Enfield rifles in his baggage under the care of the American authorities there.⁷⁶

Warned that further advance on his part would be dangerous, McDougall dispatched his Secretary-Designate, J.A.N. Provencher, to Fort Garry with a verbal message for Mactavish. He was to tell the HBC Governor of their arrival in the territory and of McDougall's request for the protection of the authorities. Provencher, a former editor of La Mignerve and a nephew of the first Bishop of St. Boniface, was further to communicate with the "insurgents" in order to de-

⁷⁶ CSP 1870, McDougall to General Hart, 4 November 1869.

termine their numbers and their intentions. The Secretary was to "assure them of the determination of the Government to deal justly with all classes and to respect existing rights without reference to race or religion."⁷⁷ Nonetheless, so long as the Métis remained in arms, McDougall would refuse to conduct or condone any official communications with them.

On leaving Pembina on the morning of the 31st, Provencher noticed that his progress was being monitored by mounted scouts. One of them fell in behind his wagon in the late afternoon and refused to give his name. When it became apparent that St. Norbert could not be reached that same day, Provencher put up at a house near the road. The Métis owner kept watch and made sure that the Canadian did not slip away under cover of night.⁷⁸ Provencher reached the barricade early the next morning and found it guarded by about thirty to forty men. Unable to proceed further, he asked to be taken to the "chief officer in command." He was then escorted to Ritchot's residence. Later, Provencher would record only that "It was about four or five minutes walk beyond the fence."⁷⁹ As he had arrived before the church service celebrating All-Saints Day, the visitor was invited to attend. Only afterwards did he speak to some men he "as-

⁷⁷ CSP 1870, McDougall to Howe, 31 October 1869.

⁷⁸ CSP 1870, Provencher to McDougall, 3 November 1869.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

sumed" were the leaders.

In his report, Provencher noted that the men knew nothing of what had occurred in either the Imperial and Canadian parliaments. The Métis understood Canada had paid the HBC £300,000 for their rights in the country. Provencher claimed that he attempted to fill this gap with protestations of Canada's good intentions and that the reaction of the individuals he spoke to was quite positive. Nonetheless, he was advised that it was too late because the Métis had already formed their government, framed a constitution and held elections. Furthermore, they were in the process of negotiating with the English and Protestant Métis as to future action. The Canadian learned that the militants had taken matters in hand because they had not been consulted about the transfer. Provencher admitted to McDougall that "they had been greatly abused by a few people, looked upon as representing the views of the Canadian Government."⁸⁰ Finally at 4 P.M., he was taken to John Bruce who listened politely to Provencher's explanations of Canada's good intentions before declaring the proceedings to be unofficial and at an end. In terminating his report to McDougall, the emissary noted that in spite of popular demand that he be allowed to speak to the camp as a whole, the leadership refused him that freedom.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Provencher's recollection of his mission for the benefit of McDougall appears to be incomplete. Nowhere does the French Canadian mention the name of Riel or Ritchot, nor the presbytery which served as the headquarters of the movement. It would seem obvious that Ritchot would have been his principal contact among the militants. In a later affidavit, André Nault claimed that Riel spoke with the visitor.⁸¹ Within a week of Provencher's visit, Dennis was reporting to McDougall that the priests and others had "assured" him that while at St. Norbert, "Mr. Provencher stated to them that he thought they were doing right and that all [McDougall's] cabinet was to be draughted from Canada."⁸² Dennis went on to caution that Provencher may have said what he did to insure his safety or that the informants were lying. Nevertheless, given Provencher's selective memory concerning the specifics about where he was taken and to whom he spoke, it seems possible that like many other of his compatriots, he developed sympathy for the Métis cause.

Provencher was not the only one of McDougall's entourage to attempt the road to Fort Garry. Several hours after the sanctioned departure of Provencher, Captain D.R. Cameron, R.A., set off without the blessing of the would-be Governor. On reaching St. Norbert, Cameron was taken prisoner by the

⁸¹ PAM, Nault Affidavit.

⁸² PAC, Macdonald Papers, pp.40692-706, Dennis to McDougall, 8 November 1869.

Métis and placed in a private home to await a decision from the leaders about what to do with him. Later, Cameron reported not a word about his capture. What does emerge in his writings is that while at St. Norbert he had conversation with Ritchot who, perhaps in order to gain information, attempted to cover-up his own role in Cameron's embarrassment. from this latest captive. Cameron's description of the discussion was that

he offered me all manner of sympathy at a time that he was supplying the french 1/2 breeds at the barrier close by his house--with meat & vegetables. he pretended that he was very desirous to permit me to pass on--always careful, however, to exert himself less in my behalf than those who opposed me.⁸³

The stopping of Cameron at the barrier and the subsequent demise of McDougall's government in waiting signalled the end of Cameron's expected role as first officer of what might have become the Northwest Mounted Police and pacifier of the natives. For the moment, however, Cameron continued to see himself as the military man on the spot who would inevitably lead Her Majesty's forces against the "rebels."

The plan of action submitted by Cameron to the Prime Minister was to have a regiment sent via the United States "dressed as bourgeois" in order to keep the Métis off guard and to rally the "loyal" settlers.⁸⁴

⁸³ Ibid., p. 40999-41002, Cameron to Sir John Young, 30 December 1869.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 40759-78, Cameron to Macdonald, 3 November

McDougall was soon giving Macdonald the same advice but with a few twists. The frustrated Governor called for fifteen hundred Canadian volunteers, five hundred of which would travel via the United States where they could pick up the arms left at Fort Abercrombie. The rest were to proceed via Fort William in the spring. McDougall closed his own military assessment of the situation with the telling statement: "But for Heaven's sake don't send us any more Captains of the Royal Artillery with glass eyes. [Cameron wore a monocle] There is not much use for that arm of the service on the prairies."⁸⁵

The arrival of McDougall at Pembina and the attempts of some of his entourage to reach Fort Garry prompted the Métis Council to meet in the evening of 1 November. During this session, three resolutions were passed. The first called on Pierre Lèveillé, Pierre Poitras, and François Dauphinais to organize a troop to escort Provencher and Cameron back across the boundary and to do the same with McDougall. The mission was eventually carried out under the leadership of Ambroise Lépine who had only just arrived on the scene. The next motion called for the confiscation of all weapons belonging to merchants passing on the roads and elsewhere. They were to be stored for safe keeping until such time as

1869.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 40692-706, McDougall to Macdonald, 8 November 1869.

the Council saw fit to return them. Finally, in a resolution prompted by the arrival of the cart train carrying the Governor's baggage and that of the others, it was decided to confiscate "all objects of whatever nature" belonging to the Canadian Government for the benefit of the Métis Senate.⁸⁶

All-Saints' Day, 1 November 1869, represents the high point in the Resistance which had begun with the driving off of Canadian squatters and speculators early in the summer. By the beginning of November, Canada's attempt to quietly assume authority over the Northwest had been checked with the stopping of the surveys and the isolation of McDougall and his party. While Cameron and Provencher were being escorted back towards Pembina, Ritchot and Riel celebrated their victory by erecting a wooden cross near the site of the barrier which had been the focal point of the St. Norbert camp and the effort to stop McDougall. Triumphant in their defence of the cause, they appended the inscription: "Digitus Dei est hic", (God's finger is here).⁸⁷

Certainly one of the agents of the Catholic Church was omnipresent. Without Ritchot's presence to organize, legitimize, and encourage the resistance, it seems unlikely the young Riel could have withstood the early efforts to breakup

⁸⁶ APSN, Ritchot, Cahier II.

⁸⁷ L.A. Prud'homme, "La Barrière de Saint-Norbert."

the movement. Had that occurred, McDougall would have reached Fort Garry or been shot in the attempt. Either way, the rest of the Colony and the Canadians would have been aroused and united against the Métis militants. Having demonstrated their ability to make their will felt with only implied violence, the Métis kept and continued to keep their opponents divided and weak.

Chapter III

PRELUDE TO NEGOTIATION WITH CANADA, DECEMBER 1869-APRIL 1870

After the bloodless coup which saw the Métis seize control of Fort Garry and supplant the moribund administration of the HBC, Ritchot's major public contribution was his role in negotiating the terms of entry into Confederation. The first formal list of conditions appeared in the wake of McDougall's self-proclamation as Governor of the Territory on 1 December. Unable to reach Fort Garry, McDougall had remained at Pembina where he became convinced a declaration of his authority would draw the English-speaking settlers to his banner in opposition to the Métis. When it appeared the plan might work, Riel countered by offering to allow McDougall to assume office if he could guarantee the rights of the settlers under Canadian rule. Asked by the English settlers what those demands would entail, Riel and the other Métis leaders drew up the first "List of Rights."¹

The equally well-known second list, followed the appearance of Donald A. Smith as both a Canadian emissary and subversive. Provided with diplomatic credentials by Prime Minister Macdonald, Smith had also been asked to engineer

¹ Stanley, Riel, p. 72-73.

the overthrow of the Provisional Government through covert means.² When Smith arrived in the settlement and saw the results of the failed counter-coup led by Dennis and Schultz, he realized Riel's movement could withstand any local attempt to defeat it militarily. Smith, however, was able to force Riel to call a mass meeting of the settlement to hear him speak of Canada's good intentions. The HBC officer hoped to secure a call for the reestablishment of Company rule but was thwarted when the Métis leader called for a second round of elections to select forty delegates "to decide what would be best for the welfare of the country."³ The so-called Convention of Forty drew up a second "List of Rights" which was presented to Smith for his comments. As the emissary did not have the power to grant any of the demands, he was forced to make public a Dominion invitation to have delegates sent to Ottawa to argue Red River's case before the Canadian Government. The day following Smith's announcement of 7 February 1870, the convention unanimously approved a resolution which had been put forward by James Ross and Louis Riel, the leading spokesmen for each of the linguistic communities:

That as the Canadian Commissioners have invited a delegation from this country to Canada, to confer with the Canadian Government as to the affairs of this country and as a cordial reception has been

² PAC, Macdonald Papers, p. 648, Macdonald to Rose, 5 December 1869; also p. 713, Macdonald to McDougall, 12 December 1869.

³ Ibid., p. 91.

promised to said delegates--be it therefore resolved that the invitation be accepted and that the same be signified to the Commissioners.⁴

On 11 February, Riel nominated Ritchot, Judge John Black, and Alfred H. Scott to be the delegates to Ottawa. The endorsement of these nominations was one of the last acts of the Convention before their adjournment in favour of the reconstituted Provisional Government. The delegates were, however, not to leave until after the first sitting of the new regime.⁵ The nature of their nomination and the recommended timetable makes it difficult to determine if the delegates were to act as agents of the Convention of Forty or of the Provisional Government. At the time, the distinction was unimportant to many. However, the technicality was significant enough to Riel for him to want the delegates commissioned by the Provisional Government. He, perhaps more than any other, realized how Ottawa might view such details. Ritchot was soon informed that he had been appointed by the "President of the North West Territories" as a commissioner along with Black and Scott "to treat with the Government of The Dominion of Canada"⁶. The other delegates received similar notes. Before the new government could attend to the proper instruction of its delegates and its other responsi-

⁴ Begg Journal, 8 February, p. 300. The other commissioners were Father Jean Baptiste Thibault and Colonel Charles De Salaberry.

⁵ Ibid., 11 February, p. 304-5.

⁶ AASB, T 7214-23, Thomas Bunn to Ritchot, 12 February 1870.

bilities, it first had to deal with yet another attempted challenge by the "Canadas" and another messenger from Ottawa, Bishop Alexandre Taché.

The second Canadian uprising and the local repercussions have been well presented elsewhere.⁷ Less well documented is the communication between Ritchot and his Bishop once Taché arrived home from Rome on 8 March after a lengthy absence. He had returned early at the request of the Dominion Government who, after having ignored his previous pleas to avert trouble in the Northwest, now wanted him to help them end the difficulties. Macdonald and Cartier hoped that the Bishop's influence might convince the Métis to cease their resistance. In effect, Taché was to be yet another emissary of good-will. Taché, however, was assured, or at least was led to believe, that a general amnesty would be proclaimed and that delegates from Red River would be well received. These were the messages he delivered to Ritchot on his arrival at St. Norbert on 8 March, to Riel, Lépine, and O'Donoghue on 11 March, and to the Council of the Provisional Government four days later.⁸ Taché's faith in the amnesty promises was unshaken by either the execution of Scott on 4

⁷ The military threat to the Provisional Government is amply dealt with in Stanley, pp. 100-117; Morton, "Introduction", pp. 100-116; and Begg Journal, 10 February-5 March, p. 303-328.

⁸ For a discussion of Taché's return to the settlement see Stanley, pp. 118-33 and Begg Journal, 9 March, p. 311, to the end of his Journal. See also Select Committee, 1874; Taché Testimony, p. 18.

March or the qualifications that had been placed on the written version of it supplied to him by Macdonald and the Governor General on 16 February. He based this decision on the various discussions he had in Ottawa with the Prime Minister and other Cabinet members. In a conversation with Macdonald, Taché responded to the former's expressions of good intentions by stating: "This is all very well, but there have been acts committed which are blameworthy, and there may be some others before my arrival there. May I promise them an amnesty?" The Prime Minister's reply was affirmative and unconditional.⁹

Taché was also able to advise Riel's Council that Canada was familiar with the Bill of Rights and did not see much that was difficult about it. This assertion was based on a telegram he had received from Joseph Howe.¹⁰ Presented with this additional encouragement from Ottawa, Riel and his associates began to provide their delegates with the diplomatic tools necessary for their mission.

⁹ Select Committee, 1874; Taché Testimony. The Bishop's role in the thorny Amnesty question is beyond the scope of this discussion except inasmuch as it touches on Ritchot's involvement. However the best primer on Taché's dealings with the smoke and mirrors of Ottawa is to be found in the above noted Testimony.

¹⁰ The text read: "Proposition [Bill of Rights] in the main satisfactory, but let the delegates come here and settle the details." (Select Committee, 1874; Doc. #8, Howe to Taché, 25 February 1870).

For his part, Ritchot was anxious to leave. Begg noted that on 2 March, "Mr. Ri[t]chot was to call on Riel to-day to see when the delegates are to leave for Ottawa--if they do not leave soon, it is said he will not go as other duties will prevent him."¹¹ These "other duties" were perhaps a veiled reference to possible interdiction on the part of Taché who was then approaching the settlement. The notion that Ritchot might have wanted to avoid his Bishop is supported by the disappearance of visible clerical support after the arrival of the Bishop.¹² The priest soon received a note from Riel which complained of how time was passing while work was being done on the Bill of Rights. Nonetheless, the President hoped his delegates would be able to leave before the end of the week if Judge Black's hesitancy could be overcome.¹³

Riel's mention of the Bill of Rights was a reference to the substantial changes which were being made to the document as drawn-up by the convention of February. Prior to the departure of the delegates, a third and even a fourth version were prepared by Riel and his more intimate associates. Such alteration of the express will of the convention has provoked occasional controversy, but it must be remembered that the resulting Manitoba Act was approved by the

¹¹ Begg Journal, 2 March, p. 326.

¹² PAM, Nault Affidavit.

¹³ APSN, Riel to Ritchot, 2 March 1870.

elected members of the Provisional Government. Thus a debate over the "legitimacy" of the changes can only be considered sterile and will not be entered into here.¹⁴ The work was completed by 22 March at which time the commissions and instructions of the delegates were finalized, and passed on to Ritchot by Taché who went up to St. Norbert to bid his subordinate farewell.¹⁵

Included in the documents carried by Taché was a personal message to the departing priest. The note might be considered an additional set of instructions prepared by Ritchot's religious superior. The central theme of Taché's recorded thoughts was that an agreement with Canada outweighed absolute principles. The Bishop was afraid that Ritchot's commitment to the movement might jeopardize a peaceful settlement of the difficulties between Red River and Canada. Ritchot was told that as a delegate he not only had the obligation to rely on his own conscience, but also on divine inspiration and on the opinions of others who by "position and education" had a right to the priest's confidence. Realizing the temper of many in Canada, Taché almost pleaded with Ritchot to reach an agreement with Canada.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the revision of the list see Stanley, Louis Riel, pp. 131-32. and Morton, "Introduction" pp. 119-21.

¹⁵ AASB, Ta 0671, 0672, Taché to Riel, 22 and 23 March 1870. These notes consist of Taché requesting that the documents promised Ritchot be ready by noon on the 22nd and then advising Riel of Ritchot's departure.

c'est notre seule planche de salut, c'est notre seul espoir. Pour obtenir ce but, laissez-moi vous le dire, il ne faut point de volonté absolue. Vous avez vos opinions, fort bien; d'un autre côté, d'autres ont les leurs. Il est bien difficile de dire que dans tous les cas ils sont et moins sincères et moins inspirés.¹⁶

Taché's advocacy of compromise over failure continued with the prayer that Ritchot would return with an agreement which "si non parfait," would be satisfactory for the country and to the Métis.¹⁷

The Bishop's desire for a settlement went beyond his natural concern for the country where he had laboured for over twenty-five years. During his absence, his clergy had identified themselves with the resistance and were deeply implicated in Riel's movement. A successful and healing end to the difficulties would allow his priests to "congratulate themselves for their actions before God and man alike." Part of Taché's closing comments clearly summarizes his ambivalent feelings about Ritchot as a delegate. "ce n'est pas moi qui mettrai en question vos intentions, je vous sais trop sincère; si quelque chose pouvait m'inquiéter ce serait peut-être un excès de sincérité."¹⁸

¹⁶ The letter was printed in LCSB XXX pp. 163-64; while the original is in AASB, T 0660-63.

¹⁷ Ibid., emphasis in original.

¹⁸ Ibid.

In contrast to Taché's fears of obstinacy, the messages given Ritchot by the Provisional Government made it clear that Ritchot was expected to fight for the acceptance of the Bill of Rights. The official documents, all signed by Thomas Bunn as Secretary of State, consisted of a commission, a letter of instructions, and, in the case of Ritchot, at least, the fourth and final version of the list of rights. Referring to the twenty articles in the list, Bunn advised the delegates that articles 1,2,3,4,6,7,15,17,19, and 20 were discretionary. Nonetheless, the premier delegate was reminded to never forget that the complete confidence of the people was on his shoulders and they counted on him to do all in his power to assure those rights which till then had been denied.¹⁹

The delegates were also told that they did not have the power to finalize arrangements with the Canadian Government. Any agreements arrived at would have to be presented to and ratified by the Provisional Government. If the delegates still entertained doubts as to who they were representing in

¹⁹ Thomas Bunn to Delegates; 22 March 1870. AASB, T 7214-23 contains a "True Copy" of Ritchot's letter which was written in French and was somewhat stronger in tone than the English versions provided to Scott and Black. At odds with the above is a somewhat different copy of the same letter published in Georges Dugas, Histoire Véridique, which does not include 17 and 19 among the negotiable clauses. Since the nineteenth clause contained the critical request for amnesty, one must wonder if the Dugas version, undocumented as it is, might indeed be closer to the verbal instructions given Ritchot if not the written ones.

Ottawa, these were dispelled by their commissions which opened with the phrase,

Sir.--The President of the Provisional Government of Assiniboia (formerly Rupert's Land and the North-West) in council do hereby authorize and delegate you [Ritchot] to proceed to the city of Ottawa²⁰.

Thus burdened with the contradictory wishes of his political and religious leaders, Ritchot finally left St. Norbert for Ottawa on 23 March in the company of Colonel De Salaberry. They were joined at Pointe Coupée the next morning by Alfred Scott before proceeding on to Pembina which was reached in the evening of the 26th.²¹ While at Pembina, Ritchot wrote the first of what would be many reports to his Bishop who in turn was to pass on the contents to Riel and the rest of the Government. After asking for Taché's blessing for "le pitieux délégué partie de St. Norbert," Ritchot made two observations on the Bill of Rights. He regretted the lack of a clause allowing the delegates to settle the details of the federal subsidy and complained of a lack of

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ At this point the narrative of Ritchot's activities shall rely mainly on Ritchot's famous Ottawa Journal which has been published in unedited form by G.F. Stanley in La Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique Française (RHAF) March 1964; and has been translated and edited by W.L. Morton in his Birth of A Province, Contrary to what is stated by both editors, the original document still exists in the Archives Paroissial de Saint-Norbert and a microfilm copy is available in the Provincial Archives of Manitoba. For the most part Stanley's presentation will be used as the basis of what follows in the discussion of the negotiations.

detail in the eighth clause which dealt with the federal and provincial franchise.²²

Ritchot and his companions left Pembina on the 26th after which they were joined by Judge Black who was travelling with Charles Boulton, the nominal leader of the February uprising. Together they caught up with J.A.N. Provencher who had spent the winter at Pembina. Travelling at night in order to avoid the worst effects of the thaw on the roads, the group finally reached the rail-head at St. Paul on 7 April. There Ritchot was dogged by reporters but avoided them by declaring his ignorance of English.²³ From St. Paul, Black and Boulton were able to take the train to Detroit and then to Toronto. Unlikely to receive a kind welcome in an Ontario inflamed by the death of Thomas Scott, Ritchot and Alfred Scott proceeded south of the Great Lakes to Ogdensburg, New York. There they were met by Gilbert McMicken of the Dominion Police who escorted them to Ottawa which was reached in the late afternoon of 11 April.²⁴ Ritchot would later refer to this initial contact as the first example of the official recognition of the delegation's status as representatives of the Northwest.²⁵

²² AASB, T 7240, Ritchot to Taché, Pembina, 26 March 1870.

²³ AASB, T 7275, Father J.B. Guernin to Taché, St. Paul, Minnesota, 7 April 1870.

²⁴ "Le Journal de l'Abbé N-J Ritchot-1870", RHAF, 11 April, p. 540 (Hereafter "Ritchot Journal").

²⁵ PAM, MG2, C14, Ross Papers, #528, "Report of Reverend

During the course of his lengthy and tiresome journey, Ritchot no doubt gave much thought to the important task which lay ahead for him in Ottawa. In order to receive what information he could from Red River, he asked the Bishop to write him often.²⁶ In the same note, the delegate likened his mission to that of a fisherman. The fish could either swim into his net or be guided by the hand of Providence. Either way, Ritchot was optimistic, if only because of his faith. His adversary in Ottawa had also given some thought to the forthcoming negotiations, but his faith in success had less to do with Providence than with patronage.

The Prime Minister had good reason to be sanguine about the arrival of delegates from Red River. Recently he had defused a serious "repeal" movement in Nova Scotia by the granting of minor concessions and patronage, highlighted by the appointment of Joseph Howe to the Cabinet. Shortly after his meetings with Taché, Macdonald reported the Bishop was in agreement with the needs of the Dominion Government and shared similar sentiments with regard to the possible appointment of an Imperial Commissioner to mediate between Canada and its reluctant acquisition. The mutual fear, according to Macdonald, was that the conciliatory proposals of

Ritchot to the Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia, 24 June 1870"; notes prepared by William Coldwell, (hereafter Ritchot Report), p. 6.

²⁶ AASB, T 7261-64, Ritchot to Taché, Sauk Centre, 5 April 1870.

"an overwashed Englishman, utterly ignorant of the Country and full of crochets . . .", would be unacceptable to the Canadian Parliament.²⁷ Compromise lay far from Macdonald's mind in late February. This intransigence is evident by his reference to the possible arrival of negotiators from the troubled region.

Everything looks well for a delegation coming to Ottawa including the redoubtable Riel. If we once get him here, as you must know pretty well by this time, he is a gone coon. There is no place for him in the ministry for him to sit next to Howe, but perhaps we may make him a Senator for the Territory.²⁸

Whatever the result of possible negotiations, Macdonald was still insistent, as he had been from the beginning, that a military expedition be sent to the Northwest in the spring. This force would then be replaced by a territorial police force based on the Irish Constabulary. In the Prime Minister's mind the imposition of an armed force was necessary because,

We must never subject the government there to the humiliations offered Mr. McTavish [sic]. These impulsive half-breeds have got spoilt by this émeute and must be kept down by a strong hand until they are swamped by the influx of settlers.²⁹

²⁷ PAC, Macdonald Papers, Vol. 14, pp. 24-28, Macdonald to Rose, 23 February 1870.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

The shooting of Scott only reinforced Macdonald's desire for a military demonstration of Canadian authority if only to ease the vengeful furor raised in Ontario by Schultz and Mair. The need for the legitimizing presence of British Regulars, however, allowed the Mother Country to increase its involvement in the dispute between Canada and the citizens of the Northwest. This involvement meant, that in the end, it was the Imperial Government, rather than Providence, who guided the fish into Ritchot's "net."

The issue of an Expedition to Red River was raised formally by a Cabinet memorandum prepared in early February. After referring to the mass meetings of January and the possibility of Mactavish being restored to office, the Prime Minister belittled such a result by suggesting he would still lack any real authority. The assertion was then made that the leaders of the resistance had declared themselves for annexation to the United States. Macdonald further claimed that even if their followers forced them into negotiations with Canada, their "good faith" would be doubtful. Insofar as the negotiations themselves were concerned, Macdonald intimated that they would likely fail if an insistence were made on some of the "altogether inadmissable" demands found in their list of rights.³⁰ The Prime Minister was referring to the December list since he had not yet heard

³⁰ PAC, Macdonald Papers, pp. 40423-33, Minute of Council, 4 February 1870.

of the final outcome of Smith's meeting with the settlers.

Having painted a picture of emasculated authority, annexationist adversaries, and futile negotiations, the Prime Minister came to his point. A military force would have to be sent up with the opening of navigation so as to be in place by the beginning of May. To that end, contracts had already been issued for the construction of the necessary boats. Macdonald then declared the need to have the Expedition "undertaken, organized, commanded, and carried through with the authority of Her Majesty's Government."³¹ Three reasons were then submitted: a demonstration of force would convince the Americans that Britain remained committed to her North American possessions, the troops would be more intimidating than "untried volunteers", and the Métis had not expressed antipathy towards Britain.

Following its submission to Cabinet, the memorandum was transmitted to London for presentation to the British Government as a request for troops.³² Within the week Macdonald was telegraphed the good news that the British would cooperate in the Expedition unless events rendered it unnecessary.³³ The telegram was soon followed by a longer note which advised the Canadians that the British did not want

³¹ Ibid.

³² PAC, Macdonald Papers, PP. 40441-44, Rose to Macdonald, 15 February 1870.

³³ Ibid., p. 40457, Rose to Macdonald, 21 February 1870.

the impression given that the Métis and Indians were to be "coerced" into accepting Canadian rule. To avoid such charges, Canada was to remain silent on the possible dispatch of British troops until after some concessions had been made to the citizens of Red River.³⁴ The Colonial Secretary, Lord Granville, reiterated this theme in a tersely worded telegram to Sir John Young, the Governor General of Canada.

The proposed military assistance will be given if reasonable terms are given to the Roman Catholic Settlers and if Canadian gov't enable H.M. Gov't to proclaim transfer simultaneous with movement of troops.³⁵

The initial Canadian response to these British conditions was prepared in London by John Rose who promised that Canada would be ready to complete the transfer as soon as her authority was peaceably established in the region.³⁶ Insofar as the other condition was concerned, Rose was unwilling or unable to offer the British any better assurances than those already presented to, and rejected by, the residents of Red River. Granville was provided with a package of documents which was almost identical to the one Smith had read on 19 and 20 January.³⁷ Granville was apparently as unimpressed

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 40458-61, Rose to Macdonald, 22 February 1870.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 40471, Granville to John Young, 5 March 1870.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 40482-85, Rose to R. Herbert [Office of the Colonial Secretary], 9 March 1870.

³⁷ Ibid., these included McDougall's original instructions, his further instructions from Howe dated 7 December 1870,

with these statements of good will as Riel had been. Consequently, he too preferred to place his faith in a negotiated arrangement between Canada and Red River. Three days before the arrival of Ritchot in Ottawa, Sir John Young was ordered to telegraph, as soon as possible, the results of the negotiations with the delegates and "at once whether your gov't accept our conditions as to time of transfer and apportionment of cost of troops."³⁸ Macdonald's initial response to Young was that the delegates were still being awaited, but were to arrive soon. As to the timing of the transfer, Canada would accept it at once "if England sends troops to act with ours and suppress the insurrection."³⁹ The Prime Minister went on to suggest that Canada would agree to any apportionment of the costs, so long as they were reasonable.

Macdonald's frustration with Britain's reluctance to support his plans for conquest became apparent in a follow-up letter to Young. The Prime Minister complained of Granville's position:

if we accept the Country, England will send Troops, but in his instructions to Sir C.[linton] M.[urdoch] he says the troops are not to be used to force the people to unite with Canada, in other words to be of no use.⁴⁰ Now if we accept the

Smith's commission and public instructions, etc.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 40583, Granville to Young, 9 April 1870.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 40584, Macdonald to Young, 9 April 1870.

⁴⁰ Clinton Murdoch was a British immigration commissioner

Country we are committed to its conquest and must go on. We can't return the Country to Her Majesty or the H.B. Company. Again why should we agree to pay for troops that may be ordered not to act when they get to Fort Garry? My idea is that Sir C. Murdoch should convince himself that the majority of the people desire union with Canada, and then procure a pledge from England by cable that the troops will be sent and used if necessary.⁴¹

With this explanation, Macdonald restated his previous day's suggestion that Granville be told that Canada would immediately assume the governing of the Territory if Britain would commit its troops to the suppression of the resistance.⁴² Young's telegram to Granville, however, was ambiguous as to the use of the troops. It only informed the Colonial Secretary that Canada would accept the transfer "if movement of troops settled."⁴³

For his part, Macdonald wrote to Lord Carnarvon, the former Colonial Secretary and Confederation ally. He perhaps intended that his influence might sway Granville into a more accommodating stance. The letter offered further arguments for the dispatch of troops. According to Macdonald, the citizens of Red River were loyal, "though they would have preferred their present wild and semi barbarous life to the

who, while visiting Canada, was asked by Granville to be his observer in the Red River matters. See Morton; Birth of a Province, p. xxviii, fn.

⁴¹ PAC, Macdonald Papers, pp. 40585-87, Macdonald to Young, 10 April 1870.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 40587, Young to Granville, 11 April 1870.

restraints of Civilization that will be forced on them by the Canadian Government and the new settlers."⁴⁴ Even so, he argued, the matter was almost settled until it became "a good deal complicated" by the shooting of Scott. The Scott incident was described by him as a "barbarous murder" authorized by a "sham Court" on the "most frivolous pretexts." Carnarvon was then told that the affair had raised passions to a point where retribution was being demanded against Riel and his associates. Furthermore the Canadian Government was being told to refuse to have anything to do with delegates sent by Riel. The Prime Minister, however, expressed the hope

that we will be able to manage matters so satisfactorily that the Expedition which is now being prepared and which must go, will be accepted not as a hostile Force, but as a friendly garrison.⁴⁵

Macdonald's expressions of satisfactory management were themselves, "a good deal complicated" however, by the conflicting desires of those who demanded an imposed settlement and those who wanted to secure terms more satisfactory to the Provisional Government.

During the course of his travels, Ritchot had been aware of a furor in Ontario over events in Red River. It was to avoid any difficulties that he and the delegate Scott had travelled through the United States as far as Ogdensburg

⁴⁴ Ibid., Vol. 14, pp. 129-32, Macdonald to Carnarvon, 14 April 1870.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

where they were met by McMicken and escorted to Ottawa. The Dominion Policeman confirmed Ritchot's decision to avoid Toronto and the priest began to wonder if the Scott affair would affect his mission adversely.⁴⁶ Nonetheless the delegates had been able to reach their destination without hindrance. Furthermore, initial indications were that all would go well.

After spending the night in the home of the Bishop of Ottawa, Ritchot was taken by De Salaberry to Parliament Hill where he was introduced to George Etienne Cartier. While little of substance passed between the Minister of Militia and the cleric, Ritchot was pleased with his cordial reception and with what he heard. Cartier told him that everything augured well and that the Government would not be distracted from its course by the cries emanating from "certain individuals" over the Scott incident. Nonetheless, Cartier expressed the hope that the furor could be allowed to run its course before beginning negotiations with the delegates who were awaiting Judge Black's arrival. Ritchot was invited to return the next day in order to introduce Cartier to Alfred Scott.⁴⁷ It would seem obvious that in spite of Cartier's optimistic demeanour, the government held grave concerns over the hysteria being fanned in Ontario and in the

⁴⁶ AASB, T 7288-90, Ritchot to Taché, 11 April 1870.

⁴⁷ Ritchot Journal, 12 April, p. 541.

House over the death of Scott.⁴⁸ Borrowing a page from MacDonald, Cartier believed that a delay in meeting the delegates officially would allow tempers to cool.

Following the meeting with Cartier, De Salaberry took Ritchot to the office of Joseph Howe. After the introductions were made, the delegate informed the Secretary of State that negotiations could begin as soon as Black arrived on the 14th.⁴⁹ The priest apparently was not concerned with the political needs of the ministry and was anxious to get on with his assigned task. During the course of the evening Ritchot was visited by J.C. Taché, brother of the Bishop of St. Boniface and Deputy Minister of Agriculture. Taché advised Ritchot that a settlement would likely take time and that he believed that troops would not go to Red River.⁵⁰ Ritchot also noted numerous Members of Parliament among his visitors and supporters. Nonetheless, he remained unconvinced that the Expedition would be cancelled. Furthermore, he advised Taché that prudence required he not write directly to Riel and that the Bishop act as the go-between.⁵¹ The cautious priest had heard many assurances of official good

⁴⁸ The temper of Ontario and of some of its M.P.s is evident in the records of the House of Commons. See House of Commons Debates, Volume III (hereafter Debates), pp. 828-31 and pp. 890-99 for the discussions of 4 and 6 April on the question.

⁴⁹ Ritchot Journal, 12 April, p. 541.

⁵⁰ AASB, T 7294-96, Ritchot to Taché, 13 April 1870.

⁵¹ Ibid.

intentions but he was unprepared to trust Her Majesty's Mail Service in light of the animosity he found waiting for him in Ontario.

Following the execution of Thomas Scott, an orchestrated campaign of indignation was launched in Ontario by a small group of influential individuals who styled themselves "Canada First." Exploiting sensationalized versions of the martyrdom of Scott and the fiery speeches of Schultz and others, the movement sought to force Ottawa to refuse any negotiations and crush the "rebellion" with troops. It was feared that a peaceful settlement would alter the Territory's projected destiny as an annex of Ontario. As Schultz phrased it to one public rally;

It was from Ontario this movement to add Red River to the Dominion commenced; it was in Ontario this expression of indignation was expressed; and it was to Ontario the Territory properly belonged.⁵²

Above and beyond the public manifestations of Ontario's outrage, more tangible steps were being taken to end the threat of negotiations. Hugh Scott, brother of the slain hero, was prevailed upon to secure a warrant from a Toronto police magistrate for the arrest of Ritchot and A.H. Scott. When it became known the two had bypassed Toronto, the warrant was forwarded to the Ottawa police for execution.

⁵² Cited in Stanley, Louis Riel, p. 138. The same work provides a useful treatment of the largely contrived indignation movement, pp. 134-39.

Shortly after his arrival in Ottawa, Ritchot learned that he was to be served with a warrant and that tensions in the bi-cultural capital were high. On 13 April the authorities let it be known that Ritchot should turn himself in rather than risk a demonstration. His friends agreed with that position. As he had not broken any laws, Ritchot asserted he would not subject himself to arrest until after receiving official notification. Ritchot was nonetheless willing to allow himself to be escorted quietly to the local Court House where, by prior agreement, his warrant would be served. The possibility of a confrontation between his supporters and his pursuers in the Bishop's Courtyard was thus avoided. Among his escort was Major George Futvoye, Cartier's Deputy-Minister of Militia. The case was then brought to attention of Judge Thomas Galt who said he would deal with the matter the next afternoon. Following a visit to the Police Station, Scott and Ritchot were taken back to their lodgings where they were placed under guard.⁵³

Although Ritchot's details are sketchy it would seem that his presence in Ottawa had produced two camps: one prepared to assist in his arrest, or worse, and the other just as ready to defend him. The Journal's reference to his being escorted away from the Bishop's Palace suggests the purpose was to get clear of his defenders rather than his enemies. Such a scenario would also explain why the delegates were

⁵³ Ritchot Journal, 13 April, p. 542.

put under house arrest rather than held in prison for the charge of murder.

The next day's Court appearance was brief and resulted in Galt throwing out the warrant on the technical grounds that the Toronto Magistrate had no jurisdiction in Ottawa. However, before the delegates could leave the room they were again arrested. The warrant which provoked the second arrest had also been issued to Hugh Scott. The same "Canada First" cabal who had put Scott up to the first attempt had foreseen the possibility of dismissal and had arranged for Scott to secure a second warrant from an Ottawa Magistrate.⁵⁴ Ritchot and his fellow delegate were then taken to the Police Station where they remained in custody for the better part of the day. After a good deal of difficulty, arrangements were made to have the Police once again escort them back to their lodgings and where they remained under guard.⁵⁵

Although under house arrest, Ritchot did not concern himself overly with his legal difficulties. The effect of the assurances of his influential supporters is apparent in the telegram he sent Taché over the Easter weekend. Ritchot warned the Bishop not to become anxious over the "strange news" he might read in the papers. The Bishop, and by ex-

⁵⁴ Stanley, Louis Riel, p. 140.

⁵⁵ Ritchot Journal, 14 April, p. 542.

tension the Provisional Government, was told that the Dominion was not a part of the situation and that no personal danger was anticipated. In a display of political astuteness, the delegate suggested that the "little persecution of some parties is more favorable than otherwise to the success of our mission."⁵⁶ Ritchot's words were prophetic.

The private legal harassment of the delegates soon began to have repercussions far beyond their own frustrating schedule of inconclusive court appearances.⁵⁷ Sir John Young received a curt wire from London which read "Did Canadian gov't authorize arrests of delegates? Full information desired by telegraph."⁵⁸ The response was immediate. In a cypher telegram sent the same day, Young told Granville that the charges had been laid by the brother of Scott and that the Dominion had nothing to do with the charges. In fact, Granville was informed, the defence counsel of the delegates had been secretly retained by the government.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ AASB, T 7303-4, Ritchot to Taché, 16 April 1870.

⁵⁷ From Monday 18 April to its final dismissal on Saturday 23 April the case was postponed on six different occasions and was remanded from the Court of Common Pleas to that of a Police Magistrate. (Ritchot Journal, pp. 542-43, and also Ritchot Report, pp. 3-5).

⁵⁸ PAC, RG7, G13, Vol. 3, Granville to Young, 18 April 1870.

⁵⁹ Ibid., Young to Granville, 18 April 1870. (See also PAC, MG 11, CO42/685 B499, Colonial Office Papers, p. 620, Macdonald to Young, 21 April 1870 for his written version of what he told Young on the 18th.)

Still unaware of the trans Atlantic concern his case had caused, Ritchot wrote again to Taché complaining he had yet to meet officially with anyone and that the validity of the second warrant was still being decided. The only good news was that Judge Black had come to visit him at the Bishop's.⁶⁰ Ritchot then prepared a petition to the Governor General which demanded that the Crown grant him "le privilege qui appartient à un parlementaire d'être exempt de toute exigence hostile et de toute molestation jusqu'à son retour en lieu sur."⁶¹ The petition recounted how Black, Scott, and himself had been sent as delegates from the Northwest on the basis of Young's own Proclamation of 6 December and the assurances of the various Canadian commissioners. Since arriving in Ottawa, however, the delegates had been subjected to arrests and other indignities which, while being deplored by the government, were allowed to continue. Insofar as the purported crime was concerned, Ritchot pointed out that his guilt or innocence was irrelevant in light of his status as a diplomat. The petitioner, nonetheless, vowed that he had nothing to do with the death of anyone and went so far as to claim personal ignorance of the matter. The petition ended with the demand that Young intervene immediately and put a stop to the violations of the diplomatic rights of the Red River emissaries. Young's re-

⁶⁰ AASB, T 7314-15, Ritchot to Taché, 19 April 1870.

⁶¹ AASB, T 7323-25, Ritchot to Young, 20 April 1870.

sponse was to return a copy of the Petition and to advise Ritchot that his concerns had been forwarded for consideration by Cabinet.⁶²

The delegation's legal problems were also brought to the attention of the House that evening. Joseph Dufresne, the member for Montcalm, asked the Prime Minister about the circumstances of their coming to Ottawa and how their status was viewed in connection with their being arrested. Dufresne also noted that the delegates had been threatened by a lynch mob while they were at the Police Court. Macdonald replied that the Government had yet to receive any official communication from anyone claiming to be delegates and that the arrest of the individuals in question was a matter for the Province of Ontario to deal with. The Opposition then raised the issue of implied recognition of the Provisional Government through that which might be accorded to their delegates. The Prime Minister skirted the question by suggesting the delegation "could have the credentials of representatives of the people."⁶³

Still hoping for a quick commencement to the talks, Ritchot sent a letter to Howe which complained of his inability to communicate freely with the other delegates due to threats of violence and the terms of his bail. Nonetheless,

⁶² The Governor General's reply is appended to Ibid.

⁶³ Debates, p. 1082.

he announced that he was ready to attempt the mission which he pointedly remarked had been undertaken at the solicitation of the Canadian Government. The note closed with the declaration that he could not understand the manner in which the delegates had been treated after their invitation implied they would be under the protection of Canada's honour as a nation.⁶⁴ This note was followed by a more formal letter to Howe over the names of all three delegates. The delegates from the Northwest, "désirant retarder le moins possible les affaires de leur mission, ont l'honneur de vous prier de vouloir bien informer le Gouvernement de Son Excellence qu'ils désirent être entendus le plutôt possible."⁶⁵ Ritchot perhaps hoped that an official demand for a commencement to negotiations would force the Dominion to acknowledge his claims of diplomatic status.

Cartier called on Ritchot 22 April to invite the delegates to his home the next day for a "semi-official" interview with Macdonald and himself.⁶⁶ The meeting itself was an introductory session attended by Cartier, Macdonald, Black, and Ritchot. The discussion consisted mostly of verbal sparring in order to determine the positions of the respective parties. Ritchot was surprised that the Canadians had

⁶⁴ AASB, T 7331-32, Ritchot to Howe, 21 April 1870.

⁶⁵ AASB, T 7339-41, Ritchot, Black, and Scott to Howe, 22 April 1870.

⁶⁶ Ritchot Journal, 22 April, p. 542.

not even asked to see their instructions. The conversation was polite and the delegates were given to understand that Red River would be provided with a satisfactory government.⁶⁷

That same Saturday afternoon, Ritchot and Scott were escorted to the Police Station by a number of prominent supporters. The Magistrate had expected to hear witnesses for the prosecution, but Scott's lawyer announced that he was dropping the matter for lack of evidence. The delegates were then greeted by a cheering crowd of French Canadians and Irishmen which included a number of Senators and Members of Parliament. The crowd was eager to celebrate the victory of the delegates, but Ritchot dampened their spirits by declaring that a public demonstration would cause him pain. Aside from any diplomatic concerns, Ritchot likely wished to avoid provoking a counter-demonstration if not a riot. He did allow himself to be escorted back to the Bishop's Palace where he spent Sunday receiving well-wishers.⁶⁸

It is difficult to determine with certainty what Canada's intentions were with regard to the Red River delegation. The suggestion has already been made that Macdonald did not consider the negotiations to be a serious hindrance to his primary goal of sending a British force to the west long

⁶⁷ Ibid., 23 April, p. 543.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 24 April, p. 543.

enough to secure Canadian authority. This force would then be superseded by a Canadian Constabulary who would maintain a strong hand over the Métis for as long as it took for the influx of settlers to "swamp" the troublesome inhabitants. On no occasion prior to 23 April did the Prime Minister indicate a willingness to offer the delegates any more than the vague promises already served up by Smith. Nor was there any intimation that the terms of the original Act for the administration of the territory were to be altered. Even in the course of the transatlantic negotiations over the use of Imperial troops, Macdonald would offer only the same bland assurances Red River had already rejected as insufficient. It must be considered probable that Macdonald was interested only in pro forma discussions, during which his notorious charm might convince them of Canada's kindness in a way Thibault, De Salaberry, and Smith had failed to do. His quip about a Senate seat for Riel must also be considered. If indeed his intention was to grant little of substance, his plans received a rude shock on the same day as his first encounter with Ritchot.

Sometime before or after the luncheon meeting between the delegates and the Ministers, the Governor General would have received a telegram from Granville. The British Government had obviously lost patience with the Canadians over the shoddy treatment accorded the delegates and the unconvincing assertions of Canada's peaceful intentions with regard to

the troops. It was time for the Home Government to state its position and this was done in unmistakable terms. Young was to advise his Ministers that permission would be granted for the dispatch of the British troops only if four conditions were met. The first stipulated that Rose immediately forward the £300 000 which had yet to be paid to the HBC and that the Crown be able to proclaim the transfer before 1 June. Two of the other terms dealt with the technicalities of the proposed Expedition. Britain would pay only for the dispatch of 250 regulars, and the officer in command of the British garrison would have to approve of the military arrangements. The third condition dealt directly with the negotiations which Macdonald seemed to take so lightly. "Canadian Gov't to accept decision of H.M.'s Gov't on disputed points of settlers' Bill of Rights."⁶⁹ Macdonald was faced with an unpleasant choice if he wanted to use British troops to legitimize Canada's hold over the Northwest. He could either compromise with the delegates already in Ottawa or he could have an "overwhelmed Englishman" dictate a settlement. Although he chose the former alternative, it is clear from subsequent events the resulting agreement would only be honoured as long as necessary and mainly to satisfy the British.

⁶⁹ PAC, Macdonald Papers, pp. 40593-94, Granville to Young, 23 April 1870.

Chapter IV

AGREEMENT IN OTTAWA, 1870

Whatever Macdonald's own feelings towards the prospect of negotiated settlement with the delegation from Red River and the domestic ramifications of so doing, he began the task along with George Etienne Cartier on 25 April. As they had done previously, Black and Ritchot met the Canadian ministers in the privacy of George Cartier's own home in Ottawa. Cartier and Macdonald opened the proceedings by asking for details on the two lists of rights they had in their possession: those of December and of the Convention of Forty. They intended this step to be followed by the submission of a composite list to be submitted for their consideration.¹ While Judge Black and the Canadians discussed the merits of such a procedure, Ritchot sat in silence. He realized that the Canadians were attempting to repeat the Smith ruse of dealing directly with the general population rather than the Provisional Government. Furthermore, Ritchot had been

¹ This situation is also dealt with in an undated Ritchot note which can be found in the same file as the original Journal in the APSN. The statement seems to have been prompted by the Manitoba School's Question of the 1890's and deals at length with Ritchot's introduction of the fourth list of rights which alone included the demand for separate schools. Since it, in effect, is part of the Introduction to the Journal the document will be referred to as "Ritchot Journal, Introduction."

charged with winning concessions based on lists prepared subsequent to the ones mentioned by the Canadians. When finally asked for his opinion on the proposed course of action, Ritchot replied that in dealing with an important matter he believed a serious approach should be taken. The first step, he argued, was to define the nature of the participants in the discussion and establish the grounds upon which they spoke.

Ritchot's opening statement continued with the observation that after fifteen days in Ottawa, the delegates had yet to receive any official communication from the Government. Even disregarding his own personal difficulties, the priest was far from satisfied with his reception. Recalling his first meeting with Cartier and the latter's expressed desire to delay negotiations until after the Scott agitation abated, Ritchot reminded Cartier of his reply. The cleric had appreciated the ministry's political problems and promised to be accommodating so long as it did not impair the success of his mission. The delegate then declared he was at the end of his patience and had, up until then, contained his indignation. The point of Ritchot's presentation was that although he had much to say that day, the delegation would remain silent until it knew how it stood officially.

Cartier's wounded protest that his presence and that of the Prime Minister as delegates from the Cabinet would be

regarded as sufficient evidence of recognition was brushed off by Ritchot. Although honoured by such high level attention, Ritchot wanted written confirmation of the delegates' official reception to show his constituents. Cartier answered by saying that Macdonald had stated in the House that he would receive the emissaries.² Ritchot was adamant and it was finally agreed that a note would be prepared.³ The note, delivered the next day at the opening of the proceedings, was a response from Howe to the 21 April request of the delegates to begin talks. It acknowledged receipt of the letter which stated that "as delegates from the North-West to the Government of the Dominion of Canada," they wished to meet with that government. Howe informed the delegates that Macdonald and Cartier had been authorized by the Cabinet to meet them on the "subject of their mission."⁴

The note did not recognize the delegates as representatives of the Provisional Government or of any other body, nor did it refer to their commissions. This ambiguity, however, was also evident in Ritchot's formal request for the commencement of talks. While Riel would have insisted on recognition of his government, Ritchot realized that a writ-

² See Debates, 6 April 1870, p. 895. Macdonald spoke of the delegates as coming from the Convention and argued that the presence of Judge Black, the chief law officer of the region, would suffice to demonstrate the legitimacy of the delegation.

³ Ritchot Journal, 25 April, p. 544.

⁴ AASB, T 7214-23, Howe to Ritchot et. al., 26 April 1870.

ten expression of that recognition would be more than the Dominion could grant. He was willing to compromise on the ticklish matter by seeking "official" status for the delegates and for the negotiations. Ritchot would later argue that recognition was privately extended to the commissions prepared by the Provisional Government.⁵

Having won his opening skirmish, Ritchot continued the preliminaries by declaring that a general amnesty was a sine qua non of any possible settlement.⁶ The Canadian response was positive. They would provide him with the means to secure an amnesty although they were indefinite as to the procedures involved. Ritchot later recalled advising the ministers that the delegates knew nothing of the procedures and would not take any action. "[I]f the ministers had not the power to settle all our difficulties, I had no business in Ottawa and would return to Red River on the following morning."⁷ The ministers promised a response the next morning. Nonetheless, it was only after Ritchot closed his presentation by protesting the sending of troops that the negotiations began in earnest.⁸

⁵ Ritchot Report, p. 6.

⁶ Ritchot Journal, 25 April, p. 545.

⁷ Select Committee, 1874; Ritchot Testimony, p. 70.

⁸ Ibid.

With Ritchot believing he had been promised both recognition and the Amnesty, Macdonald tried to seize the initiative by shifting the discussion towards the administration of the territory and the appointment of individuals to arrange matters. He apparently hoped to save the governmental apparatus contained in his original legislation by inviting the westerners to share in the distribution of the offices. While Black was again receptive, Ritchot was more interested in securing responsible government than in the distribution of patronage. He objected strongly to Macdonald's proposal. The Prime Minister's attempts to win over the priest by advancing the introduction of democratic institutions from twelve to six months, after the Transfer and then to two, were each rejected by the delegate.⁹ The Prime Minister's alternative proposal of a 26 member Council with six Canadian-named appointees was received similarly by the delegates. Black advocated acceptance while Ritchot again refused to

⁹ Ritchot Journal, 25 April, p. 545. Morton suggests that Ritchot's use of the term "nous" meant that Scott was supporting his opinions. He also implies that Scott's insignificance during the conference is underscored by his name only appearing on two occasions after the conference began. (see Morton, Birth of a Province, p. 138). For his part, Stanley suggests that Scott rarely attended the sessions and "preferred the bar at the Russell Hotel." (Louis Riel, p. 141). Stanley's conclusion about Scott's role is supported by Ritchot's Journal. The Journal usually mentioned the participants in the day's discussions and Scott seldom appears. Furthermore, the cleric almost always preferred the reflexive "nous" to the more personal "je." Nonetheless, Ritchot himself did praise the efforts of both his co-delegates when he reported on his mission before the Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia. (Ritchot Report, pp. 23-24)

relinquish responsible government and, by implication, provincial status. After a prolonged discussion, the Canadians gave in to Ritchot's insistence on a two tiered Assembly as spelled out in his final List of Rights.

Forced to concede provincial status, the ministers immediately strove to place limits on the size of the new creation. Cartier referred repeatedly to the need for several provinces in the North-West. Ritchot, however, pretended not to understand. He no doubt realized that he had won a major victory. His insistence on the first clause of the list assigned to him had secured the rights of a partner in Confederation rather than of a colony of Canada. While it must be said that the shadow of the Colonial Office did much to guide the Canadians into his net, Ritchot had become one of Canada's least known "Fathers of Confederation."

The negotiators met again the next day in the privacy of Cartier's home.¹⁰ There, Ritchot and the others were presented with Howe's letter of recognition. In return, Ritchot presented the Ministers with his copy of the Bill of Rights which he had received on 22 March over the signature

¹⁰ The negotiations were in fact being held as quietly as possible. Ritchot would later testify: "They requested me to keep perfect silence as to the communications I had had with them, and let the public mind settle down." (Select Committee, 1874; Ritchot Testimony, p. 71). For his part, Macdonald would only tell the House "that the discussion of this matter is carried on by Government, not with one or two or three alone, not with the delegates, so-called, chosen by the convention--but with other gentlemen also." (Debates, 26 April 1870, p. 1192).

of Thomas Bunn. Macdonald and Cartier were at first reluctant to negotiate on the basis of the new list since it differed greatly from the two already in their possession and on which basis they had begun to prepare legislation. Ritchot responded by declaring that the mandate of the delegates rested on the final list and that nothing could be accomplished on the basis of the older documents.¹¹ On that basis the Canadians agreed to proceed to the first matter of business which was the determination of the size of the unnamed province.¹² The boundary set at this time likely conformed to the traditional limits of Assiniboia. This would include everything within sixty miles of Fort Garry. The discussion then shifted to specific details of governing the province. It would be allowed to have two Senators and four Members of Parliament until its population warranted additional representation in Ottawa. The local legislature would be a bicameral administration with an Upper House consisting of no less than seven and no more than ten members who would be appointed for life by the Lieutenant-Governor.

¹¹ Ritchot Journal, Introduction. These later notes on the acceptance of the fourth list as the basis of the negotiations point out that if Scott's and Black's lists had indeed been much different than his, the other delegates would have protested the inclusion of the School demands and the Canadians would have exploited the division.

¹² Ritchot Journal, 26 April, p. 545. See also an unsigned and undated set of notes in Ritchot's hand (AASB, T 7547-49). A comparison of these papers with the Journal entries of 26 April make it clear they relate to the same meeting. The first point reads as follows: "province nommer _____ bornée comme suit _____."

The elected assembly would consist of twenty-four seats.¹³ The limits of the various provincial constituencies would be set by the Lieutenant-Governor in accordance with the existing divisions of the population. In this way the traditional parish structure on which the Provisional government had based its elections would be maintained under the new regime. It was also agreed that the franchise would extend to all British subjects.¹⁴ This last point represented a concession on the part of the delegates. The ninth clause of the Bill of Rights had demanded that a three year residency requirement be met before the newcomers be allowed to vote. In this way it was hoped that the existing population would be able to delay the political effects of the anticipated wave of Ontario immigrants. The Canadians, however, were not prepared to see their citizens wait for any period before being able to exercise their voting rights.

The question of financial support for the administration of the province was resolved with a promised annual grant of £20,000 along with a per capita payment of 80 cents. Since the province had no debt for the Dominion to assume, as had been the case with the original provinces of Confederation, semi-annual payments would be made on the terms which had recently been offered to Newfoundland. As explained by Mac-

¹³ Ibid. In the aforementioned notes Ritchot had written "Responsible" beside this reference to the local administration.

¹⁴ Ibid.

donald in the House, a computed sum based on the difference between an estimated population of 15,000 and that of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick would serve as the theoretical debt. A five percent payment of \$27.27 per capita would then be paid over to the province.¹⁵ Ironically, the proposal for a denominational school system found in Article 7 rated barely a mention in Ritchot's Journal. This would suggest that it had been accepted without much discussion.

Initially, the Canadians were only prepared to recognize all HBC titles granted within the so-called Settlement Belt along the Red and Assiniboine rivers. It did not matter to the Canadians if these rights had been paid for or not. Their concern was that the lands be held on areas freed from the encumbrance of Indian Title and which had been ceded by the HBC. After some debate, Macdonald and Cartier agreed also to recognize those holdings within the Settlement Belt regardless of whether a contract or agreement had been reached with the Company. Nonetheless, the delegates remained unsatisfied with the Canadian refusal to consider recognition to land holdings beyond the confines of the ter-

¹⁵ Ritchot's Journal entry relating to these financial matters reads only "Vu la grandeur de la province on alloua £20,000 par an; l'intérêt de sommes chargées, octrois par tête." (Ritchot Journal, 26 April, p. 545) Morton thought Ritchot's understanding of these matters was confused. (Birth of a Province, p. 139). The use of the supplementary notes, however, suggest Ritchot was simply checking off items that had been discussed. See also Debates, 2 May 1870, p. 1302 for Macdonald's explanation of the financial package offered the new Province.

ritory ceded to Selkirk by the Indians during his visit in 1817. After a lengthy debate, the Canadians agreed to recognize these additional claims. The delegates then itemized the rights of common as understood in Red River and won an agreement to have those rights continue.¹⁶

Having raised previously the question of an amnesty for crimes against both property and individuals, and having been promised an answer, Ritchot broached the nineteenth clause of his instructions. It demanded that all debts forced upon the Provisional Government by the "illegal and inconsiderate measures" of the Canadians in the Northwest be assumed by the Dominion. Furthermore, it insisted "that none of the members of the Provisional Government, or any of those acting under them, be in any way liable or responsible with regard to the movement, or any of the actions which led to the present negotiations."¹⁷ The Canadians took the position which they would maintain for years thereafter. They stated that the question of an amnesty was beyond their competence and was a matter for the Imperial or local authorities to deal with. Ritchot was told that the Canadian Government had no jurisdiction in the Northwest, and that Canada should itself be requesting the forgiveness of the

¹⁶ Ritchot Journal, 26 April, p. 545-47. Ritchot's notes on this session are broken up with the insertion of details of the first part of the next day's meeting which dealt with control over Crown lands.

¹⁷ See Morton, Birth of a Province, p. 250.

settlers for having advanced into the region without authority and "made war" on the residents through their agents. As recalled by Ritchot in June, the Canadians claimed that the amnesty question was a matter for the Crown to deal with by right of the Provisional Government which de facto represented its authority due to England's failure to provide suitable administration for the Northwest.¹⁸ Unswayed by this attempt to deflect the issue of the amnesty, Ritchot retorted that any arrangement would be futile without agreement on the amnesty. The Canadians responded that they would take charge of the matter and that it could easily be settled by one of several means. The delegate's reply was succinct, "pourvu que l'affaire soit réglée, c'est tout ce qu'il nous faut."¹⁹

Ritchot later claimed the ministers' reply to the question of an amnesty was that "they were in a position to assure us" that the amnesty would be granted immediately following the passage of the Bill creating the province.²⁰ Reluctant to trust only in words, Ritchot asked that the nineteenth clause be incorporated in the Bill. The response was that such an inclusion would be "inexpedient" since the Bill was a House matter, while the securing of an amnesty

¹⁸ Ritchot Journal, 26 April, p. 546, and Ritchot Report, p. 25.

¹⁹ Ritchot Journal, 26 April, p. 546.

²⁰ Select Committee, 1874; Ritchot Testimony, p. 71.

was within the domain of the Cabinet. Ritchot's request for written evidence from the ministers was rebuffed with the assertion that their word was sufficient guarantee. Macdonald and Cartier maintained the position that an amnesty could only emanate from the Crown. They nonetheless claimed that such a proclamation could be procured easily. However, to demand a written promise of a Royal action prior to the passage of the Bill would be viewed as "imposing conditions on the Crown."²¹ Ritchot also swore that the death of Scott was never raised as an impediment to a general amnesty.

They said with regard to the popular outcry respecting the death of Scott, that while regretting that event they, as men of business, could pay no attention to it, and that the matter would not prevent them from making suitable arrangements and settling all the questions.²²

When the negotiators met again on Wednesday 27 April, the Canadians presented a draft Bill which was to form the basis of the day's discussion. As the clauses were gone through at length, a major difficulty arose over the control of waste, or so-called Crown Lands. The proposed Act reserved control of these unoccupied lands and resources to the Dominion rather than to the province as had been the case with the four original provinces of Confederation. The Canadians argued the terms of purchase with the HBC demanded

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

substantial reserves for that Company which had to be distributed by the Dominion. Furthermore, the negotiation of treaties with the natives, the conduct of the surveys necessary for settlement, and the costs of other public works all had to be financed by the sale of the land in the Northwest. Ritchot protested that the denial of provincial control over land would mean second class status. At this point Judge Black rallied to the defence of the Canadian position. He suggested that the claims of the Red River settlers for control of the lands were extravagant. Ritchot nonetheless maintained his position and even felt that the Canadians sympathized with his stance. The Canadians, however, declared that if an agreement was to be reached, the delegates must be willing to concede on some points. One of these was, implicitly, the question of control over natural resources.

The discussion which followed was difficult with Ritchot getting little support from Black. The priest pointed out that securing an agreement was only secondary to having it accepted by the people of Red River. He declared that he would be unwilling to submit the proffered terms even if they were satisfactory to Black. Ritchot then challenged the Judge by promising to accept the Canadian offer as it stood if Black could, in turn, guarantee that the residents of the Colony would accept them. Black was forced to admit that he could give no such assurance and acknowledged that they would be rejected.

Faced with the continued refusal of the Canadians to yield Crown lands to provincial control, Ritchot declared that he too, could not yield unless some form of compensation or other conditions were offered to the residents of Red River which would be equivalent to the control of those lands. Ritchot proposed a universal grant of land to all minors resident in the province. The ministers countered by arguing that such a grant would be impossible since Parliament would only approve grants for the extinguishment of the Indian Title. When Ritchot asked that grants accordingly be made to the children of mixed ancestry, the Canadians complained that the Métis wanted to be treated as civilized men in respect to democratic rights while at the same time clinging to their rights as Indians. Ritchot's reply was that his constituents had asked for no more than what was provided to the other provinces in their initial demand for control of Crown Lands. The Canadian protest that they had everything to pay and nothing to gain from their acquisition of the Northwest was met by the retort that if Canada insisted on withdrawing the region's source of revenues, they should be willing to pay the expenses. Insofar as the charge of a Métis double standard was concerned, Ritchot argued that a demand for equality with the other provinces did not imply a willingness to lose rights which belonged to either individuals or nationalities such as the Métis.²³

²³ Ritchot's Journal notes on the discussion are convoluted. However, his "Report" allows for the above reconstruc-

Ritchot's steadfast refusal to concede the Federal demand for control of Crown lands without commensurate compensation, forced the Canadians to offer 100,000 acres of land for the benefit of Métis children. Ritchot's counterproposal would have the Dominion set aside two hundred acres for the free possession of every adult currently in the province. He also demanded that these lands be individually selected anywhere in the province in whatever portions suited the claimants. The needs of future generations would be met with a similar grant made to children born before a mutually agreed date on their reaching the age of sixteen. As a further assurance for a Métis land base, Ritchot asked for a law which would safeguard the rights of the minors and keep the lands within the families. The Canadians were no doubt concerned by the possibility of having the interrupted settlement of the Northwest further delayed while the Métis and others staked their individual claims. They immediately made offers of 150,000 and then 200,000 acres to be distributed among family heads who could in turn make arrangements with their children. While Black remained agreeable as always, Ritchot refused the offer as inadequate. On that note, the day's formal discussions came to an end. Ritchot, however, remained at Cartier's where he had dinner with the Minister and some of his associates from Montreal. That same evening, Ritchot sent a telegram to Red River announc-

tion.

ing that negotiations were under way, and that while some points had been settled others had yet to be agreed upon.²⁴

In a possible effort to bring the negotiations to a head, the Canadians presented Ritchot with a printed version of a Bill the next morning. The clause by clause examination of the document was, however, cut short by the departure of Macdonald. The conflicting pressures generated by the Red River difficulties had helped drive the Prime Minister back to the bottle.²⁵ Faced with what he termed Sir John's "in-disposition", Ritchot agreed to consider the Bill privately and to return in the morning with his written observations. It is not known if Ritchot consulted with anyone during the afternoon and evening of the 28th. Fortunately, his comments on the clauses of the proposed Bill have survived and have been published along with his Journal.²⁶

²⁴ AASB, T 7362, Ritchot to Bunn; 27 April 1870.

²⁵ Macdonald's bout culminated in an attack of gallstones which almost killed him. See D.G. Creighton, The Old Chieftain, (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1955), pp. 66-72.

²⁶ Ritchot's comments on the Bill have been printed along with his Ottawa Journal by both Morton and Stanley. The original document, headed "Remarques sur les 26 Clauses" is included as an appendix to Ritchot's Journal found in APSN. Also found glued in the Journal is the certified copy of the Bill as submitted to Ritchot 28 April, and a statement describing the context of the two documents. The statement was prepared in November 1895 for use as an affidavit in connection with the Manitoba Schools Question.

Ritchot's first suggestion was that the province created by the Bill be named "Manitoba." The commentary on the first clause went on to indicate that the restricted limits of the province did not contradict his own instructions since it was understood that the rest of Rupert's Land and the Northwest would eventually be elevated to provincial status as well. Such a rationalization may appear tenuous but Ritchot might have argued the planned "annexation" of the region for the advantage of Ontario had been thwarted.²⁷

The only objections raised to clauses 2 through 18 were that the demands for a franchise locally defined and a three year residency requirement had not been met. Perhaps in consideration of the New Brunswick School Question, the advice of his Quebec friends, or his own prescience, Ritchot suggested that the 19th clause dealing with separate schools be completely rewritten. This proposed change is noteworthy in that, as presented by the Canadians and eventually found in the Manitoba Act, the four subsections of the clause were almost identical to Section 93 of the British North America Act which guaranteed protection of the minority schools in both Ontario and Quebec. While acknowledging that the

²⁷ Ritchot Journal, "Remarques sur les 26 Clauses", pp. 561-64; The proposed boundaries of the province are not found on the printed version of the Bill but they were known to Ritchot who gave them as being the American frontier to the 53rd parallel, and from 96 degrees to 98.30 degrees longitude. The western line, it was noted without comment, did not include the settlers of Portage la Prairie.

clause fulfilled the letter of his instructions, Ritchot believed a more satisfactory wording might read

Any system of public instruction which may be adopted by the local Legislature will have to rest upon the fundamental principle of Separate Schools or denominational education as at present existing in practice; each church being allowed the exclusive control over the schools of its denomination and the management of its educational affairs, provided always that two or more protestant denominations may be allowed to unite if they think proper. The public moneys granted for the purposes of public instruction will have to be distributed between the different churches according to the number of children between the ages of 5 and 16 years.²⁸

The proposed rewording was not incorporated in the Act, but in later years Ritchot and others believed it might have made a difference in the troubled history of Manitoba's publicly supported denominational schools.

The next three clauses dealt with the Dominion's financial support for the nascent province. In reference to the subsidy to be paid in lieu of payments on a provincial debt, the delegate suggested that part of the computed principal be paid over as well as the five percent interest payments. The Federal offer of \$20,000 was also considered insufficient. In support of a claim for more funds, Ritchot argued that it would be impossible to run a government on such meagre revenues. Frontier conditions precluded much of a tax base or much local cooperation in the provision of

²⁸ Ibid. The above English wording appears in the original document although Ritchot's statement points out that it was not done in his hand. Whether the writer was a mere cypher or not is not known.

schools and other services. The final aspect of Canada's financial contribution was a clause which agreed to pay the costs of various Dominion services such as the postal service and militia.

Section 23 of the proposed bill contained the second provision for preserving the duality of the Red River Settlement. It guaranteed the use of either French or English in the Legislature and Courts of the province. As was the case with the clause protecting denominational schools, the wording was an almost verbatim repetition of the relevant Section of the British North America Act; in this case, Section 133. Ritchot noted that it conformed to article 16 of his instructions and that it would, in practice, meet the two other conditions which asked that the Lieutenant-Governor and Chief Justice be bilingual.

The delegate raised his strongest objections in connection with the 24th Article which related to the administration of Crown Lands. It reserved all ungranted, unoccupied, and waste lands for administration by the Federal Government. The only right accorded the province was that of setting aside reserves for the use of the inhabitants as Commons. Even so, such reserves would require the sanction of the Federal authorities and could not interfere with the Dominion requirements for railway construction and other public works. Ritchot protested that such a provision contradicted

the second article of his instructions and was a derogation of the rights accorded to the other provinces of the Dominion who all controlled their own Crown Lands. He went so far as to point out that even Prince Edward Island had been offered control of its territory. He further argued that the territory which made up the new province only formed an insignificant portion of the entire Northwest, which included the Valley of the Saskatchewan, where Dominion control would be acknowledged. The delegate then reminded the Canadians that much of Manitoba's surface was not of much value. Large Commons were necessary for the support of all the nationalities who for the foreseeable future would have to rely on hunting and trading.²⁹ Ritchot was in effect proposing that large areas of the province be set aside for the communal use of the various cultural groups in the province. Ritchot further asked that provincial control of lands extend beyond those already granted to individuals within the Settlement Belt. He proposed that land granted to public bodies or individually possessed without the sanction of the HBC or beyond its jurisdiction, should also be under local control.

²⁹ Morton correctly points out that Ritchot's estimate of the value of the prairie landscape would have remained accurate were it not for the development of wheat hybrids which could survive the short dry growing season. See Morton; The Birth of a Province, footnote, p. 159.

The written commentary on the draft Bill ended with six general observations. The first declared his understanding that all existing rights and customs of the country were to remain intact under the general terms of Confederation. He did, however, indicate that the proposed reservations of land for the HBC would produce serious difficulties. He then noted that Federal responsibility for the Native population precluded any charges against the province on their account. Ritchot then referred to two items which were not included in the printed Bill but on which he understood agreement had been reached. These were the demand for improved steam communications with the Northwest and a call on the Dominion to underwrite the construction and furnishing of the Lieutenant-Governor's residence and the local Legislative Building. The final comments focused on two matters which remained to be settled. These were the question of the amnesty and of a postponement on the imposition of Canadian tariffs on imports.

While Ritchot was preparing his comments on the Government position, others in the capital were passing judgement on the Bill of Rights on which he based his positions. Sir Clinton Murdoch prepared a report to the Colonial Office the same day. He expressed strong reservations about some of the items advocated by the delegates. He objected to the claims of provincial status and local control over Crown lands on the grounds that they would allow the local popula-

tion to interfere with the construction of the planned Pacific Railway and to delay the advance of immigration if they so desired.³⁰ He also charged that local control would be detrimental to the territorial provisions of the agreement between the HBC and Canada. The Englishman was upset especially by the final demand emanating from the Northwest. According to Murdoch, the demand for Amnesty and protection from liability for property losses would "secure an indemnity to Riel and his abettors for the execution of Scott, and to all others for the plunder of the Hudson's Bay Company's stores."³¹ Murdoch advised his superiors that Canada could not venture such a course even if it had the power. The other "inadmissible" demand was that any agreement made in Ottawa would have to be approved by the Provisional Government. Murdoch felt that such implied recognition would allow Riel to postpone the transfer indefinitely. Those terms were repugnant to him and the Canadians with whom he was in contact. Murdoch, however, argued the Canadians had no choice but to reject them and "endeavour to arrange others that would not be open to objection."³² The observer predicted that the Ministers would succeed in reaching an agreement which would meet London's demand that British troops not be used to impose Canadian sovereignty on a re-

³⁰ Select Committee, 1874; Doc. #135, Sir Clinton Murdoch to Sir Frederick Rogers, 28 April 1870.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

luctant population.

The question raised by Murdoch's note is how the Canadians were to secure a settlement with the delegates while at the same time denying the request for an Amnesty which was the declared sine qua non of any agreement. As Ritchot would state three years later in a Petition to Young's successor,

the ordinary practice is not to invite rebels to treat, and negotiations are not entered into with their delegates if it is not proposed in case arrangements are effected, to pass the sponge over the past and proclaim a general amnesty for all acts anterior to the arrangements.³³

The agreement reached between the delegates and the Canadians was not a capitulation but an accord based on compromises and understandings of future action. The question of amnesty was not considered by Ritchot to be under the former heading. As events would show, the delegates were given to understand by Macdonald, Cartier, Sir John Young, and Murdoch, that an amnesty had been promised by the Governor General in his Proclamation of 6 December. All that remained was to have it proclaimed by the Imperial authorities. The tone of Murdoch's letter and the fact that only Cartier lived up to the repeated promises to secure the Proclamation, logically suggests that the delegates were intentionally misled from the beginning, and that Cartier was not a party to the deception.

³³ Ibid., Doc. #65, Ritchot to the Earl of Dufferin, Governor General of Canada, 1 April 1873.

Elsewhere in the capital, Sir John Young was preparing a telegram for Lord Granville. It suggested that Murdoch, himself, and General Lindsay, the General Officer Commanding, all believed that at least 390 Regulars should proceed to Red River if the expedition were sent. Even with the proportional increase of the British complement, the Canadians still agreed to pay three quarters of the cost.³⁴ Granville's affirmative response remained conditional on Canadian acceptance of his ultimatum of the previous week. His demand that the Canadians agree to defer to the British on any points at issue with the delegates had yet to be answered.³⁵

Unaware of these high level communications, Ritchot submitted his list of replies to Cartier the next morning. Macdonald was still indisposed. Nonetheless, the negotiations continued with Cartier speaking for the Federal side. When the discussion turned once again to the land question, the minister asked for a final proposal from the delegates. The reply, according to Ritchot, was the same as had been presented on the 27 April. His suggestion that fifty or seventy five years be allowed to pass before terminating the provision of land for Métis children was described as too much by Black. Cartier then asked how many acres should be set aside to meet the claims of the Métis. Ritchot had con-

³⁴ PAC, RG7, G13, Vol. 3, Young to Granville, 28 April 1870.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 40597, Granville to Young, 30 April 1870.

sulted with Black on the question prior to meeting with Cartier and had agreed to curtail his planned demand for 3,000,000 acres by half.³⁶ During the remaining discussion on the quantity and the method of distributing the lands, Cartier offered 1,000,000 acres. Talks resumed on the same topic the next day, but little progress was made. Ritchot also raised the question of the amnesty with similar results. Cartier would only repeat the same line that he and the Prime Minister had taken earlier. The amnesty was an Imperial matter but they would use their good offices to procure its eventual proclamation.

Following a Sunday spent receiving a number of M.P.s including Premier Chauveau of Quebec, Ritchot returned to Cartier's home where he found Macdonald once again at the table. The projected Bill and the land question were again discussed. The increased offer from the Canadians of 1,200,000 acres for the settlement of Métis claims was met by Ritchot's insistence on 1.5 million acres. Although Ritchot yielded to the Canadian offer, he did believe that an appropriate method of distribution had been agreed upon. The claims could be taken by individuals who would be free to select their land anywhere in the province and in any number of parcels suited to their requirements. In this

³⁶ It should be noted the full question as recorded by Ritchot was, "Combien donc voulez-vous avoir d'âcres de terre à prendre où vous voudrez" (Ritchot Journal, 29 April, p. 549).

way, Ritchot believed the Métis could safeguard their needs for pasture and haylands, as well as wood lots and farming plots. These terms, however, would be set out by the local legislature which, according to the Bill before him, would have control over the Métis allotment. The same body would ensure the equitable distribution of the land to the heads of families in proportion to the number of children in the household. The parents or guardians would then divide the allocation among their descendants under the supervision of the provincial government. Such supervision, Ritchot hoped, would keep the lands in the hands of the Métis, instead of being passed on to speculators and immigrants. So far as Ritchot was concerned, all that remained to be discussed was the wording of these provisions. In a note to himself he indicated that the clause itself would be later inserted in his Journal.³⁷

On that note it would appear that insofar as the confer-ees were concerned, the negotiations were all but complete. That evening Ritchot telegraphed Taché advising him that everything was "almost settled" and that he would be leaving within the week.³⁸ Although the name is not given, the telegram also noted "Governor right man." The Government of Canada also felt the negotiations were over, or at least began to deal with the British as if they were. The next day

³⁷ Ritchot Journal, 2 May, p. 549.

³⁸ AASB, T 7396, Ritchot to Taché, 2 May 1870.

Young reported to Granville that "Negotiations with delegates closed satisfactorily."³⁹ In response to a note from Macdonald indicating that "everything promotes a peaceful solution" in Red River, Young sent Granville another telegram. The note advised the Imperial authorities that John Rose would be instructed to pay over the £300,000 and that the British could effect the transfer prior to the end of June. The Canadians, however, asked for due notice before the formal delegation of authority over the Northwest.⁴⁰ Along with the previous agreement as to the division of expenses, the telegram represented the fulfillment of three of the Conditions set by Granville for the use of the troops on 23 April. The fourth term was only alluded to in a separate telegram sent the next day. Young wrote "I presume I am now at liberty to issue final orders for troops to proceed to Red River. General Lindsay asks for such order from me."⁴¹ The response from Granville was affirmative.⁴²

³⁹ PAC, RG7, G13, Vol. 3, Young to Granville, 3 May 1870.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Young to Granville, 4 May 1870, and Macdonald Papers, Vol. 14, pp. 157-58, Macdonald to Young, 4 May 1870.

⁴¹ Ibid., Young to Granville, 5 May 1870.

⁴² Ibid., Granville to Young, 6 May 1870.

Chapter V

"TO ADD A FEW WORDS TO THE PHRASES" THE MANITOBA ACT

Following the formal conclusion of the negotiations, the Canadian government translated the agreements and understandings into law. The framing of legislation is, by any definition, a precise art. Differences in phraseology between a statement of intent and its legislative manifestation are often boggling to the layman even though the results are the same. Ritchot, however, was eventually forced by a decade of administrative frustration to ask the following of Macdonald:

When the Hon. Ministers took so much pains to frame the clauses of the Manitoba Act, was it their intention, then, to add [a] few words to the phrases which would, later, deprive the Manitoba settlers of their rights?¹

Although Macdonald's answer is unknown, the following examination of the evidence would indicate that he intended to subvert the agreements reached with the delegates while at the same time attempting to convince them, and London, that all was well. For his part, Ritchot found himself detained in Ottawa for several weeks following the "end" of the negotiations. Faced with a variety of verbal promises of action

¹ PAC, Macdonald Papers, pp. 141514-26, Ritchot to Macdonald, 15 January 1881.

by both Canadian and British officials, Ritchot sought written confirmation of those assurances with regard to the amnesty and the method of land distribution before his departure for Red River. Quickly he found that these tasks were even more problematic than the negotiations.

Following the closing session of the negotiations Macdonald rose in the House in the late afternoon of 2 May to introduce the "Manitoba Bill" for first reading. Beyond a series of recriminations arising from the Red River troubles, the ensuing discussion was interesting in that Macdonald strove to play down the influence of the delegates in the formulation of the proposed legislation. He would only go so far as to say that "we have discussed the proposed Constitution with such persons who have been in the North West as we have an opportunity of meeting."² The principal objections raised by the opposition concerned the elaborateness of the political institutions granted to such a small population, and the fact that the Canadian settlement of Portage la Prairie was not included in the territory of the province. Protests were also heard with regard to the land boon to be distributed to the Métis children.³

² Debates, p. 1300.

³ Debates, pp. 1297-337.

Opposition pressure succeeded in gaining one immediate alteration. The Red River delegates were summoned by Cartier the next morning and asked if they would object to the admission of Portage into the province. Although agreeable, the delegates requested that suitable increases be made in the various subsidies and land grants. Ritchot put these thoughts in writing the next day. He told Cartier that he saw a large difference between administering a province the size originally proposed by the government and accepted by the delegates, and one which would be expanded to incorporate Portage la Prairie. Ritchot then reminded the minister of a number of Métis settlements which had not been given the same consideration as the Canadians of Portage.⁴

At 2:30 that afternoon Ritchot accepted Judge Black's invitation to meet Sir Stafford Northcote, the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, at the Russell Hotel. He had come from London on behalf of the HBC to help protect the Company's interests in the event of a settlement between the citizens of Red River and Ottawa.⁵ Northcote's own Diary contains the following description of Ritchot, "He is a fine looking vigorous man, apparently about 40, with a great black beard. He does not speak English, but makes up for it by speaking French with a marvellous rapidity."⁶ His purpose

⁴ AASB, T 7380-81, Ritchot to Cartier, 4 May 1870.

⁵ Morton, Birth of a Province, pp. 67-68.

⁶ See Ibid., "The Ottawa Diary of Sir Stafford Northcote.",

in meeting Ritchot was to defend the Company against various charges which had been raised as a result of the Red River Troubles. Northcote protested that the HBC had wanted to inform the Northwest residents of the transfer but had been told by British authorities that it was none of their business. Canada and Britain were supposed to provide the settlers with details of the new administration. The Company officer also gave assurances that the HBC wanted to do its utmost for the future benefit of the inhabitants. Among his promises was that of Company cooperation with the local government in controlling the trafficking in alcohol.⁷

For his part, Ritchot told Northcote that the Métis respected the HBC which would continue to play a major role in the territory. He laid the blame for much of the troubles at the feet of "les intriguants" and an underestimation of the people of the Northwest.⁸ Northcote responded with the observation that opinion in England had been impressed by the quality of the debate during the Convention of Forty as reported by the New Nation. Northcote felt this compliment "much pleased" Ritchot, while the latter duly noted the comment in his Journal.⁹ In light of his next meeting it is notable that Ritchot's description of his talk with Northcote

p. 101.

⁷ Ritchot Journal, 3 May, p. 550.

⁸ Northcote Diary, p. 101.

⁹ See Ibid., and Ritchot Journal, 3 May, p. 550.

corroborates well with the Englishman's version.

From the Russell Hotel, Ritchot and the delegates proceeded to a meeting with the Governor General which had been arranged by Cartier. On arrival, the westerners were introduced by Sir John Young to Sir Clinton Murdoch. Young described Murdoch as an agent of the Crown sent to help settle Northwest affairs if an arrangement could not be made with the Canadians.¹⁰

The lengthy audience began with Young and Murdoch asking questions about the Northwest and the recent difficulties. During the course of the discussion Ritchot took advantage of references to clerical involvement to defend the role he and his colleagues played. He told the Englishmen that the clergy had remained in their stations and that it was not to play the "humbug" that they had left their own homes to work in the Northwest. Nor, he continued, did they create the principles which determined human behaviour. The clergy guided themselves and others according to principles of justice which they could not compromise to suit their own needs. Rising to his theme, Ritchot declared that according to those principles of right, the clergy in particular had a role to play since they were closest to the people when the

¹⁰ The following description of this critical meeting is drawn from Ritchot's Journal, 3 May, pp. 550-52. See also his Testimony before the Select Committee in 1874. There he strongly and convincingly defended his version of what transpired that day between the delegates and the representatives of the Crown.

troubles began. In that situation they had contented themselves by actions "which prudence alone could dictate." He then asked rhetorically if Young believed it possible, or even desirable, for the clergy to have pursued another course. All they had known of McDougall's authority was what they had read in the newspapers. How, he continued, could the clergy have demanded submission to McDougall on that basis. The Governor General laughed off the McDougall affair as past history and said he understood from the beginning that the Métis were rebelling against McDougall rather than the Crown.

The Governor then brought the audience around to the topic for which Cartier had arranged the meeting. Young asked Ritchot if he was familiar with his Proclamation of 6 December. It contained the assertion that neither the Canadians or the Crown wished to mistreat the residents of the Northwest and were on the contrary willing to hear their grievances and give them justice. Ritchot's replied coyly that he knew of the Proclamation but could not recall its wording. Thus prompted, Young stated that in the document he had promised in the name of the Crown that no one would be troubled for their participation in unlawful acts, and that in effect "il y aurait une proclamation générale d'Amnistie." Young claimed the Queen wanted nothing less than to reestablish peace in her territories. The Governor General then pointed to Murdoch and said he knew full well that these were the intentions of the Crown.

Murdoch, who had only days earlier castigated the request for an amnesty as a demand for an indemnity, then seized his cue. He told the delegates that the Queen only desired one thing, to establish peace "et de passer l'éponge sur tous les faits et actes illégaux qui avaient eu lieu dans le Nord-Ouest" Unimpressed by such high level assurances, Ritchot told Murdoch that they had yet to receive anything in writing and that such documentation was imperative. Murdoch protested that when one dealt with men such as himself and Young, it was not necessary to dot all the i's. He further suggested that it would be in the best interests of all not to commit the promise to paper. He told the suspicious Ritchot "qu'il fallait leur laisser une certaine latitude, qu'il n'en serait que plus avantageux pour nous, etc."¹¹ Ritchot noted that although he felt obliged to accept their words on the matter, his constituents would remain unsatisfied. Before ending the meeting, the Governor General once again promised the curé all would be well and the residents of the Northwest could be assured no one would be troubled.

Assuming Ritchot's reconstruction of the conversation was not a case of self-deception, the meeting was clearly an attempt to dispel any doubts the delegates may have had about the promised amnesty. In keeping with Canadian policy, general assurances of good intentions were indeed provided.

¹¹ Ritchot Journal, 3 May, p. 552.

However, nothing specific was promised nor was the commitment made in a form which might be appealed to at a later date if the amnesty did not materialize. It might be argued that this reluctance was an understandable means to avoid further fanning the anger still raging in Ontario over the shooting of Scott. The thought of Ritchot returning to Riel brandishing written evidence of clemency from Ottawa would have been anathema to many in the agitated province. The Canadians perhaps believed that it would be far better to proclaim nothing and simply refuse to initiate prosecutions against the insurgents. Alternatively, an amnesty coming from such an unimpeachable source as the Queen might silence "Loyalist" opinion in Ontario in the same way the prestige of British regulars were supposed to awe the resident of the Northwest. Macdonald's forced participation in the negotiations and Murdoch's letter of 28 April, however, suggest a different sort of political pragmatism. The Home Government had demanded a settlement in exchange for the use of its troops. Such a settlement would have been impossible if the delegates had been told forthrightly that an amnesty was politically impossible for the government to arrange even if it desired to do so. The solution to the dilemma was to delay confronting the issue with the delegates as long as possible and then only provide them with verbal assurances which could be denied if the need arose.

Whatever the case, Ritchot felt confident enough in the progress of his mission to telegraph the Provisional Government and advise them that the "Bill erecting the Province of Manitoba" had been brought before Parliament and that it satisfied the delegates. The message continued by saying that the other points, meaning the amnesty, were settled and that the delegates were "confidant of amicable and acceptable arrangements."¹² When asked the following day by Cartier for his impressions of the meeting, Ritchot replied that they were satisfied. Elated by this response, Cartier gushed that the Canadians would treat Manitobans as spoiled children and give them more than what had been provided to other provinces. These words soon took on a hollow note as Ritchot found that the day's discussion on the land question went nowhere.¹³ Ritchot realized why within hours. When the Manitoba Bill was presented to the House that evening, preparatory to Second Reading, it had been altered dramatically.

The first alteration announced by the Prime Minister concerned the western frontier of the province. Portage la Prairie was incorporated into the larger unit while provision was also made for future expansion if deemed necessary. As a result of this growth in territory, the estimated size of the population for the purpose of establishing subsidies

¹² AASB, T 7376, Ritchot to Thomas Bunn, 4 May 1870.

¹³ Ritchot Journal, 4 May, p. 552.

was raised from fifteen to seventeen thousand. These changes merely reflected the negotiated agreement arrived at between Ritchot and Cartier after the opposition uproar over the exclusion of that settlement.

Whereas the projected Bill shown Ritchot had been silent on the method of protecting land rights gained by occupancy, the revised version established four classes of ownership to which the Dominion was prepared to accord varying degrees of recognition. The first three subsections of Section 31 outlined types of tenure which could be regarded as sanctioned by the HBC. These were freehold grants, grants less than freehold, and "titles by occupancy with the sanction and under the licence and authority" of the Company on lands where the Indian title had been ceded. The Bill stated all three classes would be converted to freehold if the grant had taken place on, or prior, to 8 March 1869. The fourth subsection dealt with individuals in "peaceable possession" of land at the time of the transfer where the aboriginal title had yet to be extinguished. Referring to this class of landholders as "merely squatters", the Prime Minister was willing to give them only preemption rights.¹⁴ This would allow them first opportunity to meet whatever terms the Dominion might set for the acquisition of the land. This was a direct contradiction of what had been agreed to 26 April.

¹⁴ Debates, p. 1359-60, and Section 31 of the Manitoba Act.

Macdonald also announced the Métis land reserve would grow by an additional 200,000 acres to 1.4 million. In contrast to what had been agreed previously with the delegates, the Prime Minister changed both the procedure for distributing the lands and the authority under which it was to be supervised. The parcelling out of the Métis lands was to be regulated by the Dominion Cabinet working through Orders-in-Council. The Lieutenant Governor would still be charged with the selection of the 1.4 million acres, but he would be under the direction of the Dominion rather than the Provincial administration. The original terms as to distribution of the land had been reached on 2 May. Ritchot's version of the agreement, noted above, corresponded with the details provided to Sir Stafford Northcote by Cartier on the same day.¹⁵ Within two days, however, Northcote had been told by the Prime Minister "that when the blocks were set out, the Government would make provision for giving lots to such of the half-breeds as were claimants, taking care not to put them all together."¹⁶

The difference between the two procedures was fundamental. In the arrangements reached with Ritchot, the Métis would have been free to expand their existing river lot communities and begin new ones over time. As well, they would have been able to divide their individual allotments accord-

¹⁵ Northcote Diary, p. 97.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 103.

ing to their need for hay and pasture lands, as well as acreages for wood and agriculture. Finally the administration of this arrangement was to take place under the auspices of the local government which the mixed-blood population expected to dominate at least for a few years. Although Macdonald's alterations of the administrative provisions did not change the mode of distribution explicitly, that was indeed the result and Ritchot protested vehemently at the first opportunity.

The next day, 4 May, Ritchot gathered his fellow delegates and some of his political friends and went to see Cartier and Macdonald. They complained about the revisions. The Canadians defended the changes by declaring that without them, the Bill might be lost. Ritchot was assured that in practice nothing would be different from what had been agreed to verbally during the negotiations. Cartier and Macdonald promised that prior to the departure of the delegates, an Order-in-Council embodying the verbal understandings would be passed by Cabinet. When Ritchot rejected these assurances as unsatisfactory, he was promised another Order-in-Council which would authorise a committee, named in part by Ritchot, to select and divide the 1.4 million acres among the Métis. The delegate replied that he would consider the offer and accept it only if he could do so in good conscience. Throughout the day, his friends in Ottawa seconded the positions of the Ministers by telling Ritchot that

the Bill was sufficient and deserved to be passed. One of these entreaties made special reference to the protection accorded to separate schools.¹⁷

After his consultations, and following a more thorough examination of the Bill, Ritchot returned to the Ministers the next day and resumed the discussion of the land provisions. The delegate was especially concerned with the limited recognition accorded to occupants of land beyond the settlement belt. The Canadians told Ritchot that the land in question was not yet theirs to give since the rights were still vested with the native population. However, they promised that the Governor in Council could, and would, arrange for the present occupants to have the land for free. The Canadians were once again providing assurances in lieu of action. Ritchot's patience, however, had come to an end. He demanded to know how on the one hand the Government could promise delivery of 1.4 million acres at the same time it insisted it could not assure the security of a few existing occupancies. Ritchot pointed out that such a policy would create a situation where the children would be provided with free land while their parents, the pioneers of the territory, would have to pay. The Canadians insisted that such a problem had been foreseen and was the reason they were prepared to make free grants to all the present occupants in question. Furthermore, they assured Ritchot that he would

¹⁷ AASB, T 7387, J.C. Taché to Ritchot, 5 May 1870.

be provided with whatever guarantees he might need before his departure. The ministers would not, however, agree to change the wording of the Bill. They protested that substantial alteration might lead to the loss of the Bill in the House. Ritchot continued to protest that, as written, the terms found in the Bill would be rejected by Red River as insufficient. He could only observe that he would have to rely on the verbal agreements made between the negotiators in trying to have the terms accepted. The delegate acknowledged that Britain and Canada could destroy the Métis. That was not the issue. What was important was that the affair be resolved peacefully.¹⁸

On Saturday, 7 May, Ritchot met with a number of Quebec politicians. One of these had taken the liberty of reporting to Quebec City that the delegates did not oppose the sending of troops to the Northwest. Ritchot advised the M.P. that he had never made such a statement. The question of troops was not a matter covered by their commissions, nor had it been raised, "pour bonne raison", by the Canadians. Ritchot intimated that he would wait until the Bill was through the House before deciding whether or not to address the issue of the expedition. In any event, the delegate repudiated the presumptive action of the Quebec politician.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ritchot Journal, 6 May, p. 553.

¹⁹ Ibid., 7 May, p. 553-54.

In Parliament, the Bill was submitted for consideration of the Committee of the whole, but not before another round of recriminations over the events of the past year. By this time Ritchot had developed the same insouciance Cartier exhibited in regard to opposition attacks on the Government and the delegates. In spite of the heated discussion in the House, the priest did not offer any observations in his Journal.²⁰

With the resumption of business on Monday, Ritchot, Scott, and an unnamed friend went to see Cartier about the wording of the clause dealing with eligibility for shares in the 1.4 million acres. They were concerned with the phrase which would apparently limit distribution to those domiciled in the province at the time of the transfer.²¹ Cartier replied that the Dominion would consider the winterers and others who spent part of the year away from Red River as residents so long as they had not settled elsewhere.

Ritchot met with several French Canadian M.P.s the next day. They all assured him that the Bill would clear the House with almost unanimous support from their compatriots. Nonetheless, they warned him against attempting to alter the terms since this would possibly clear the way for other,

²⁰ See Debates, 1414-43.

²¹ Ritchot's notes indicate the terms "Residents domiciliés--tenant feu et lieue", (Ritchot Journal, 9 May, p. 554).

less desirable, amendments. Ritchot had been ready to suggest an eastward expansion of the province to Lake of the Woods but heeded the advice of his new found political friends.

Ritchot spent the rest of the day in Parliament where he listened to the final round of debate on "An Act to amend and continue the Act 32 and 33 Victoria, chapter 3; and to establish and provide for the Government of Manitoba"; commonly known as the Manitoba Act. Sitting in the Gallery he heard Mackenzie Bowell refer to him as "that meek and lowly priest, . . . who had done more than any other man in the Territory to prevent the entrance of [McDougall]." ²² While not noting Bowell's remarks, Ritchot did note the speeches of three French members who rose to his defence. ²³ He also witnessed attempts to amend the Bill by eliminating the Métis land grant and the clause respecting denominational schools. ²⁴ Finally, in the early hours of the morning, after the passage of the Bill, he heard several French members attack the sending of troops. Cartier defended the expedition with the same assurances he had given Ritchot. The force, he said, was on a mission of peace rather than conflict.

²² Debates, p. 1494.

²³ Ritchot Journal, 10 May, p. 544. Ritchot is silent of the personal aspects of the discussion.

²⁴ Debates, pp. 1493-504.

Ritchot continued his Ottawa activities the next day when he went to visit Cartier, Schultz, De Salaberry, and Judge Black. During his conversation with Cartier the priest was told that John Schultz had asked Cartier to arrange a meeting between himself and Ritchot. Ritchot surprised the intermediary by declaring that he had no objections to meeting with Schultz and would be happy to do so. The two protagonists of Red River met that same afternoon. Ritchot described Schultz as despondent while attempting to affect the appearance of gaiety. Following a few pleasantries, Schultz asked Ritchot about his role in the events of the winter. Specifically, had Ritchot advocated or opposed the imprisonment of the Canadian leader by the Métis, and had he been happy to see him behind bars. Ritchot's diplomatic response was that during those exceptional events they had both acted according to their own principles and perceptions. Ritchot went on to suggest that there could be little use in his elaborating on his past actions. The priest told Schultz that it was something that should never be spoken of again. Schultz's reaction was only described as understanding what he had been told.²⁵

That evening, Ritchot heard from two friends from Red River. He received letters from John Bruce and Louis Riel. Bruce's note was personal while that of Riel contained a set of long overdue instructions. Dated 19 April, Riel's note

²⁵ Ritchot Journal, 11 May, p. 555.

asked Ritchot to learn what he could about Dominion preparations for a military expedition and of Schultz's activities among the Indians to the east of the Colony. As well, Ritchot was to report any Canadian breaches of good faith. Included in the letter were copies of various Proclamations issued by the Provisional Government including the agreement to allow the HBC to resume its commercial pursuits. Although their arrival on the eve of the prorogation of the House and of the accordance of Royal Assent to the Manitoba Act made them superfluous to the negotiations, Riel's instructions are of interest. He asked Ritchot to demand a subsidy of \$80,000 a year for ten years. Insofar as the name of the Province was concerned, Riel acknowledged that "Rivière Rouge" was inscribed in everyone's heart, but that the imagination cherished the name "Manitoba." Believing the whole region was to be included in the arrangements, Riel preferred "Nord Ouest" to the more parochial "Assiniboia." In the end, Ritchot was told to select either Manitoba or North West. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the instructions was Riel's demand that the province have the right to divide its territory between its two populations, "pour que cette coutume des deux populations vivant séparément soit maintenue pour la sauvegarde de nos droits les plus menacés."²⁶ Ritchot perhaps felt that his securing of the 1.4 million acres was a partial fulfillment of this

²⁶ AASB, T 7316-18, Riel to Ritchot, "Instructions", 19 April 1870.

last request.

Confident that Royal Assent to the Bill signalled an end to his mission in Ottawa, Ritchot prepared a report for Bishop Taché. It opened with the assumption that Taché would have seen newspaper references to the Parliamentary debates and the creation of the new province. Ritchot also assumed that many would not be satisfied with Manitoba's small size. All the same, their supporters in Ottawa were happy with the Bill and Ritchot pointed out that the success of his mission could be measured in the rage demonstrated by their enemies on seeing the Act passed. With regard to any responsibility for the Bill's shortcomings, Ritchot declared "que nous avons fait ce que nous avons pu pour le plus grand bien et avantage des habitants de la nouvelle province du Manitoba."²⁷ Taché was told that since the military expedition was beyond the power of the provinces to deal with, the delegates had remained content to monitor its progress. Finally, Ritchot advised his Bishop that a few important matters remained to be dealt with. The delegate expected to be home sometime in June.

In his reference to outstanding issues, Ritchot was alluding to the Amnesty and the consummation of other verbal agreements made with the Ministers. Among these was the question of individual land claims beyond the settlement

²⁷ AASB, T 7401-6, Ritchot to Taché, 12 May 1870.

belt. Ritchot's postscript indicates his confidence of a satisfactory resolution of the issue.

Il est important que nos gens prennent et batis-
sent --ou bien qu'ils labourent. L'habitation est
un contrat--Les terres de la Rivière aux rats sont
belles. Je vous ferai comprendre cela dans ma
prochaine lettre.²⁸

Elsewhere in the capital, Sir John Young was also advising his superiors of the satisfactory conclusion of the Red River negotiations. His telegram to Granville read in part "Bill for Gov't of North West passed, sanctioning conditions agreed upon with Delegates."²⁹ The Governor General elaborated on the telegram in a somewhat sanctimonious letter written the same day. Referring to the Act, Young wrote

I trust this measure may by the liberality of its provisions satisfy the inhabitants of all classes and creeds in the North West and convince them of the groundless nature of the alarms with which union with the Dominion was regarded in certain quarters.³⁰

Young's note made no mention of any of the outstanding matters or even of the Amnesty which he himself had told the delegates was an Imperial matter.

Ritchot took advantage of the prorogation to spend an extended weekend sojourn in Quebec where he visited his parents for the first time since his initial departure for the

²⁸ Ibid., emphasis in original.

²⁹ PAC, RG7, G13, Vol. 13, Young to Granville, 12 May 1870.

³⁰ Ibid., G9, Vol. 49, Young to Granville, Draft Letter, 12 May 1870.

west. Ritchot returned to Ottawa on Tuesday 17 May. Before proceeding to George Cartier's for a dinner engagement, Ritchot met with Judge Black and his sister who were on the eve of their departure for Montreal. Black considered his task finished and claimed that he had already done more than had been expected of him. In the Judge's view, the Convention had appointed Ritchot to speak for the French while he spoke for the English. As such, he did not consider the unresolved aspects of the Amnesty and land questions as his responsibilities. Nonetheless, Ritchot noted that Black told him that "Sans moi [Ritchot], nous n'aurions pas eu la moitié de ce que nous avons eu. Les gens de la Rivière Rouge, Anglais et Français, comme aussi le Canada me doivent beaucoup, etc."³¹ Black's comments were seconded by his sister who thanked the priest on behalf of the citizens of Red River for his efforts on behalf of all classes.

Ritchot's dinner companions that evening were the Cartiers, Hector Langevin, and Colonel Patrick R. Ross, Adjutant-General in Canada. The conversation centered on such items as the nature of the Métis, the conduct of Father Lestanc and the other clergy, and Donald Smith and his report. Ritchot's own role was debated extensively with his activities approved by those present on the grounds he had no legal obligation to act otherwise. Cartier paid tribute to his clerical guest by lauding Ritchot for his prudent, wise and

³¹ Ritchot Journal, 17 May, p. 557.

independent conduct. The Minister also thanked him for the time spent around the negotiating table and the information he had provided about the Northwest. He then invited Ritchot to repeat many of his observations and stories for the benefit of the other guests.

The casual tone of the evening was upset only when Cartier's statement that their affairs had been successfully arranged was challenged by Ritchot.³² Cartier admitted that Ritchot was correct and promised to work on what was obviously the amnesty matter. He told Ritchot that they would see the Governor General on the subject in two days.

Ritchot spent the intervening time preparing a memorandum for Cartier. It set out the issues to be resolved before he could return to Red River. The first of these dealt with the selection and distribution of the 1.4 million acres destined for Métis progeny. The delegate recounted how the original agreement to allow the provincial government jurisdiction over the land had been abandoned by the Dominion. Faced with the opposition of the westerners, Macdonald and Cartier had promised to assign the task to a Committee made up of individuals chosen by the delegates. The Prime Minister even suggested the selection of Bishop Taché along with the Bishop of Rupert's Land. This arrangement, however, was

³² Ibid., p. 557. The passage reads: "Nos affaires sont réglées, dit Sir Georges. Je réplique: elles se régleront-- facilement?--je trouve des difficultés"

not to be incorporated into the Manitoba Act. An Order-in-Council was instead promised by the ministers. Ritchot demanded that this be done before his departure. The delegate also advised Cartier that the execution of the verbal promise to issue an Order guaranteeing free ownership to claimants of lands still under aboriginal title would also have to be carried out along with the promised proclamation of the general amnesty.³³

Before meeting with the Governor General, Ritchot had a lengthy session with Cartier. It was the first of many the two men would have as the delegate pressed the minister relentlessly for the fulfillment of the various promises made to him.³⁴ Ritchot's notes say little, if anything, about these meetings. Fortunately, the tenor of these sessions was discussed before the Parliamentary Select Committee which enquired into the Amnesty question in 1874. Cartier's private secretary, Benjamin Sulte, and his Deputy Minister, George Futvoye, both supported Ritchot's assertions before the same Committee that Cartier promised Ritchot all his concerns would be met. Futvoye testified that on 19 May he heard Cartier tell Ritchot: "Je garantie que vous aurez tout ce que vous avez demandé" and that both had made it

³³ AASB, T 2423, Ritchot to Cartier, 18 May 1870. See also Select Committee, 1874; Doc. #57.

³⁴ Select Committee, 1874; Benjamin Sulte Testimony, p. 181. Sulte began to act as Cartier's private secretary 19 May, and told the Committee that from that day to 25 May, the two men "had five or six [meetings] in a day."

clear to him that the guarantee included the amnesty.³⁵ For his part, Sulte testified that Cartier "repeatedly assured Father Ritchot that his people would not be troubled in reference to what had taken place in the North-West."³⁶ The silence of Ritchot's Journal relative to these meetings and the renewed assurances can be explained easily. He had all the verbal promises he needed. What Ritchot sought with near desperation was written evidence of those assurances before he returned to Red River. Only then could he assure the population that they had nothing to fear from the troops.

Late that afternoon, Ritchot, Cartier, and Scott went to Rideau Hall where they again met Sir John Young. The Governor General assured Ritchot that those who participated in the troubles would have nothing to fear. He contended that he was not yet Governor of the Territory and that Canada had no jurisdiction. He promised Ritchot he would see to the preservation of peace when that time came. As far as the military expedition was concerned, the delegate was told the troops would do nothing until the arrival of the Lieutenant Governor and the establishment of the new administration. Even then, the provincial administration would be answerable to Young who proclaimed his sympathy towards the Métis. Young further referred to Lord Granville's telegram and to

³⁵ Ibid., George Futvoye Testimony, p. 168.

³⁶ Ibid., Benjamin Sulte Testimony, p. 181.

his own Proclamation of 6 December which promised an amnesty to all those who would recognize British authority.

Ritchot replied by first pointing out that Young knew British sovereignty was never questioned in Red River. With regard to the December proclamation, Ritchot argued that it only referred to actions anterior to its issuance and promised nothing in regard to what occurred since. Ritchot continued to insist on a new Proclamation which he could carry with him to Red River. He also reminded Young of his previous promises to provide the delegate with such an instrument. Young replied that such a document would take time since it would have to emanate from England. When Ritchot suggested that the transatlantic cable be used to speed the process, he was told that "such matters were not conducted by cable, that it was necessary that the proclamation should be signed by Her Majesty's own hand, that it would be issued immediately, and that it would arrive in Manitoba before us."³⁷ Ritchot's observation that it would be impossible for the proclamation to reach Manitoba before the delegates was met by the amended assurance it would arrive before the Lieutenant Governor. The delegate again insisted that verbal promises were inadequate and demanded documentary evidence. Young promised Ritchot he would soon be provided with "something which would satisfy the people of Manitoba,

³⁷ Ibid., Ritchot Testimony. See also Ritchot Journal, 19 May, p. 558-59.

that nobody would trouble them pending the proclamation of that amnesty." Young then reverted to the argument that the December proclamation was "the best possible guarantee."³⁸

Also discussed with Young were the verbal agreements concerning the selection and distribution of the 1.4 million acres and the conversion of claims on lands still considered to be under aboriginal title. Ritchot made a point of reminding the Governor that the residents of Portage la Prairie lived on such lands. Young agreed to have Cartier prepare written assurances that the verbal arrangements would be put into practice. On that note the day's meeting and the week's business came to an end.

Following a quiet weekend, Ritchot went to see Cartier on Monday, 23 May. He found him in the process of preparing the note discussed the previous Thursday. It took the form of formal reply to Ritchot's missive of 18 May. Ritchot's Journal mentions only that he was shown a draft of Cartier's letter on the day of his visit. However, Ritchot's later testimony before the Select Committee and subsequent Journal entries indicate the note provoked debate which led to alterations. In its original form, the note referred to only two of the three issues raised by Ritchot. With regard to subsection 4 of Article 32, Cartier had written, on behalf of the Government, "that so soon as the Government can grant

³⁸ Ibid.

the necessary titles, no payment shall be required from any of the persons mentioned in that paragraph." Such claimants would be considered on the same basis as those on lands no longer held under aboriginal title.³⁹ The verbal agreement of 26 April, contradicted by the wording of the Manitoba Act, had finally been certified as a result of Ritchot's persistence.

In his reference to the amnesty question, Cartier was less clear. Instead of the unequivocal promise of an amnesty proclamation which Ritchot demanded, Cartier wrote

I desire to call your attention to the interview you had with His Excellency the Governor General on the 19th instant, at which I was present, and in which His Excellency was pleased to state that the liberal policy with which the Government proposed to follow in relation to the persons for whom you are interesting yourself is correct, and is that which ought to be adopted.⁴⁰

In his testimony before the Select Committee, Cartier's Deputy Minister pointed out that he drew up the note at Cartier's dictation and that he "had always heard from Sir George" that the liberal policy referred to the proclamation of a general amnesty for all offences.⁴¹ Ritchot subsequently protested the phrasing of the amnesty passage but Cartier insisted that it "contained the whole sense of the promise of amnesty" as understood by Ritchot. The delegate accepted

³⁹ Ibid., Doc. #58, Cartier to Ritchot and Scott, 23 May 1870.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., Futvoye Testimony, p. 168.

the wording reluctantly, but only because he continued to expect further documentation from Young.⁴²

When shown the document again on 27 May, Ritchot pointed out that it said nothing about local control in the selection and distribution of the 1.4 million acres. After considering the matter, Cartier agreed to add a second postscript to the one authorizing the delegates to use the letter in whatever manner they saw fit. Ritchot was shown the addendum the next day. It promised that the acreage would be of a nature satisfactory to the "half-breed residents." Although Cartier guaranteed the "most effectual and equitable" division of the land, he said nothing of the local committee which had been promised on 4 May. If Bishop Taché and the Archbishop of Rupert's Land were supposed to supervise the parcelling of the Métis children's allotments, they would require greater authorization than found in Cartier's postscript.⁴³ Nonetheless, Ritchot appears to have accepted the note as presented; perhaps because he felt it was the best he could do.

In addition to the haggling over Cartier's note, Ritchot had to contend with the minister's proposal that the delegates themselves should petition the Queen for the amnesty promised by the Dominion. On 24 May, J.C. Taché brought

⁴² Ibid., Ritchot Testimony, p. 75

⁴³ Ibid., Cartier to Ritchot and Scott, 23 May 1870.

Ritchot a copy of a petition which had been prepared by Cartier's office. Ritchot was told that Cartier had been advised by Sir John Young that a request sent by the delegates to the Queen would be something he would be pleased to support. It was further suggested that such a course would be the best means of securing a quick proclamation of the amnesty. Even if sincere, it is evident that Young and Cartier were not prepared to risk their own reputations on the amnesty matter. Far better, they must have thought, to have the matter regarded as a private dealing between the delegates and the Monarch. Initially Ritchot refused to have anything to do with the document. As he told investigators four years later, Ritchot was the only delegate remaining in Ottawa. Black had left for London via Montreal, while Scott was on his way to New York. Furthermore, it can be surmised that the delegate continued to regard the amnesty as a commitment to be fulfilled by the Canadian and British authorities, rather than a concession to be requested. Taché assured him that Cartier saw the petition only as a means to end the amnesty negotiations. The reluctant curé was also told that if the Dominion were not prepared to support the request, it would not have drafted the document in the first place. Ultimately, Ritchot was advised the petition was only a matter of form in order to avoid compromising the Government.⁴⁴ Ritchot agreed to play his part in the sup-

⁴⁴ Ibid., Ritchot Testimony, p. 75, and Ritchot Journal, 24 May, pp. 559-60, for details concerning his first expo-

posed charade, conditional on several changes being made. Cartier's messenger was told, however, that he would only do so "if it was the best means to obtaining the amnesty." He would, however, not accept any responsibility for the document.⁴⁵

The petition itself was draughted as emanating from Ritchot on behalf of all three delegates. Addressed to the Queen, the document first recounted how the delegates had come to Ottawa at the invitation of Sir John Young in order to lay before him the "complaints and wishes" of the settlers. Next came a somewhat gratuitous clause expressing the appreciation of the delegates "for the kindness and goodwill" demonstrated by Young and his ministers. The arrest of two of the delegates, the vulnerability of the undocumented arrangements and the elusive amnesty were of course not mentioned in the document. The Queen was told, however, that the delegation had succeeded in securing provincial status for a portion of the Northwest through an Act of Parliament and that the delegates were certain their success would satisfy those they represented.

Pointing to the absence of a "regular Government or authority" in Red River for seven months and the resulting confusion, the petition explained that "a sort of Provision-

sure to the petition.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

al Government" had been formed. The government had never intended, however, to challenge Imperial authority; its "sole object" was to provide for the local needs of the region. The heart of the petition pointed out that during the period in question, illegal acts had been carried out by conflicting parties who both believed themselves to be following the right course. The Crown was told that the above actions would continue to perpetrate feelings of "vengeance and irritation" if they were submitted to judicial reckoning. Furthermore, the petition suggested that a judicial continuation of the hostilities would likely defeat the pacifying influence of the Manitoba Act, and delay the development of the Northwest. That being the case, the Queen was asked "to exercise the Royal prerogative of mercy, by a remission and forgiveness of all acts partaking of an illegal character that may have been committed by any party in the Settlement during the time of the disturbances." The request was justified by a reference to Young's proclamation of 6 December which had invited the residents to submit their grievances to him and which had promised that "no legal proceedings will be taken against any parties implicated in those unfortunate breaches of the law."

Young's proclamation had only referred to the events of October and November 1869 and the amnesty promise had been conditional on an immediate laying down of arms. Rather than repeat the assurances provided to the Commissioners,

Taché, and the delegates about the proclamation's all encompassing intent, Cartier had Ritchot's "petition" offer an excuse for the continuation of the resistance. The British were asked to believe that an early resolution of the conflict was made difficult by the impossibility of sending the delegates eastward during the winter months. It was hoped that the Crown would not "impute to the unwillingness of the settlers the delay that prevented them sending their delegates" The petition concluded by praying Queen Victoria "to exercise Your Royal Prerogative of mercy by an act of amnesty, to remit and pardon all illegal acts that may have been committed during the time of the disturbances."⁴⁶

Cartier and Ritchot met several times over the week as each attempted to have the other help promote his own political requirements. As mentioned above, Ritchot pressed Cartier to clarify the written promises of government action. For his part, Cartier sought the curé's signature on the amnesty petition. Cartier was candid during these sessions about why the government could not state its position clearly on the matters which interested Ritchot, and why it was reluctant to petition for the amnesty on its own responsibility. Ritchot later testified that Cartier told him in part

that on account of the excitement of feeling it was advisable to take all means possible, which would arrive at the same end without exciting prejudices; that in a country like this, where there were different interests and several

⁴⁶ Ibid., Doc. #58a contains the full text of the Petition.

parties, provided you arrived at the same end, it was advisable to take those means which would least run counter to the opinions of some of the people. . . . the means he was taking to have the amnesty proclaimed was the safest and quickest way of obtaining the desired result without creating dissatisfaction.⁴⁷

Based on what he had seen and experienced while in Ottawa, Ritchot would have been hard pressed to refute Cartier's political logic. He could only reply that while satisfied with the assurances provided, he still had to answer to his constituents at Red River.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, Ritchot agreed to sign the petition on 26 May after securing Cartier's promise that he would provide official written support for the amnesty request over his own signature.⁴⁹

When not dealing with the petition, Ritchot and Cartier focused their attention on other residual matters as the delegate's departure approached. The minister was concerned with what type of reception the Lieutenant Governor and the troops might expect on their arrival at Red River. He asked Ritchot to inform him of what the province might provide in the way of accommodations and supplies. Cartier furthermore suggested that Ritchot arrange for the Métis to meet the Expedition as guides. In reference to other matters, the minister sought Ritchot's estimate of the debt owed to the HBC

⁴⁷ Ibid., Ritchot Testimony, p. 77.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Sulte Testimony, p. 181.

by the Provisional Government⁵⁰ Ritchot later recalled Cartier's suggestion that Riel should continue "to maintain order and govern the country," and that he should be "at the head of his people" when they received the Lieutenant Governor.⁵¹ Ritchot was also asked by the minister to prepare a synopsis of events which culminated in the stopping of McDougall the previous fall.

The note was prepared over the period 29-30 May and consisted of two parts, both dated the 30th. One portion contained the narrative Cartier had asked for and may have well been drawn from, or the inspiration for, Ritchot's own Cahier I cited earlier. The other section of the note demonstrated that the curé from St. Norbert had learned much during his stay in Ottawa. Cartier was presented with a lengthy list of possible appointees to unspecified positions within the new provincial administration. In addition to many Red River names such as Riel, Lépine, and Tourond; Ritchot included those of several Québécois who had either approached him or been recommended to him while he was in Ottawa. They were Joseph Dubuc, Charles L. Champagne, and Victor Beaupré.⁵²

⁵⁰ See Ritchot Journal, 22 May, p. 559, and his Testimony, p. 77.

⁵¹ Select Committee, 1874; Ritchot Testimony, p. 77.

⁵² PAC, Macdonald Papers, MG26A, Vol. 103, Ritchot to Cartier, 30 May 1870.

Ritchot had other concerns in the final days before leaving Ottawa. He wanted to know the Lieutenant Governor's itinerary and doubtless pressed Cartier to have him take the fastest possible route and reach the Colony ahead of the troops. His obvious hope was that, as promised, the Canadian assumption of authority would rest on the arrival of the amnesty and of the Governor rather than on the bayonets of British soldiers and Canadian volunteers. The delegate was also interested in supplementing his own documentation of the negotiations. He wrote Judge Black and asked him for "some written account of our negotiations."⁵³ Black's reply to the request was negative. The former Recorder of Assiniboia claimed that he had considered such a document prior to Ritchot's request. He, however, "finally came to the conclusion that the best report which I could possibly give on the subject was the Bill itself."⁵⁴ This rather bland reply would have been a disappointment to Ritchot who was thus robbed of a credible document from a highly respected participant in the negotiations. Nonetheless, Ritchot's effort suggests that he did not fear that Black's recollections would contradict his own version of what had transpired in Ottawa.

⁵³ See, AASB, T 7485, Black to Ritchot, 25 May 1870. Ritchot's own letter has not been found but a reference to its preparation is in his Journal, 20 May, p. 559.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Chapter VI

THE CONFEDERATION OF RED RIVER

Ritchot left Ottawa on the 1st or 2nd of June. His return trip to Manitoba was uneventful, but his anxieties with regard to the elusive amnesty and the arrival of troops bore heavily on his mind. This trepidation surfaced in the reports he sent to Cartier while en route to Red River. In each, Ritchot returned to the same theme; the need to authenticate the promises of peace and security he would have to provide to the citizens and leaders of Red River in order to assure a peaceful reception for the Lieutenant Governor and the troops.

The first of the notes was sent from St. Cloud, Minnesota, within a week of his departure from Ottawa. The letter had been commenced 2 days previously in St. Paul. It complained that the newspapers of that city had done all they could to create trouble by portraying the sending of the military expedition as a sign of British treachery. Furthermore, the St. Paul papers had been warning Manitobans not to accept any arrangements prior to the granting of a general amnesty. Although Ritchot expressed his own faith in the word of Cartier and the others, he suggested the minister forward a telegram from England or "something promis-

ing or assuring an amnesty." Such a course, Ritchot continued, would benefit their mutual cause greatly.¹

The second portion of the letter reiterated the pressing need for official word on the amnesty. While all in Red River awaited his return, they knew little of what had been agreed upon in Ottawa. Fearing the worst from the troops, scouts had been sent out from Fort Garry to monitor the distant approaches. Ritchot also informed Cartier the Métis were prepared to resist the Canadians with Fenian aid if threatened with attack. Ritchot further bolstered his case for a quick proclamation of the amnesty by telling of his meeting with William Mactavish in St. Cloud. The former Governor of Assiniboia was said to have expressed his confidence in Riel's loyalty as well as the opinion that the Ottawa agreements would be accepted by all in the settlement. As final evidence of Riel's continued adherence to British institutions, Ritchot pointed out that in spite of many public offers of Fenian aid, "Riel wishes seriously to come to terms with Canada."²

On arriving in Georgetown at the head of Red River navigation, Ritchot prepared his second report. The priest reiterated the anxiety with which the settlement awaited the return of the delegates and the suspicion with which the ap-

¹ Select Committee, 1874; Doc. #59, Ritchot to Cartier, 5 June 1870, St. Paul. and also AASB, T 7586-87.

² Ibid., St. Cloud, 7 June 1870.

proaching troops were viewed. Much of this tension, according to Ritchot, was the result of ill-advised newspaper reports emanating from Canada. The residents of Red River were unhappy at seeing themselves branded as rebels in spite of their insistence they had never rebelled against any legitimate authority. They claimed only to "have driven back adventurers from Canada who came without any right to disturb them and to make war upon them in their own country."³ Ritchot raised again the boggy of Fenian intervention along with the qualification the Métis would reject their aid in light of the terms he was bearing from Ottawa. Cartier was told further all who had seen those terms were satisfied, and many even looked forward to the arrival of the troops who were thus seen as being sent in peace. Nonetheless, Ritchot warned, ". . . ils trouvent que c'est troupes ne devaient pas être envoyées avants les arrangements." For the Canadians to do otherwise would be perceived as coercion.⁴ After preparing his report, Ritchot boarded the steamboat International and proceeded to the tense settlement below.

Ritchot's impressions of the situation in Red River are supported by the recorded observations of Alexander Begg. Although sanguine about the state of affairs, Begg noted

³ Select Committee, 1874; Doc. #60, Ritchot to Cartier, Georgetown, 13 June 1870, and certified copy of the French original, AASB, T 7620-21.

⁴ Ibid., emphasis in the original.

that by the end of May "A bad feeling" was arising among the French population with regard to the arrival of Canadian volunteers.⁵ On the same day as Ritchot's warning to Cartier from Georgetown, Riel had ordered the winterers to remain near the Colony pending the arrival of the delegates.⁶ Word of Ritchot's departure from Ottawa only reached the settlement on 14 June.⁷

A far better barometer of the tension caused by Ritchot's delay and the approaching troops is found in two official communications sent by the Provisional Government. Both notes assumed Ritchot was still in Ottawa and it is unclear whether Ritchot was able to intercept them while on his way home. The first of the notes, signed by Louis Schmidt, complained of the lack of any official communication concerning the negotiations in Ottawa and the Act which they had produced. Without such knowledge, Schmidt warned Ritchot that the government was not in any position to commit itself to accepting any terms. The principal thrust of the letter was, however, a protest against the dispatch of troops. Ritchot was told of Red River's misgivings about the expedition. Without any official word from either Canada or the delegates, the population could only assume the troops represented a second attempt to impose a Canadian Governor by

⁵ Begg Journal, 24 May, p. 375.

⁶ Ibid., 7 June 1870, p. 379.

⁷ Ibid., 14 June 1870, p. 380.

force. Ritchot was asked why the troops were coming when peace had reigned in the settlement since the departure of Schultz, Lynch, Mair, and the others. Secondly, Schmidt argued that the arrival of Canadian volunteers in the settlement would provoke more difficulty than they were supposed to prevent. In the words of Schmidt, "Nous en savons tous quelque chose, sans excepter le Canada; qu'elle [Canada] a été la principale cause de nos troubles."⁸ The missive closed by instructing Ritchot to protest the sending of the volunteers who would produce trouble within the Colony, and additional expense to the Canadian treasury.

Schmidt's second note began by chastising Ritchot for his delay in returning home or informing the Government of his activities. The emissary was told of stillborn plans to dispatch a second delegation to Ottawa. Schmidt asked Ritchot to realize the unease which resulted from the lack of detailed news and the continued absence of the delegates. The delegate was also told of mounting pressure on the government for word of a satisfactory arrangement with the Canadians. Some were even accusing the Executive of lying about its efforts. As with the first note, the principal grievance lay not with Ritchot, but with the Canadians. The curé was told to warn Canada that Red River "would never accept unification without knowing the conditions and the explanations offered by our delegates and the Canadian Govern-

⁸ AASB, T 7580-83, Schmidt to Ritchot, 4 June 1870.

ment."⁹

In a passage which indicated concern with legal repercussions if not injured pride, the dispatch bemoaned the absence of any references to the Provisional Government in any of the reports emanating from Canada. Schmidt protested that the government had been recognized and completed by the Convention of Forty. He further maintained that the Provisional Government had been the authority which had appointed, commissioned and instructed the delegation.¹⁰ Schmidt's note ended with the plea that while all did not doubt their delegates or remain ignorant of their difficulties, they did want them to return home.

The arrivals of the International had been the subject of much observation for several weeks as Ritchot was expected to disembark on each occasion. The long wait ended at 3 P.M. on 17 June. The Colony would soon know the results of his labours, and Ritchot would learn if the concessions he had wrung from the Canadians would satisfy those who had sent him to Ottawa and ensure peace. The delegate was given a hero's welcome by Riel and other leading associates of the Provisional Government. The Métis militia even provided a 21-gun salute.

⁹ AASB, T 7601-4, Schmidt to Ritchot, 10 June 1870. Author's translation.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Following the initial formalities, Ritchot was debriefed by Riel and others.¹¹ They were assured that the amnesty would be proclaimed shortly since it had been promised as the "sine qua non condition" of the entire negotiation package. When asked by Riel for written confirmation, Ritchot referred to Cartier's letter which he agreed was unsatisfactory unless supported by the verbal explanations which he could provide. Ritchot then explained the context of the note and the political realities of the situation to Riel. Riel then told the delegate that if he thought the note sufficient, "[Riel] hoped it was so."¹²

The debriefing process continued the next day when Ritchot met with the Executive Council of the Provisional Government.¹³ The specific nature of what Ritchot told the Executive can be inferred from Bishop Taché's later recollections of his own conversations with the returned delegate. Ritchot corroborated all the assurances that Taché had given the Métis leaders about Canada's good intentions and the blanket aspects of the amnesty promises. Taché recalled being informed by Ritchot that "a promise of full and complete amnesty" had been given by Young and Murdoch on behalf of the Crown.¹⁴ Ritchot also told Taché that

¹¹ Begg Journal, 17 June, p. 382, refers to the salute. See also Ritchot Testimony, p. 79.

¹² Ritchot Testimony, p. 80.

¹³ Begg Journal, 18 June, p. 382.

the Canadians had been able to assure him that the amnesty would not only be granted "but that it would arrive probably before they [the delegates] returned home, certainly before the arrival of the Lieutenant-Governor."¹⁵ Ritchot placed special emphasis on Cartier's suggestion that Riel should remain in control until the arrival of the Canadian administrator.

Reassured by the news from Ottawa, Riel then invited Ritchot to communicate his favourable reception to Cartier. The minister was told that "President Riel" was satisfied and would soon summon his Council and the Legislative Assembly of the Provisional Government to consider the Act before submitting it to the population.¹⁶ Insofar as the Governor's reception was concerned, Cartier was assured that the appointee would be greeted cordially. The Rielites were in fact anxious for the Governor to arrive ahead of the troops. This is why Ritchot requested that he arrive via the St. Paul route and confided to Cartier that secret discussions were under way to send an escort as far as Ottawa to meet him. In a less positive vein, the Canadians were advised that the departure of the troops before the acceptance of

¹⁴ Select Committee, 1874; Taché Testimony, p. 35.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., Doc. #61, Ritchot to Cartier, 18 June 1870. The use of the titles "President", "Legislative Assembly", etc were atypical of Ritchot's previous writings and suggests the note was influenced by the executive which had become jealous of its official status.

the terms was not well regarded by the local population. Ritchot, however, claimed he had dispelled most of their fears with his assurances of the peaceful purposes for which the troops had been dispatched. Thus, as Cartier had earlier wished, the Métis were planning to help guide the troops to the settlement. These expressions of faith in Canadian goodwill were qualified by Ritchot who warned, "Je suis convaincu que tout ira bien pourvu toujours que l'amnistie nous arrive à temps."¹⁷

The news that Ritchot carried from Ottawa was not long in circulating through the roads of the settlement. Within three days after the arrival of the delegate, Begg was reporting that the mission was "a very complete and successful one."¹⁸ Intentionally or otherwise, Ritchot's reports had undergone some embellishment within the anxious Colony. It was rumoured that Ritchot was bearing the amnesty. The full report to the residents of Red River had yet to be made and would in fact be postponed.

The Executive had summoned the elected representatives of the Legislative Assembly to hear Ritchot on 23 June. The meeting was, however, adjourned due to the reputed poor health of the delegate. He had in fact already missed a second interview with the Executive held two days previous.

¹⁷ Ibid., The original note, AASB T 7638-39, contains the emphasis.

¹⁸ Begg Journal, 20 June, p. 383.

In a note informing Ritchot of the hasty adjournment of the Assembly, Thomas Bunn indicated that the delegate had other reasons for wishing to delay his official public accounting. Bunn advised Ritchot that in addition to informing the assemblymen of Ritchot's physical difficulties, Riel had suggested that Ritchot was awaiting the appearance of at least one of the other delegates.¹⁹ Ritchot, and no doubt Riel, already knew that Black was on his way to England and that Scott had gone to New York. It might be argued that the two were in fact vainly waiting for further confirmation of the all important amnesty before meeting the House. Whatever the case, Bunn invited Ritchot to either appear the next day or submit a written report.

When Ritchot appeared before the Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia, his principal goal was to win acceptance of the arrangements for which he had laboured so tenaciously. As implied in his letters to Cartier, Ritchot felt that all hopes for a peaceful resolution of affairs rested on his ability to pacify the settlement before the arrival of the troops. The delegate thus coloured his presentation in such a way as to forestall any difficulties a more accurate report might have raised. Details of the less positive aspects of his mission had been presented to Riel, Taché, and others, but these were not for public consumption. In

¹⁹ Select Committee, 1874; Doc. #62, Thomas Bunn to Ritchot, 23 June 1870.

presenting his case before the Assembly, Ritchot was very much the politician anxious to have his proposal accepted without controversy, recriminations, or worst of all, doubts. Whether he was acting according to his own counsel or that of others is impossible to tell and is perhaps irrelevant if one accepts the premise that Ritchot was de facto a member of the Provisional Executive. Ritchot's exposition of the Manitoba Act, whose terms were familiar to many in Red River, nonetheless assured its unanimous acceptance by the Assembly, and should be examined in detail.

Ritchot's words to the Assembly were translated into English by Riel and recorded by William Coldwell for use in the New Nation. The delegate assured the members that in spite of the arrest of Scott and himself, the emissaries never feared for their safety. The majority of Canadians, he said, "had better regard for justice and the rights of men."²⁰ The delegates had only allowed themselves to be arrested so as not to embarrass England and Canada. Nonetheless, out of respect "to themselves, to those who delegated them, to the Government here, and the people of the Northwest generally", they protested their treatment.²¹ Following the reading of the Petition of 20 April, the Assembly was told that the protest had been based on the Governor General's Proclamation of the previous winter. To shouts of

²⁰ Ritchot Report, p. 3.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

"hear", the emissary declared that in the Proclamation, "His Excellency, as the Representative of the Queen, stated that a pardon had been granted to all those who had risen in arms."²² Young's acknowledgement of receipt and his offer to submit the petition to Cabinet for consideration was then read.

Satisfied that this was all the representatives needed to know about the initial difficulties of the delegates, Riel then asked Ritchot if the delegation had been received as that of the Provisional Government. In response, Ritchot stated that although they had been recognized officially only as delegates of the Northwest, the Canadian Ministers "privately" paid due respect to the delegates' Commissions from the Provisional Government. The preliminary exchange of notes between Ritchot and Howe was then read. Ritchot, however, did not mention the persistence required on his part to secure Howe's note of recognition.

In keeping with the positive tone of his presentation, Ritchot's description of the negotiations was a simplified condensation of what his own notes recorded about his mission to Ottawa. The altered version presented to the public ignored the the Canadian breaches of faith and placed the verbal assurances in the best possible light. The description of the negotiations was further simplified by referring

²² Ibid., p. 5.

to conflicting "lists" as opposed to counter-proposals and draft Bills.

Ritchot claimed that the Canadians opened the negotiations by presenting their own list of rights which they were prepared to accord to the people of Red River. This proposal was immediately rejected with the protest that the delegation had come to present, not to accept, terms of entry into Confederation. Ritchot continued by saying that the Canadians in turn rejected many of the terms presented by Red River, claiming that their submission to Parliament would result in the defeat of the Ministry. Such a defeat, they argued, would be of little benefit to the westerners. The Government then presented yet another list "quite different from that sent out" from the Northwest. The resulting stalemate produced an intervention by the Governor General who asked that a compromise list be prepared based on the two then supposedly before the negotiators. Ritchot further claimed that he replied that if such an agreement could not be reached "it would be necessary for him [the Governor General] to receive and treat with the delegates in the name of England."²³ A compromise list was then drawn up

²³ Ibid., p. 12. It is at this point that the record indicates that Ritchot was aware, prior to his departure from Ottawa, of his option to negotiate directly with the British if unsatisfied with the Canadians. That he did not exercise this option suggests his belief in the amnesty promises was sincere. This contemporary reference to knowledge of the British interest contradicts a later assertion made by J.M. Jolys in his Pages de Souvenirs et d'Histoire, La paroisse de Saint-Pierre-Jolys au Manito-

and submitted to lawyers in order to ascertain whether the new document was one the delegates could accept and which Canada could legally offer. The "list" was also submitted to sympathetic individuals from all the provinces who agreed the measure would be "advantageous" for Red River. The Colony was told this ritual of compromise and consultation produced the list submitted to Parliament for approval by both Chambers and made law. This imaginative representation of the facts enabled Ritchot and Riel to deflect any possible concerns over alterations to the Red River list of rights as drawn up by the Convention of Forty.

In spite of his simplified version of events relating to the Manitoba Act, Ritchot did mention the need to secure subsequent assurances and explanations from the government with regard to the land provisions of the Act. According to Ritchot, this stage of his mission was also satisfactory:

Wherever there is a doubt as to the meaning of the Act in this respect, it is to be interpreted in our favour (Cheers). This is only just, as manifestly, any law of this kind ought to be interpreted in favour of the people for whom it is made.²⁴

Ritchot's phrasing reflects the type of wording Cartier may have used during one of their many meetings which followed the end of the negotiations.

ba, (Archdiocèse de Québec, 1914), p. 14.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

Ritchot's characterizations of the discussions concerning the rights of occupancy and of the evolution of the Métis/Half-Breed reserve conform to, and clarify, what appeared in his own Journal. The underlying tone of this portion of the presentation was optimistic since the delegate had faith in the various assurances given him by Cartier and others during his stay in Ottawa. Noteworthy is the fact that Riel and O'Donoghue, both previously briefed, asked questions which allowed Ritchot to add further details on the land question.

Ritchot terminated the discussion of the land question by praising both of his co-delegates to Ottawa. He first singled out Alfred Scott, "so much insulted by the Press", as having done "excellent service" which earned him the esteem of the ministers for his "tact and ability." Insofar as the more concession-minded Judge Black was concerned, Ritchot declared that he had only to mention his name to make Red River aware of the good impression he had made on all. The Assembly was then assured that "on all questions, your delegates were perfectly agreed."²⁵

The cheers which followed the praise of Scott and Black may have stopped cold when Riel asked Ritchot if Red River was entering Confederation "only to give Canada jurisdiction over us?" Seizing the obvious cue, the delegate suggested

²⁵ Ibid., p. 24.

that the President might be referring to the Amnesty which had been raised by the 19th clause of the List of Rights. Here again, Ritchot's public version of the discussions supplements what was contained in his private notes. His discussion of the debt question is, however, unsupported by the other documentation in that his own papers do not deal with it. Red River was advised that as soon as Canadian authority was established, the Provisional Government would cease to exist and no claims could be made against it; compensation would have to be sought from the Crown. For its part, Canada would also have to assume a portion of the debt by virtue of its premature attempt to introduce its authority as would the HBC for allowing it to do so. The Colony was told that the Canadian Government, Clinton Murdoch, Lord Northcote, Donald A. Smith, Judge Black and others had already arranged the distribution of liability amongst their respective institutions.²⁶

As the afternoon progressed, Ritchot noted that he had been consulted as to whether there was any objection to having the Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba act in the same capacity for the entire Northwest. Ritchot further indicated that Manitoba would be exempt from Canadian regulations for

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 27-28. See also Northcote's Diary. The entries of 27-30 April allude to a series of discussions amongst the above named dealing with the question of financial losses, liability, claims and compensation. Ritchot may well have been made aware of these informal discussions either through Black or Cartier.

the preservation of the fisheries. As Ritchot phrased it, "it would not be very good to make laws to protect the fish when the people were hungry."²⁷ Ritchot then told of how Ottawa's initial offer of a \$20,000 subsidy had been rejected as insufficient and been raised by \$10,000. At this point Cartier's letter to Ritchot of 23 May was read to the Assembly by Thomas Bunn, "in further explanation of the Manitoba Act."²⁸ Ritchot's only comment on the letter, including its postscripts, was that the term "resident" was understood to include the winterers who maintained a domicile in Red River. Such relative silence on the letter for which he had laboured so hard suggests that, at least in public, Ritchot wanted to present the Manitoba Act as being satisfactory on its own. Ritchot and the Executive of the Provisional Government realized that a full explanation of the issuance and meaning of the letter would have belied the optimistic tone of the afternoon's presentation.

In his general comments on the mission, Ritchot expressed his faith in both the Canadian and British promises of fair treatment. The delegate also indicated that the new Lieutenant Governor was "a real gentleman." On the sensitive matter of the expected troops, the delegate claimed he never spoke for or against their being sent and that he believed the intentions of the Government in sending them were fair.

²⁷ Ritchot Report, pp. 30-31.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

The Assembly was further told that, in general, the Canadians with whom Ritchot had contact did not, "as a rule" support the positions being taken by the Canadian newspapers. The delegate suggested that most Canadians believed they might have acted similarly to the Provisional Government had they been attacked by outsiders.

Following the completion of Ritchot's presentation, Riel asked the Assembly for opinions on the agreement as explained by the delegate. A motion by Louis Schmidt asking that the Assembly "do now, in the name of the people, accept the Manitoba Act", was then carried unanimously. This was followed by a decision to welcome the Lieutenant Governor on his arrival and a vote of thanks for the efforts of Father Ritchot.²⁹ With the approbation of the Assembly for both himself and his work, Ritchot again took the floor. The St. Norbert priest was satisfied that his year long association with the militants opposed to Canadian pretensions had been fully justified by the results achieved. His closing comments reflected this relief.

The delegate first thanked the citizens of the Northwest "for the noble stand" they had taken. His Canadian counterparts, Cartier and Macdonald, were also acknowledged for the "liberal Act framed by them with the assistance of the delegation." Similar sentiments were expressed for Parliament

²⁹ Ibid., p. 44, and Stanley, Louis Riel, pp. 148-49.

for having carried the measure by a vote of 120 to 11. With an eye to his own reputation, Ritchot took care to thank the Queen of England, "whose subject I have always been, and am today." Most importantly, however, Ritchot singled out Providence as deserving of the gratitude of all "for being let through so many difficulties and dangers."³⁰

Ritchot's remarks bore a conciliatory tone in discussing the enemies of the movement in which he had played such a vital role. He asked his listeners not to "think harshly of those who did not come with us and demand rights: for it was a very imprudent thing." He later added that "if there were some among us who did not dare to oppose McDougall, they were perhaps right."³¹ The delegate noted that although division had made the task difficult, the unity he saw before him would make "a strong people" and Manitoba would become a model Province. Ritchot was not so sanguine as to assume that all was well. After declaring that many immigrants would be arriving and that Red River would be glad to receive them, Ritchot offered the caution: "let us be intelligent enough to distinguish between the good and those who come to work against us."³²

³⁰ Ritchot Report, p. 46.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 46-47, 49.

³² Ibid., p. 47-48.

After a brief discussion of the initial exclusion and later inclusion of the Portage settlement, Ritchot concluded his remarks by referring again to the favorable sentiment he claimed existed in Canada. Red River had received all the "sympathy and attention" that could be expected. As well:

admiration was expressed for the stand taken by the people who had . . . , shown themselves to be a reflective, prudent people--wise to plan--prudent to act--so that amidst many possibilities offering themselves, they had passed almost unscathed through a crisis of the gravest moment.³³

Ritchot reported his success to Cartier four days later. The minister was told that the terms not only had been accepted but that "Sympathy with Canada is lively and sincere." Riel's wish that the Governor would arrive quickly and relieve him of his responsibilities was also passed on by the delegate.³⁴ Ritchot's note betrays the fact that at least for a time, Bishop Taché would supersede him as the principal intermediary between the residents of Red River and the Canadian Government. The curé referred Cartier to more complete details of events found in two telegrams and one letter sent by the Bishop earlier. Furthermore, Ritchot informed the minister that Taché was leaving that day for Ottawa.³⁵

³³ Ibid., pp. 49-50.

³⁴ Select Committee, 1874; Doc. #63, Ritchot to Cartier, 28 June 1870.

³⁵ Ibid.

Taché believed that Ritchot's return to Red River would have also brought official word of the amnesty which had been promised to him prior to his own departure from Ottawa. Realizing that Ritchot had been given little more than what he had himself been told six months previous, Taché felt obliged to meet again with the Canadians. As he testified later "I wished to make certain, to my own satisfaction, the promise made to the delegates, and report to Ottawa the satisfaction of the people."³⁶

Ritchot ended his note to Cartier by thanking the minister for all the assistance he had provided and by enjoining him to pass those sentiments on to Macdonald and the other ministers with whom he had contact. In a rather mundane postscript, the Minister of Militia was told that his troops would find sufficient supplies of beef within the settlement and that Taché would provide further details. An additional indication of the young province's first efforts at jobbery was Ritchot's renewed presentation of Joseph Dubuc and Charles Champagne as individuals worthy of Government favours. The two had been Ritchot's travelling companions from Ottawa.³⁷

³⁶ Ibid., Taché Testimony, p. 36.

³⁷ Ritchot to Cartier, 28 June 1870. This last note was deleted from the printed version and can be found in the original, (AASB T 7654-57).

His official duties at an end, a satisfied Ritchot returned to his parish where he again reported on his mission before a public assembly. In order to more completely signal what he believed was the successful conclusion of his involvement in a cause he had helped launch twelve months previously, Ritchot announced plans for a votive chapel.³⁸ The Chapel, dedicated to the Madonna, represented the fulfillment of the promise made by Ritchot to the Métis during the darkest days of October. It remained to be seen if the Canadians and British authorities would live up to their own promises to have the amnesty and the new Lieutenant Governor arrive before the troops in order to assure the peaceful assumption of Canadian authority.

With a tense peace in the Colony and Taché in Ottawa lobbying for the proclamation of the amnesty, Ritchot spent much of the summer at home supervising the corvée which had been organized to erect what at that time was called the "Chapelle de Notre Dame de la Victoire."³⁹ This work was doubtless upset by the unexpected arrival, in battle formation, of the military expedition which "captured" the undefended Fort Garry on 24 August. The arrival of the troops

³⁸ Begg Journal, 8 July, p. 388.

³⁹ This is the name found on a scribbler among Ritchot's other papers found in the APSN. The notebook, "Cahier de Souscription pour la Chapelle de Notre Dame de la Victoire promise le Octobre 1869 à l'occasion des troubles", contains the names of all those who contributed labour, material, or money to the project.

before that of the Governor and of the expected amnesty produced a great deal of disorder within the Colony as the reinforced Canadian element clashed with the Métis.

Lacking any civil authority and unwilling to impose martial law, Colonel Wolseley asked Donald A. Smith to assume William Mactavish's old title of HBC Governor pending the arrival of the Canadian appointee, Adams A. Archibald of Nova Scotia. Faced with the obvious betrayal of the understandings reached in Ottawa, Ritchot visited Smith and Wolseley on 29 August. When Smith began to speak of how the Colonel had reestablished the Company regime, the priest exploded. According to Joseph Dubuc who had accompanied him, Ritchot treated Smith to a fifteen minute lecture which demonstrated "d'une manière accablante" that the old government had ceased to exist and could not be resurrected. Unable to respond to Ritchot's well informed lesson in constitutional theory, Smith protested that he had only assumed the title at the insistence of Wolseley and in order to help protect life and property. Smith continued by asserting that he found the task heavy. Ritchot replied that to work to preserve order was acceptable. "Mais," he added, "ce n'est pas Assiniboia qui revit. C'est une espèce de police transitoire que vous formez." Fearful that Smith might issue warrants for the arrest of Riel and other principals, Ritchot warned against committing any act which could produce fatal results. Smith was advised that the responsibility for such

consequences would certainly fall on those who would have acted without authority as Smith was doing. Smith's rejoinder was to deny any such intent and to assert that all the English, including Bishop Machray were furious with him for not taking any action against Riel and the others.⁴⁰

Following his meeting, Ritchot returned to St. Norbert where he reportedly told his parishioners that "as no Civil Government had yet been established, they were perfectly at liberty to form another Provisional Government."⁴¹ The expression of such sentiments by Ritchot is entirely plausible. That he was advocating a second resistance is, however, to be doubted. His enduring faith in the strength of the promises made and the support of those he had met in Ottawa and Quebec persisted. Ritchot's desire was for passive resistance. As paraphrased by Dubuc in a note to Riel, Ritchot declared that he too was indignant at the outrages being suffered by the Métis,

Mais, aux yeux du monde qui nous regard, aux yeux des étrangers qui s'interressent à notre sort, plus ils [the Canadians] feront des bêtises et s'enfonceront dans la voie de l'infamie qu'ils ont adoptées, plus notre cause sera belle, plus de sympathies seront pour nous, et plus le ciel nous secondera.⁴²

⁴⁰ PAM, MG3, D1, Riel Papers, #41, J.D. [Joseph Dubuc] to Louis Riel, n.d.

⁴¹ Captain G.L. Huyshe, The Red River Expedition, (London, Macmillan and Company, 1871), p. 216.

⁴² PAM, Riel Papers, #40, Joseph Dubuc to Louis Riel, 6 September 1870.

Ritchot's hopes were perhaps justified with regard with large segments of public opinion both in his own time and beyond. Such sympathy, however, would produce little tangible fruit within his own lifetime; much of which he spent attempting to secure for his people the fulfillment of the promises made to them, through his intercession, in 1870.

Chapter VII
IN DEFENCE OF RIEL

With the installation of Canadian authority in the wake of the Wolseley Expedition, Riel was forced underground out of fear of arrest or worse. Leadership of the Métis cause, at least in public, was assumed by Bishop Taché assisted by a handful of liberal professionals who had come west to aid the cause of the French language and Catholic faith. The principal members of this secular group were Joseph Royal, Joseph Dubuc, and Marc-Amable Girard. Taché and his political friends could act with greater freedom than could Riel, Ritchot, Lépine, and other leaders of the resistance movement because they were not directly linked with the death of Thomas Scott, the casus belli of the militant emigrants from Ontario.

Ritchot for his part, had to be almost as circumspect as Riel, and for the same reason of personal safety. The parish priest went underground by retreating to his priestly duties. Nonetheless, he did play a significant role in the affairs of Manitoba from time to time, as with the "Fenian Invasion" of October 1871 led by William O'Donoghue. Riel's former associate in the Provisional Government hoped to capitalize on Métis grievances by leading a band of Fenians

into Manitoba. O'Donoghue believed that the disgruntled Métis would rally to his banner and free themselves from the oppressive Canadians. Once successful, an appeal would be made by the "liberated" population for annexation to the United States. Although many individual Métis were disillusioned sufficiently with Confederation to consider rebellion, their leadership, still dominated by Riel, was insistent on a united show of support for the regime of Lieutenant Governor Archibald. Apart from any altruistic motives, the Rielites hoped that a visible demonstration of Imperial loyalty would refute the often hurled charges of treason and perhaps hasten the promulgation of the expected amnesty.¹

As had been the case two years previous, the rumours which preceded the "invasion" from the south had far greater effect than the threat. In the face of rumours of nine hundred Fenian veterans of the Civil War, Archibald commanded a divided civilian population of vengeful Canadians, alienated Métis, and ambivalent Half Breeds. To make matters worse, his military garrison consisted of only eighty men. Archibald knew that the Canadian troops and civilians alone could not hold the province; he needed the loyalty and support of

¹ The sincerity and timing of Riel's commitment to Queen and country remains a subject of controversy. See A.H. de Trémaudan, "Louis Riel and the Fenian Raid of 1871", Canadian Historical Review, June 1923, and J.P. Pritchett, "The so-called Fenian Raid on Manitoba", CHR, 1929.

the Métis.²

The Lieutenant Governor first attempted to convince Taché to postpone a visit to Ottawa until after the crisis had passed. The Bishop, however, would only promise to investigate the accuracy of the rumours as he headed south to St. Paul. Taché advised Archibald that he would only return in the event of "any real danger."³ To Archibald's query as to whom he might consult to learn the sentiments and intentions of the Métis, Taché indicated Father Ritchot. The Lieutenant Governor was told that the priest "has a great deal of influence amongst the population, and will tell you all he knows about it when you call on him."⁴ Taché, however, was the first to see Ritchot when he went to St. Norbert the next day, 23 September. He also met the fugitive Riel. When asked by the Bishop of his intentions with regard to the Fenians, Riel replied that even though he knew little of their movement, he would not fight at their side. Nonetheless, Riel told Taché that he could not decide what action to take because of the personal risk he would assume by emerging from hiding. "I may go to the front and fight against the Fenians, and I am sure to be killed by those be-

² Select Committee, 1874; Doc. #90, Adams A. Archibald, "Memorandum connected with Fenian Invasion of Manitoba in October, 1871."

³ Ibid., Taché Testimony, p. 53.

⁴ Ibid.

hind me."⁵

Several days later, Riel and other Métis principals such as Ambroise Lépine, André Nault, and Baptiste Tourond began a series of meetings in the parishes. The records of the meetings and subsequent assemblies indicate an effort by the Métis leadership first to agree on a common course of action, enjoin the bulk of the Métis to resist O'Donoghue's appeals, and then rally a force to help defend the province.⁶ At no time does it appear that the Métis leadership contemplated anything less "loyal" than neutrality. Nonetheless, Riel was still regarded as a fugitive rebel by many of the same Canadians he was prepared to help defend. Before committing himself publicly to the Canadian cause, the Métis leader needed protection from harm. The task of winning such assurances from Archibald fell to Ritchot.

Archibald had invited Ritchot to Fort Garry 4 October to discuss the attitude being taken by the Métis with regard to the Fenians. Archibald advised Ritchot he did not suspect disloyalty, but he did have to know what was going on. The priest was also warned the province would fall victim to its

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Riel's notes of those meetings which took place between 28 September and 7 October are translated and discussed by A.H. de Trémaudan, "Louis Riel and the Fenian Raid", and are also edited in The Collected Writings of Louis Riel/ Les écrits complets de Louis Riel, Volume I, ed., Raymond Huel, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1985), pp. 140-55.

internal divisions and be lost to the invaders if all or a portion of the Métis were hostile towards the government.⁷ Ritchot replied that Métis loyalty was assured and their aid available if necessary. However, when Archibald requested Ritchot to ask the Métis to take up arms against the Fenians, the priest "observed" that Riel had been warned not to show himself for fear of being placed under arrest if not killed.⁸ Archibald responded that Riel would have nothing to fear from a show of loyalty and that such a display would help disprove charges of treasonous intent and advance the cause of the amnesty. Ritchot ended the encounter by agreeing to forward Archibald's concerns and promises to Riel the next day.⁹

The intermediary had secured Archibald's verbal assurance of temporary protection for Riel during the crisis. However, after several hours of consultation with others and some reflection on the value of past promises, Ritchot sent Archibald a note. It reminded the Lieutenant Governor of their agreement as to the propriety of having Riel direct his people and deter them from taking a wrong course. Ritchot, however, warned Archibald that he was not prepared to ask Riel to come forward "avant d'avoir quelque garantie

⁷ Select Committee, 1874; Ritchot Testimony, pp. 89-90.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. Archibald's subsequent testimony before the same Committee did not take issue with the version presented by Ritchot.

que son action sera bien vue de votre Excellence." Specifically, the note asked for "quelque assurance qui le mette à l'abrit de toute atteinte légale, au moins pour la circonstance actuelle."¹⁰

Ritchot received Archibald's reply the next day. The note contained the following assurance:

Should Mr. Riel come forward as suggested, he need be under no apprehension that his liberty shall be interfered with in any way: to use your own language, 'pour la circonstance actuelle.'¹¹

In an implicit reference to how a prompt display of devotion would aid the amnesty cause, Achibald added ". . . the cooperation of the French half-breeds and their leaders in the support of the Crown, under present circumstances, will be very welcome and cannot be looked upon otherwise than as entitling them to most favorable consideration."¹²

Riel replied formally to the Lieutenant Governor's private communication and proclamation 7 October. Signed also by Ambroise Lépine and Pierre Parenteau, the note made reference to what Archibald had communicated to Ritchot. Those assurances, they noted, would make it easier for them to assist the people in responding to Archibald's call to arms.

¹⁰ AASB, T 9398-99, Ritchot to Archibald, 4 October 1871. N.B., the translated version of the note, published along with Ritchot's testimony before the Select Committee replaces "aujourd'hui" with "yesterday", (Doc #69).

¹¹ Select Committee, 1874; Doc. #69, Archibald to Ritchot, 5 October 1871.

¹² Ibid.

Archibald was nonetheless reminded that, although the Métis remained devoted and could be counted upon for as long as their services were required, they could not be expected to be enthusiastic.¹³ The appearance of two hundred Métis under arms and their review by Archibald followed shortly thereafter. By that time, the Fenian adventure had collapsed but the fears remained. Thus, Archibald's famous handshake with Riel only served to stir up another round of rage in Ontario and among the Canadian element in the West. This anger, and Macdonald's repudiation of Archibald's action, quickly ended any hopes of accelerating the amnesty process. In fact, in the face of Macdonald's concerns for the future of the West, Archibald's assurances were made as irrelevant as those made earlier by Cartier.

When it became apparent that the amnesty was no closer to realization, Ritchot set about to present a petition directly to the Crown through the agency of Sir John Young, newly elevated to the status of Lord Lisgar. Unlike the petition of the previous year, which had been prepared by Cartier's office, Ritchot's own effort was specific in its references to the various amnesty promises made in 1870.

¹³ PAM, Riel Papers, #114, Riel, et. al. to Archibald, 7 October 1871. The above original is signed only by Riel. However, the text presented among the papers of the Select Committee bears the additional signatures. It is plausible that an original draft remained among Riel's papers while a further endorsed copy was forwarded to Archibald.

The Petition, over the signatures of Ritchot and A.H. Scott, opened by describing how they, along with Judge Black, had gone to Ottawa "to lay before Your Majesty's Representative . . . , the wishes of the people of the Red River and of the North-West."¹⁴ The Crown was further advised that "it was merely in conformity" with the Provisional Government's commissions of 22 March 1870 that the delegates had proceeded. Following a reference to Howe's 26 April letter of recognition, Ritchot recalled how the delegates opened the negotiations by advising the Ministers that any agreement would be impossible without the granting of a general amnesty "for all the illegal acts" committed during the crisis which had brought the delegates to Ottawa. The reported response of the Ministers was

That they were in measure to assure them that such was the intention of Your Majesty, that they could consequently proceed with the negotiations, being satisfied that the Royal Prerogative of mercy would be exercised by the grant of a general amnesty.¹⁵

Ritchot expanded his narrative by making reference to the "interview" with Sir John Young and Sir Clinton Murdoch. At that time the two peers had asked the delegates if they were satisfied with the arrangements agreed to with the Canadians; "If not they were ready and authorized by the Government of Your Majesty to adopt such measures as would satisfy

¹⁴ Select Committee, 1874; Doc. 64a, Ritchot and A.H. Scott to Her Most Gracious Majesty, 8 February 1872.

¹⁵ Ibid.

them." The delegates pointed to the lack of anything written concerning a general amnesty as a source of concern. They regretted that they had nothing "to lay before the people of Red River as a proof of the promise made to them." In response, Young and Murdoch "repeatedly assured" them there would be "no difficulty" as amnesty "would surely be granted in order to do away with all the illegalities and irregularities of the late troubles." The petitioners then noted these vice-regal assurances of clemency prompted the delegates to express their satisfaction which allowed Young to send his telegram to Granville announcing the satisfactory conclusion of the negotiations.

The Petition also referred to Ritchot's second meeting with the Governor General, on 19 May. That session produced renewed assurances and the promise that the proclamation would precede the arrival of Canadian authority in Red River. Ritchot then recalled how the Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia had been advised of the promised amnesty. This assurance, it was noted, helped to "avert new complications." The two year delay in promulgating the amnesty was then cited as a source of anxiety throughout the Dominion as one man (Elzéar Goulet) had been killed and others forced into exile. In the words of the petitioners, they had been the victims of "parties who call themselves loyal but refuse to believe in the promise made at Ottawa."

Before concluding, the Petition noted that the Provincial Assembly had, three days previously, called for the preparation of its own address to the Crown asking to be informed as to "the action already taken, or which it may be Your Majesty's Royal pleasure to take, relative to the political movements of 1869 and '70." The ultimate request of the former delegates was straightforward; the Monarch was asked to "proclaim the amnesty which was promised us when negotiating in Ottawa."¹⁶

When the petition reached Ottawa, Macdonald was aghast. The thorny amnesty issue and a resurrection of debate over the Manitoba question were the last things he wanted to deal with during the course of the forthcoming general elections. As he told Archibald in early March, a discussion of the amnesty with the British Government "would be exceedingly inconvenient . . . until after our elections are over."¹⁷ The reasons for the delay were spelled out in a less political manner for Lord Lisgar six weeks later.

In the present state of the population at Fort Garry it is important that no answer should be sent. A refusal of an amnesty would excite the French Half Breeds to madness, and granting an amnesty would excite the British [Ontario] settlers to the same extent.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ PAC, Macdonald Papers, vol. 17, p. 306, Macdonald to Archibald, 4 March 1872.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 572-73, Macdonald to Lisgar, 20 April 1872.

Macdonald nevertheless advised Lisgar that his personal opinion was that following the elections, an amnesty might be issued to cover all offences "except murder."¹⁹

Macdonald's principal political problem, however, was not the amnesty itself, but Ritchot's "impudent" narrative of the genesis of the amnesty question. Lisgar was told that "most of their statements will require a specific denial and I shall see Cartier on the subject at once." Denials by Cartier and Macdonald of what was said around the conference table were insufficient; Macdonald also had to refute the vice-regal assurances of Young and Murdoch. Although not present at either of the interviews referred to by Ritchot, Macdonald felt able to tell Lisgar,

Their statement of what occurred between themselves and Your Excellency is also altogether false and must be repudiated. I shall send you a draft of your reply in a day or two.²⁰

When Lisgar forwarded the Petition to the Home Government his covering letter bore the mark of Macdonald's influence. In his "own defence", Young commented on the paragraphs which dealt with his role in the amnesty question. The Governor General expressed "extreme surprise" at the version presented and declared he "never made any such promise of an amnesty," He claimed he had several discussions with his ministers beforehand and "was quite on my guard in respect

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

to it."²¹ Lisgar contended that in the face of the "earnest and repeated instances of the delegates", he responded consistently that the matter should be submitted to the Canadian and British Governments where it would receive "serious attention." Young added that he further guarded himself "by adding that I was not in a position to make any promise or give any assurances whatever on the subject."²² A final note mentioned that Murdoch would agree that "this was the line agreed upon, and the language used at the interviews."²³

The intervention of Macdonald and Lisgar ensured that little would result from the Petition, at least in the short term. For the longer term, Macdonald later sought repudiations of Ritchot's contentions from both Murdoch and Cartier. Murdoch's note, written in March 1873, was categorical. In part it declared,

I have no recollection of any promise or expectations of an amnesty to Riel and his associates being held out by Lord Lisgar, when Mr. Ritchot had an interview with him in my presence or at any other time.²⁴

For his part, Cartier was less accommodating.

²¹ Select Committee, 1874; Lord Lisgar to the Earl of Kimberley, 25 April 1874, Doc. 64a.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Select Committee, 1874; Doc. #53, Murdoch to Herbert (Colonial Office), 5 March 1873.

Attempting to recover from Bright's disease, Cartier received Lisgar's denial while in England. The end of the note read "I am quite clear that neither on that occasion in question, nor on any other, did I give an assurance or promise of an amnesty to cover all offences committed during the insurrection."²⁵ Although Lisgar's statement did not conflict with Cartier's earlier recollection to Macdonald that "nothing went beyond stating that he [Lisgar] would transmit Ritchot's petition to the Queen,"²⁶ the minister later asked Macdonald to "bear in mind" that they both told Ritchot "that the question of an amnesty was not for our decision, but for the Queen and the Imperial Government."²⁷ Cartier also noted that Lisgar "forgot to mention" his vice-regal assurance that the "military expedition was going to Red River not to arrest any one, but to maintain order, as done by any garrison of regulars in any Canadian city where there was one."²⁸ In effect, Cartier did not repudiate Ritchot's implication that promises had been made that no one would be harmed as a result of the transfer. In Cartier's eyes, the issue revolved on the question of who had the formal power to grant an amnesty.

²⁵ Ibid., Doc. #52, Lisgar to Cartier, 21 February 1873.

²⁶ Ibid., Doc. #125, Cartier to Macdonald, 8 February 1873.

²⁷ Ibid., Document 125, Cartier to Macdonald, 23 February 1873.

²⁸ Ibid.

An unsatisfied Macdonald asked Cartier to "write me in full what the conversation was."²⁹ What piqued Macdonald's curiosity was Cartier's letter to Ritchot of 23 May 1870 which referred to the audience and the "liberal policy which the Government proposed to follow in relation to the persons for whom you are interesting yourself"³⁰. Cartier's death in May 1873 precluded any response to Macdonald's note. The amnesty dispute would have to continue without the input of one of the principal players.

The amnesty question acquired a new urgency in Ritchot's agenda in early December 1872. At that time a failed attempt to capture Riel at his mother's St. Vital home renewed the threat of a major outbreak of violence in Manitoba. Subsequently, Taché cooperated with the Federal authorities in convincing Riel and Lépine to leave the country with funds provided by Macdonald and Donald A. Smith.³¹ The exiling of Riel and Lépine was still not the promised amnesty and Ritchot soon found himself on the road to Ottawa. Once again he would intervene with the Federal authorities on behalf of the Métis in general, and Riel and Lépine in particular. The bitter experience of the past three years caused the returning intermediary to be pessimistic. Writing Taché

²⁹ PAC, Macdonald Papers, pp. 41572-78, Macdonald to Cartier, 22 March 1873.

³⁰ Select Committee, 1874; Doc. #58, Cartier to Ritchot, 23 May 1870.

³¹ Stanley, Louis Riel, p. 180-81.

from Moorehead Minnesota, the priest remarked, "Je me propose de me rendre à Ottawa; mais d'y rester peu longtemps, je ne compte pas beaucoup sur le gouvernement."³² Ritchot did not return to his parish until the end of June.

Ritchot arrived in the capital 5 March, and spent the next several weeks seeing various officials about neglected aspects of the 1870 settlement, especially the amnesty. Ritchot's notes indicate he raised the familiar points in a meeting with Hector Langevin. The principal issues raised were the ministerial assurances of the Imperial Government's intent to grant a general pardon. Although he lacked documentary proof of the promise, Ritchot noted his reference to the assurance in his letter to Cartier of 18 May 1870. That Cartier had not taken the occasion of his response to deny Ritchot's claim, was regarded by the former delegate as evidence supporting his case. The second point raised with regard to the amnesty was that Murdoch and Young confirmed the ministerial assurances during their meeting with the delegates 3 May. On that occasion they had refused to produce anything in writing but pointed to Young's proclamation of 6 December 1869 as proof of Her Majesty's intentions. Ritchot further noted that two weeks later, Young promised documentary evidence. At that same meeting, 19 May, the Governor General told Ritchot the sending of a petition over the delegate's name was only a matter of form. As additional sup-

³² AASB, T 11664-67, Ritchot to Taché, 27 February 1873.

port for his case, Ritchot pointed to the exchange of notes which officially launched the negotiations in 1870, and his various unanswered petitions. In a cryptic remark, the frustrated delegate wrote "3 ans de silence; nous avons besoin d'être entendu." This was followed by an implied threat to expose his case to the public. "Je n'ai peut être pas de preuve devant un cour, mais j'en ai de faites devant l'opinion publique."³³

Whether or not Hector Langevin heard this threat during his meeting with Ritchot or read it later is unclear. Macdonald, however, was aware of it. Alexander Morris, Lieutenant Governor and Macdonald's principal informant in Manitoba, had already issued a warning five days before Langevin met with Ritchot. The Prime Minister was advised by cypher telegram of Ritchot's claim to have a letter from Cartier promising public buildings complete with a Legislative Library. He also was said to possess other sensitive documents which "he had promised not to publish until satisfied of bad faith of Dominion Government"³⁴. Morris' telegram also contained an interesting comment on clerical politics; Ritchot had so far maintained his silence on orders of his Bishop.³⁵ It was perhaps a fear of possible documentary

³³ AASB, T 11692-93, untitled notes, 8 March 1873.

³⁴ PAM, MG12, B1, LG 25, Morris Papers, Morris to Macdonald, 3 March 1873.

³⁵ Ibid.

bombshells which prompted Langevin, and later the Governor General, to ask Ritchot for his grievances in writing.

The meeting with Langevin had been polite, but Ritchot did not expect much to come of it despite assertions to the contrary. He advised Taché that the Government had far more pressing concerns than the affairs of Manitoba.³⁶ Ritchot complained he had accomplished nothing during his first week in Ottawa. Furthermore, help could not be expected from the affable Cartier. Ritchot told Taché the sad news that Cartier would not be returning from England regardless of the claims of Conservative propagandists.³⁷ The priest met briefly with Macdonald when the latter stopped him in a hallway to shake his hand and suggest they arrange a meeting.³⁸ Ritchot also anticipated an audience with Lord Dufferin, the new Governor General. He, however, was not optimistic as to what would result from these sessions.³⁹ Ritchot lobbied individual supporters of the government while waiting for his major interviews and the arrival of his fellow "Manitobians" such as Girard, Royal, and H.J. Clarke; Morris' erstwhile informant. The most prominent of Ritchot's new allies was L. F. Rodrigue Masson, the Conservative M.P. from Terrebonne.

³⁶ AASB, T 11696-98, Ritchot to Taché, 12 March 1873.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ AASB, T 11724-27, Ritchot to Taché, 18 March 1873.

³⁹ Ibid., "et à quoi servira tout cela, Dieu le sait."

Masson knew Riel from his youth. The Masson family had helped sponsor some of his father's milling projects and occasionally hosted the young Louis when he was in Montreal.⁴⁰ The younger Masson had received a history of the Red River troubles from Riel.⁴¹ The Terrebonne M.P. would have been one of Ritchot's first contacts. The priest showed the M.P. various papers which included his Commission from the Provisional Government, the exchange of notes with Cartier of late May, and his 1872 Petition to Lisgar. After determining Langevin knew little of what had transpired in 1870, Masson arranged to see Macdonald on 20 March.⁴² Armed with the information provided by Ritchot, and convinced of the logic of his version of events, the M.P. confronted the Prime Minister. Masson stood his ground when Macdonald countered with the written denials of an amnesty promise by Cartier and Lisgar, and promised another one from the pen of Murdoch. The Member "thought the word of the Archbishop and Father Ritchot would also have great weight, and that many would believe that they [the clerics] had been outwitted, which would be deplorable."⁴³ Although Macdonald did not concede the point, Masson's intervention must have demonstrated the effect that Ritchot and Taché might have on his Quebec sup-

⁴⁰ Stanley, Louis Riel, p. 17 and 27.

⁴¹ See Collected Writings, item 1-127, Riel to Masson, 4 April 1872.

⁴² Select Committee, 1874; Masson Testimony, p. 183.

⁴³ Ibid.

porters at a time when Cartier was passing from the scene.

A week later, Ritchot went with Hector Langevin to the Governor General, Frederick Temple, the Earl of Dufferin (successor to Lisgar the previous year). Ritchot opened the session by complaining the amnesty promised in 1870 had yet to be proclaimed.⁴⁴ The bilingual Dufferin received the clergyman politely although Ritchot afterwards complained the viceroy had little to say in either language.⁴⁵ Whereas Young and Murdoch had been forthcoming with easy assurances of satisfactory treatment, Ritchot noted that Dufferin "prend bien garde de se compromettre." He would only promise to consider all he had heard and to forward the matter to Cabinet.⁴⁶

During the course of the interview, Dufferin asked Ritchot to prepare a memorandum outlining his case against the government. Once again, the former delegate recited the chain of events which brought him to Ottawa in 1870. The exchange of letters with Howe, the amnesty sine qua non precondition for negotiation, and the opening of formal negotiations, were all noted. Dufferin was also referred to the Petition of 8 February 1872 for additional details, and told how Taché had been compromised and trouble created in Mani-

⁴⁴ Select Committee, 1874; Ritchot Testimony, p. 85.

⁴⁵ AASB, T 11793-99, Ritchot to Taché, 1 April 1873.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

toba due to the lack of an amnesty proclamation.⁴⁷ On a personal note, Ritchot advised Dufferin that his own status as the sole remaining member of the delegation drove the people to him for help in securing the promises made in 1870.⁴⁸ To this was added the observation that his return to Ottawa was based on the necessity of "either obtaining what has been promised us, or of justifying ourselves by establishing that we may have been deceived."⁴⁹

The meeting with Dufferin and the continuing pledges of assistance from various Quebec members helped to promote optimism in Ritchot's mind; all wanted to see the amnesty matter disposed of. For some members, the granting of an amnesty was a "sine qua non" condition for their continued support of the ministry.⁵⁰

The pledges of support and threats of exposure became doubly significant after 2 April. On that day, Lucius Seth Huntingdon rose in the House and charged that the Canadian Pacific Railway consortium was a front for American interests and that Hugh Allan had purchased the presidency of the Company with massive contributions to the Conservative

⁴⁷ Select Committee, 1874; Doc. #65, Ritchot to Dufferin, 1 April 1873.

⁴⁸ Judge Black had returned to Britain while A.H. Scott had died 28 May 1872.

⁴⁹ Ritchot to Dufferin, 1 April 1873.

⁵⁰ Ritchot to Taché, 1 April 1873.

election fund. Thus began the Pacific Scandal which would dominate Ottawa politics for the remainder of the year. The problems of the Manitobans had been far from the mind of the government, they were now even further. Nonetheless, with a shrinking majority in the House, Macdonald could not allow Ritchot to further weaken the government with any other embarrassing disclosures. It is apparent that Langevin was delegated to ensure Ritchot's public silence.

Shortly after their meeting with Dufferin, Langevin had a candid talk with Ritchot after the latter complained of the continuing delays in securing a definitive answer regarding the amnesty. Ritchot's concerns for the unfulfilled promises drew little sympathy from the Minister of Public Works. He informed Ritchot that the government could not have acted in any other manner. A year later, Ritchot recalled being told "no Government could stand five minutes if it took up that question, and they were not bound to commit suicide."⁵¹ The priest retorted that he too had no obligation to commit suicide. He had trusted in promises which had not been kept and was feeling the consequences. The frustrated Ritchot warned Langevin that if the present Government could not attain the promulgation of an amnesty "we would do all in our power to attain it." Langevin reacted to the implied threat by suggesting Ritchot's cause would be worse off under an administration headed by the opposition. Unintimidated,

⁵¹ Select Committee, 1874; Ritchot Testimony, p. 88.

Ritchot's reply was curt: "We could not be worse off: we have nothing to lose."⁵²

Ritchot's mission to Ottawa appears to have been but a part, albeit major, of an effort by Manitoba's provincial and federal politicians to secure redress for a wide range of grievances. A number of the provincial ministers met individually with Dufferin 3 April. Each was sounded out for their opinions on the wisdom of granting an amnesty.⁵³ The previous day Robert Cunningham spoke on Manitoba matters in the House where he received a polite hearing. Even Donald A. Smith told Ritchot he was working in favour of the Manitoba cause. The suspicious priest could only remark "je veux le croire--."⁵⁴ Despite the help, Ritchot acknowledged that much needed to be done, given the "infamy" of those he had to deal with. If Dufferin and his advisors were not forthcoming with an amnesty, the former delegate was prepared to call on his political allies to do their worst.⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ AASB, T 11807-9, Ritchot to Taché, 3 April 1873.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid. The citation reads "si son Excellence ne me satisfait pas, je suis bien décidé de ne pas ménager nos amis du gouvernement."

⁵⁶ AASB, T 11891-93, Girard to Taché, 15 April 1873.

Ritchot's discouragement was noted by others.⁵⁶ His pessimism at times bordered on desperation and anger. In a bitter note to his Bishop he complained that his "affaire de coulis[se]" was not succeeding. The attempt to organize Quebec M.P.'s behind a concerted demand for the amnesty seemed to be disintegrating in the wake of the emerging Pacific scandal. The ministers were telling Ritchot's allies that the government would not survive two hours if it took up the amnesty question. Dufferin, who had told Ritchot he would take up the matter, had begun saying it was none of his concern. Ritchot further noted that the Manitoba politicians were at a loss as to what to do next. Ritchot, however, did; "je ferai à ce sujet ce que je pourrai, probablement une Guerre au gouvernement et probablement sans succès--mais ça va leur donner un peu sur les doi[gh]ts; il vont tout nier."⁵⁷ Masson was expected to lead this new offensive when the amnesty issue came before the House at the insistence of the opposition.

The nature of the proposed attack is evident in a note sent to Masson by the cleric 21 April. Ritchot first noted the approaching House discussion of the amnesty issue. In a situation where the government would deny having made the promise, or pleaded that they knew nothing of such a promise, Masson was asked to conduct himself accordingly.

⁵⁷ AASB, T 11920-22, Ritchot to Taché, 18 April 1873.

Je vous prie de vouloir bien en justice pour sa grâce monseigneur Taché et pour moi même l'un des délégués de 1870, affirmer de ma part que le Gouvernement de la puissance, par Sir John Macdonald et Sir Georges Cartier avons distinctment dit comme préliminaire de nos negotiations que cette question de l'amnistie ne sauffront leur cour de liberté et qu'il se chargeait de la faire accorder et que par après elle nous a été positivement promis--mais qu'il ne pourrait être proclamer qu'après la proclamation de l'Acte du Manitoba.

Je vous autorise et vous prie en justice, pour sa grâce monseigneur Taché qui a assuré qu'elle avait été promis et qu'elle serait accordé.⁵⁸

In order to carry out this defence, Masson was authorized by Ritchot to use publicly, if necessary, the various documents appended to the note. The items were not specified but they doubtless included Ritchot's "Official Papers" and the exchange of notes with Cartier of May 1870. Events in the House precluded the release of Ritchot's documents. The priest would later write that "his friends" had to content themselves with the fact the government had not denied the existence of a commitment.⁵⁹

While Ritchot's friends were busy in the House, the emissary sent a brief note asking for a meeting with Macdonald with Masson present.⁶⁰ Macdonald agreed readily and met Ritchot and Masson 29 April. Langevin was also present. Rit-

⁵⁸ AASB, T 11943-49, (Draft), Ritchot to Masson, 21 April 1873.

⁵⁹ AASB, T 12073-75, Ritchot to Taché, 12 May 1873.

⁶⁰ ASHSB, Dossier Ritchot, Ritchot to Macdonald, 28 April 1873.

chot pressed his claim by citing the assurances of Murdoch and Lisgar. The Prime Minister countered by referring to the two vice-regal denials. Pointing to Murdoch's reference to not having attended any of the negotiations, Ritchot wondered how he could declare the ministers had rejected the nineteenth clause. Macdonald then declared that he had stated that he would not treat with delegates of the Provisional government. After hearing the assertion translated, Ritchot asked incredulously: "You did tell me that?" Macdonald replied "No, I did not, but have told it to my friends." The Prime Minister then promised Ritchot a satisfactory answer within the week and assured the priest he would do all he could to ensure peace in Manitoba.⁶¹

Ritchot spent the next two weeks waiting vainly for word from Macdonald. At that point, Masson went to see the Prime Minister. The member for Terrebonne had not used the documents Ritchot had furnished, but was now prepared to again warn Macdonald of Ritchot's threats to release the material. As Masson testified later: "I saw Sir John, and informed him, as I had informed him before, that unless something was done Father Ritchot would take this action".⁶² After some discussion, Macdonald asked Masson to assure Ritchot the amnesty matter would be settled "to his entire satisfaction"

⁶¹ Select Committee, 1874; Langevin, Masson, and Ritchot Testimony.

⁶² Select Committee, 1874; Masson Testimony, p. 183.

before the latter left Ottawa. Masson was also to convince Ritchot to remain patiently in Ottawa and not press the issue. Masson was reluctant to assume the responsibility and told Macdonald so. The Prime Minister made the assurance; "Masson, I tell you you can take it."⁶³

Although Masson did succeed in his mission, it is unclear when he spoke to Ritchot. Whatever the case, Ritchot wrote the Prime Minister 16 May requesting his promised response. The note contained a chilling warning:

Je me permettrai de plus de vous faire observer que je croirais trahir la cause que m'a été confiée en 1870 et exposer notre province du Manitoba à de grands troubles, si je n'employais pas tous les moyens possibles et juste pour faire régler cette importante question.⁶⁴

Already well mired in the Pacific Scandal, Macdonald knew full well the portent of Ritchot's words.

The next day Ritchot provided Taché with a detailed report on "L'affaire de Coulis" When questioned in the House, the government neither denied nor admitted the amnesty promises. Referring to Masson's message from Macdonald, Ritchot told Taché how he had been asked not to embarrass the government since it planned to settle the matter over the summer. Macdonald convinced Masson he would go to England to press the Imperial authorities for an amnesty. Ritchot not-

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ AASB, T 12096-99, Ritchot to Macdonald, 16 May 1874. A translated version of same is found in Select Committee, 1874; Doc. #66.

ed he was quite willing and able to embarrass the government on the issue. He, however, could not see any long term advantage in such a course. Furthermore, his political friends were advising him not to publish. They reasoned that the ground gained over the past months would be lost if the Conservatives were defeated in the House.⁶⁵ Insofar as his own requests for an answer from the government were concerned, Ritchot could only note that he had no idea what replies he would receive or if they would be in writing. He suggested that the course most likely to be taken would be to summon him to hear more verbal assurances, "comme ils ont coutume de faire."⁶⁶ The St. Norbert priest had learned much over the previous three years.

In the meantime, Cunningham was signalling Ritchot's frustration in a cryptic telegram to Taché: "Cartier dead, start Vital friend at once. Chance for an amnesty."⁶⁷ Cunningham and others, including possibly Ritchot, believed it was time for Riel to force the issue by coming to Ottawa as the duly elected Member of Parliament for Provencher.

The death of Cartier and Riel's possible election provided a fillip to Ritchot's efforts in Ottawa. While regretting the loss of the well-meaning Cartier, "sa mort laisse

⁶⁵ AASB, T 12104-7, Ritchot to Taché, 17 May 1873.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ AASB, T 12129, Cunningham to Taché, 20 May 1873.

un vide", Ritchot was quick to speculate on possible nominations to Cabinet. Both possible candidates, Joseph Hyacinthe Bellerose and Masson, were regarded by the priest as friends.⁶⁸ It was likely one of those friends who claimed the Ministry would do nothing to prevent Riel from running or to aid his potential rival, Henry Clarke. The government, however, was suggesting that Riel should wait until the fall before meeting the voters. Such a delay would allow Macdonald time to make his proposed trip to England and secure the amnesty. Ritchot also became privy to the "secret" that Masson had been invited to accompany the Prime Minister to London.⁶⁹

Macdonald's manoeuvrings did not satisfy the persistent Ritchot. The Manitoban still wanted the formal response he had been promised 29 April. To that end he prepared another short note requesting an answer.⁷⁰ As expected, Ritchot did not receive his reply in writing. The former delegate was invited to meet privately with the Prime Minister 6 June. Finally, Macdonald's answer was that Dufferin was pressing the matter in England and a satisfactory resolution was expected immediately.⁷¹ With such a response there was little

⁶⁸ AASB, T 7443, Ritchot to Taché, 22 May 1873.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Select Committee, 1874; Doc. #67, Ritchot to Macdonald, 23 May 1873.

⁷¹ AASB, T 12186-91, Ritchot to Taché, 8 June 1873.

left for Ritchot in Ottawa.

Before leaving the capital, he did meet his old defender Major Futvoye. The officer told the priest that Cartier's private papers contained many favourable references to the amnesty and publication of some of those documents was expected soon. Cartier's name, however, would not appear. Futvoye also declared that if Riel were to come to Ottawa he would gladly sit in the same coach as he had done when Ritchot faced arrest and the mobs in 1870.⁷²

One must assume Ritchot left Ottawa a disappointed man, his principal mission a failure. The amnesty seemed no closer to proclamation despite the intensity of his effort. As for the renewed promise of good intentions, the priest still had nothing in writing. Nonetheless, he had stated his case to many within the ranks of the Quebec caucus. They in turn, pressed the beleaguered ministry to deal with the issue at the same time the opposition was taking advantage of the railway debacle. Masson was preeminent among these caucus rebels. When Langevin approached him the day of Cartier's funeral about a possible Cabinet post, the backbencher declined on the basis of differences over the amnesty.⁷³ Langevin in turn replied confidently the matter

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Select Committee, 1874; Masson Testimony, p. 183. Belle-rose, named to the Senate on October, also declined a Cabinet seat for the same reason as Masson. (Henry James Morgan, Men and Women of the Time: A Handbook of Canadi-

was "a settled affair." It would be granted "before or immediately after the next Session."⁷⁴

The irony of this funeral setting is inescapable. Macdonald was in fact no more honest in the spring of 1873 than he had been three years earlier. In 1870 Cartier had been the unwitting bearer of false promises to the delegate from the Northwest. In 1873, Langevin and the albeit suspicious Masson became the messengers of false hope to Ritchot. Macdonald never went to England to push for the amnesty as he had promised repeatedly. In fact, even before the Cartier funeral, the Prime Minister had taken steps to resolve the issue to his own political satisfaction. In a memorandum to Dufferin, Macdonald suggested an amnesty for all involved in the occurrences of 1869-1870; "except with respect to those who were concerned in the murder of Thomas Scott."⁷⁵ While acknowledging that such a course would not "completely satisfy the half-breeds", Macdonald hoped that a promise of collective security would result in a loss of support for Riel. Paradoxically, the Prime Minister had no intention of seeing Riel brought to trial. He reasoned such a procedure would only result in a hung jury or an acquittal by a Manitoba Court. Macdonald's preference was to see an isolated

an Biography, [Toronto: William Briggs, 1898], p. 83).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ PAC, Macdonald Papers, Vol. 20, p. 234-35, Macdonald to Dufferin, 2 June 1873.

Riel driven by fear from the country where he was a "continual firebrand."⁷⁶

Two days following Macdonald's private note to the Governor General, Dufferin approved an Order-in-Council dealing with an amnesty "to those concerned in the disturbances which occurred in the North-West Territories in 1869-70."⁷⁷ The Cabinet noted two points which necessitated the matter be brought to the attention of the Imperial Government. The first argued that the events occurred prior to the establishment of Canadian authority in the region while the second point suggested the Governor General's right of "extending clemency" could only be exercised after conviction. The British were asked to take up the matter "in order that such a course may be taken as may be thought consistent with the interests of justice and best for the quiet of the country."⁷⁸ The Order-in-Council, however, offered no advice as to who might be included or excluded in such an amnesty. Macdonald's ruse seems clear. Officially, the entire question of the amnesty was to be referred to the British without advice from the Dominion. Privately, however, Macdonald's note to Dufferin would ensure the exclusion of

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Select Committee, 1874; Macdonald Testimony, pp. 110-11, "Copy of a Report of the Honourable the Privy Council approved by His Excellency the Governor General in Council on the 4th June 1873."

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Scott's "murderers" from the protection of any Royal Proclamation. Macdonald could then deflect criticism from both sides of the issue by protesting his lack of control over what the British had decided.

Several weeks later, London replied in a manner which destroyed any hope Macdonald might have had of extricating his government from the amnesty controversy. The Imperial Government did not "unreservedly" agree with the Canadian position suggesting the power to grant pre-trial amnesty resided only with the Queen. Pointing to earlier Imperial legislation which provided Canadian Courts with concurrent jurisdiction with those established by the HBC, Lord Kimberly indicated the Governor General could "properly issue" an amnesty.⁷⁹ The Colonial Secretary further cited a New Zealand precedent in which the Governor declared "all persons who had borne arms against the Queen should never be prosecuted for past offences, except in certain cases of murder."⁸⁰ The Home Government was nonetheless prepared to accede to Canada's request to deal with the matter and would authorize Dufferin to issue an amnesty for all crimes except the murder of Scott. Before such an order was to be made, however, the British wanted further advice from the Governor General in Council. They wanted to know "whether your Min-

⁷⁹ Select Committee, 1874; Doc. #152, Kimberly to Dufferin, 24 July 1873.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

isters have any objection to the issue of an amnesty limited in the manner proposed."⁸¹ This last point would have been clear to Macdonald; if Riel and others were to be excluded from an amnesty, Canada would have to share the responsibility.

Deprived of a scapegoat, Macdonald could do nothing but continue his private charade of seeking an Imperial pardon for all offences. Such a course was taken in an interview with Taché in mid-August. The Bishop was told of Britain's decision to forgive all incidents except the execution of Scott. Macdonald feigned disappointment with the limited terms and told Taché he "would go to England immediately after the Session" to settle the question to the Bishop's satisfaction.⁸² Taché was unimpressed and furious. Another series of letters and private assurances were required to prevent the Bishop from acting on his long-standing threat "to place before the public in general, and the Members of the House in particular, the game in which I have been the victim and the tool."⁸³ As part of this soothing process, Langevin informed his caucus and the Bishop of his intention to resign from the Ministry if Macdonald failed to go to England and secure a comprehensive amnesty.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Select Committee, 1874; Taché Testimony, p. 60.

⁸³ Ibid., Doc #26, Taché to Langevin, 16 August 1873.

⁸⁴ Ibid., Taché Testimony, p. 61.

With the amnesty still in doubt, Riel's enemies in Manitoba remained free to continue their persecution of the former President. Spurred by the fear of Riel winning a seat in Parliament, a number of them secured warrants for the arrest of Riel and Lépine from a Winnipeg magistrate. The constables failed to find Riel but did succeed in arresting Lépine 17 September.⁸⁵ Riel was forced into hiding on Point Vermette across the river from Ritchot's church at St. Norbert. The inevitable consequences of the failure to secure the promised amnesty had arrived. With Lépine in jail awaiting prosecution and Riel in hiding, Taché, Ritchot, and their allies increased the pressure on Macdonald at a time when the ministry was losing support over the Pacific Scandal.

Taché heard of the renewed persecutions while in Montreal and immediately sent a telegram to Langevin: "Lépine in gaol. Riel prosecuted. You know my duty and my position. Shall be obliged to publish."⁸⁶ Langevin's reply was equally hurried. The minister could only promise to discuss the matter with Macdonald the next day.⁸⁷ Within the week Taché was sent a detailed reply by the leader of the "Bleu" faction. Langevin informed him of Macdonald's surprise and

⁸⁵ Stanley, Louis Riel, pp. 193-94.

⁸⁶ Select Committee, 1874; Doc. #22, Taché to Langevin, 19 September 1874.

⁸⁷ Ibid., Doc. #23, Langevin to Taché, 19 September 1873.

disappointment on hearing of the events in Manitoba. Taché was further told that the Dominion had nothing to do with the arrests. With regard to the threat of publication, Langevin urged restraint. He suggested Taché would gain little. An exposé would not halt the judicial proceedings under way and would only "create national and religious difficulties" of benefit to no one.⁸⁸

While Taché was being mollified from Ottawa, Ritchot prepared his own missive to the Bishop. After noting that Lépine was in prison "malgré les promesses, malgré la foi jurée", Ritchot reported that Judge Betournay was preparing further warrants for the arrest of others. The former delegate could not contain his disgust at the latest turn of events.

Voilà comment nous avons été trahis par les Lâches et infames qui se sont parjurés! Par les lâches qui sont à la tête d'un gouvernement dont ils épuisent les revenus pour couvrir leurs turpitudes et conduire à sa ruine le pays qui les nourrit.⁸⁹

Not surprisingly, Ritchot was soon on his way to Ottawa to second the efforts of his Bishop.

Ritchot's first few days in the capital were filled with rumours of an imminent collapse of the government in the House and subsequent defeat at the polls. He also heard of an attempt to bribe Robert Cunningham into supporting the

⁸⁸ Ibid., Doc. #24, Langevin to Taché, 21 September 1873.

⁸⁹ AASB, T 12897-98, Ritchot to Taché, 24 September 1873.

ministry. With regard to the amnesty, Cunningham reported that the opposition leaders, Blake and Mackenzie, were prepared to have one issued if convinced that promises had indeed been made. For his part, Masson was claiming an amnesty was forthcoming.⁹⁰ Masson's confidence was based on a renewed undertaking by Macdonald to go to England as part of his effort to convince the Member for Terrebonne to enter the faltering Ministry. Masson was further impressed by Langevin's restating his pledge to resign from Cabinet if a satisfactory resolution could not be won by the Prime Minister.⁹¹ The backbencher even asked Ritchot and Taché's aid in helping to rally votes for the beleaguered Ministry.⁹² Opposition members, however, were advising Ritchot against assuming such a partisan course.⁹³

In the midst of all the turmoil, Ritchot had difficulty assessing the government's chances for survival as the Pacific crisis reached its denouement. While some government members were telling Ritchot the ministry was in a minority position, other supporters of the Cabinet were claiming a six to eight vote majority. As to what effect the defeat of the Macdonald Ministry would have on the three year effort to secure a solution to the amnesty and other Manitoba mat-

⁹⁰ Ibid., T 12997, Ritchot to Taché, 3 October 1873.

⁹¹ Select Committee, 1874; Masson Testimony, p. 184.

⁹² AASB, T 13235-38, Ritchot to Taché, 1 November 1873.

⁹³ Ibid.

ters, Ritchot could only wonder: "--et nous, que seront nous et ou serons nous? Il n'y a rien de nouveau à ce sujet."⁹⁴ This uncertainty was again expressed the day Macdonald's government resigned. "Que va-t-il nous arriver ensuite? C'est un question à laquelle il serait difficile de répondre."⁹⁵

Ritchot was not prepared to see his hopes of a just settlement perish with the Conservatives. Shortly after the formation of the Mackenzie government, the priest met with Antoine A. Dorion and Luc Letellier de Saint-Just. The two new Ministers appeared well disposed to help Ritchot but warned him nothing could be done until after the elections. Nonetheless, they delegated J.C. Taché to prepare a report on the matter.⁹⁶

As part of his effort to further "prove" the existence of the amnesty commitments, Ritchot swore an affidavit before returning to Manitoba. Under oath, the priest enumerated the various occasions and circumstances when the authorities had made their promises. The list of the erstwhile delegate included the acceptance of the sine qua non condition of an amnesty before the commencement of negotiations, 26 April 1870; the first meeting with Sir John Young and Clinton

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., T 13250-53, Ritchot to Taché, 5 November 1873.

⁹⁶ Ibid., T 13281-84, Ritchot to Taché, 8 November 1873. See also Select Committee, 1874; Ritchot Testimony, p. 92.

Murdoch, 3 May; and the subsequent meeting with Young, 19 May.⁹⁷ Following a brief visit with Riel at Plattsburg, Ritchot returned home. Once again he had been unsuccessful in his personal battle to redeem the promises made to him. He had, however, succeeded in winning the assistance of many within Ottawa politics. The amnesty, such as it was, resulted from factors connected less intimately with Ritchot. Nonetheless, he continued to play a significant role in those events as they unfolded in 1874 and 1875.

Frustrated by the turn of events in Ottawa, Bishop Taché published his pamphlet on the amnesty question near the end of March 1874. The final impetus seems to have been the efforts of A.A. Dorion to have Taché persuade Riel to withdraw from the Federal elections.⁹⁸ Taché's booklet contained sufficient documentation from his own papers and those of Ritchot to create sympathy from Quebec and accusations of Conservative duplicity from Ontario. Although of no immediate benefit, the pamphlet thrust the issue from behind closed doors.

A second factor which raised the profile of the amnesty issue was the prospect of Riel taking his newly won seat in the House. Although Riel had braved the streets of Ottawa

⁹⁷ Ibid., T 13349-53, and Select Committee, 1874 (translated), Doc. #64; "Ritchot Affidavit sworn before Narcisse Valois, Montreal, 19 November 1873."

⁹⁸ Stanley, Louis Riel, pp. 199-201.

to swear his oath as a Member, he did not take his seat. For several days the capital was marked by meetings among the French Canadian members and public rallies in favour of Riel. As well, a Select Committee of the House was appointed to investigate the origin of the Red River troubles, the delay in granting the amnesty promised 6 December 1869, and the entire question of the subsequent promises. Despite being appointed to the Committee, Mackenzie Bowell demanded that the House expel Riel as a fugitive from justice. The motion was seconded by Riel's old nemesis, John Schultz. A heated debate followed the main motion and a subsequent attempt to amend it with a call for an amnesty. Bowell's motion, however, was carried by a margin of fifty-six votes.⁹⁹ With the prospect of Riel's attendance in the Commons removed, the focus of attention shifted to the hearings of the Select Committee.

The Committee ran from 10 April through 21 May 1874. During that time they held 37 sittings, heard 21 witnesses and were presented with 152 letters and documents. With Cartier dead and Riel in hiding, the principal witnesses were Taché, Ritchot, and Macdonald. In painstaking detail the two clergymen presented their contention that a full amnesty had been promised. To buttress their depositions, the Manitobans presented item after item of correspondence. Ritchot occupied the witness table for two and a half days,

⁹⁹ Ibid., 202-4.

relying a great deal on the Journal he had kept in 1870. The detail and consistency with which he recalled specific dates and conversations were thus impressive. The testimony of Taché and Ritchot was also supported by the Civil Servants; George Futvoye and Benjamin Sulte, and by the politicians; Joseph Royal, Joseph Dubuc, and Rodrigue Masson.

To counter the claims presented before the Committee, Macdonald presented a dual defence. He at first suggested that any amnesty promised by the Canadians was understood clearly as excluding those responsible for killing Scott. At one point he characterized the conversations between Ritchot and Cartier "as moving on different planes; Sir George referring to the amnesty, exclusive of the persons charged with the death of Scott, and Father Ritchot always including them."¹⁰⁰

Beyond the denials, Macdonald distanced himself from whatever Cartier may have done by citing his own illness at the time. This latter course was his ultimate strategy. At Macdonald's request, Dufferin sent the Committee a lengthy memorandum Cartier had prepared in 1870. Dated 8 June, the confidential memo and accompanying documents were in fact the fulfilment of Cartier's pledge to intercede officially with the Crown in securing an amnesty for all. Cartier had framed the note in support of the petition dated 26 May

¹⁰⁰ Select Committee, 1874; Macdonald Testimony, p. 106.

which his office had prepared for Ritchot's signature.¹⁰¹

In spite of all they had heard and read, the Committee's "Report" was a simple collection of the material. It would be left to Parliament "to consider whether under the circumstances stated, any other steps shall be taken"¹⁰². Parliament did not deal with the Report immediately. The press in Quebec and Ontario, however, published the evidence as it emerged. The Liberal papers which were unsympathetic to Riel and the Métis highlighted the secret dealings of Macdonald and Cartier with the western intermediaries.¹⁰³

Despite the heightened public profile achieved by the amnesty controversy, the Liberal ministry remained reluctant to act. In the fall of 1874 Ambroise Lépine went on trial for his life. Ritchot did what he could to support the defence argument that Lépine had acted as an agent for a legitimate authority in supervising the Court Martial and execution of Thomas Scott. When the defence attempted to have Ritchot narrate the acceptance of that legitimacy by the

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Doc. #131, "Memorandum of Sir George E. Cartier" [to Sir John Young], 8 June 1870. Despite its strong argument for the granting of a Royal Amnesty, nothing came of the memo in 1870. Sir John Young undercut the memorandum's significance by remarking to Granville that despite Cartier's "high political standing" and "long experience", the note could "not be regarded as a Minute of Council nor as the expression of the opinion of the united Cabinet. (Document #126, Sir John Young to the Earl of Granville, 9 June 1870.

¹⁰² Ibid., REPORT, 22 May 1874, p. 1.

¹⁰³ Stanley, Louis Riel, p. 206.

Canadians, they were overruled. Chief Justice Wood would only allow the reading of any official correspondence Ritchot might have. The cross examination by Francis Cornish sought to discredit Ritchot by concentrating on his early involvement in the disturbances of 1869-70.¹⁰⁴

The guilty verdict and death sentence were a shock to Quebec opinion. The French Canadian ministers came under pressure to secure an amnesty or resign. The Quebec Bishops and the Quebec Legislature called upon Dufferin to issue a pardon.¹⁰⁵ Mackenzie quickly found himself between the pincers of Quebec and Ontario opinion. Like Macdonald, the new Prime Minister turned to the British for help. The helping hand, however, did not come from London. Instead, Lord Dufferin, the Governor General "grasped the nettle that neither Macdonald nor Mackenzie wanted to touch."¹⁰⁶ On his own authority, Dufferin commuted Lépine's death sentence to two years imprisonment and the loss of his political rights.

The Governor General's reasons for sparing Lépine are worthy of note. In advising London of his logic, Dufferin repudiated any suggestion the Provisional Government had been legitimate. He further condemned any idea that Ritchot

¹⁰⁴ The proceedings of the trial were published in 1874. See Elliot and Brokovski; Preliminary Investigation and Trial of Ambroise D. Lépine for the Murder of Thomas Scott (1874).

¹⁰⁵ Stanley, Louis Riel, p. 211.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 212.

had received promises of an amnesty from Young or the Canadians. Dufferin cited Ritchot's weak understanding of English as the reason for the clergyman's misapprehension.¹⁰⁷ The principal justification for commutation was the demonstration of Métis loyalty during the Fenian crisis of 1871. Dufferin reasoned it would be difficult for the Crown to prosecute individuals for crimes committed prior to its calling on their armed assistance in its own defence.

The precedent of mercy having been set by the Viceroy, Prime Minister Mackenzie found it possible to propose a full amnesty be granted "to all persons concerned in the North-West troubles for all acts committed by them during the said troubles"¹⁰⁸. O'Donoghue was excluded from any protection while Riel and Lépine would have to earn their forgiveness by leaving British soil for five years.

Mackenzie prefaced his motion with a strong attack on all the Métis had done in 1869-70. Like Dufferin, the Prime Minister dismissed any claims of authority by the Provisional Government. Mackenzie, however, disagreed on the existence of promises of amnesty. Quoting extensively from the evidence submitted by the Select Committee, he declared he had no choice but to honour the assurances made by the previous administration. Mackenzie's speech to the House was

¹⁰⁷ See Canada Sessional Papers 1875, #11, for the relevant correspondence.

¹⁰⁸ Debates, 11 February 1875, p. 50.

followed by wounded protests from Macdonald and Bowell who again denied the existence of promises. On the other side of the issue, Masson and other French Canadians demanded full pardon be issued. In the end Mackenzie's motion was carried by the House.¹⁰⁹

The conditional amnesty was not what Ritchot, Taché and the others had been promised. It was, however, perhaps the best they could expect from a government dominated by Ontario. There was little more that Ritchot could do for those in whom he had interested himself for so long.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., February 11 and 12 1875.

Chapter VIII

IN DEFENCE OF SECTIONS 31 AND 32 OF THE MANITOBA ACT

The amnesty question was of particular concern to Ritchot since it revolved around private assurances made to him by other individuals who spoke on behalf of the State. Although often involved as a private claimant, the former delegate played a secondary role in attempting to redeem the promises made with regard to the security of land claims in Manitoba. These, after all, were legal commitments enshrined in the Manitoba Act. It would be left to the politicians, Taché, and the Courts to regulate those matters. Nonetheless, Ritchot's support for their efforts was apparent, at least during the early 1870's.

Within weeks of his return from Ottawa the delegate addressed an assembly of Métis in St. Norbert. During the course of his explanations of the Manitoba Act, he spoke of the promised recognition of squatters' or staked claims beyond the traditional Settlement Belt. He then referred specifically to the lands along the Rivière aux Rats where the residents of St. Norbert, St. Vital and Ste. Agathe had the custom of wintering their stock and gathering building timber and fuel. Ritchot suggested the Métis secure possession

of the territory in a definitive manner in order to preserve it from interlopers.

The next day, Ritchot led a party to the banks of the Rivière aux Rats south east of St. Norbert. The men then staked 12 chain frontages along the tributary of the Red. As further evidence of occupation, small garden plots were seeded. In the end, nearly sixty individuals carried out the time honoured ritual of claiming land according to the "custom of the country." Of these, thirty-eight were residents of St. Norbert. Most did not relocate to their new claims. The families of Gabriel Lafournaise dit Laboucane, Toussaint Vermette, Isidore and Joseph Tourond, Joseph Cadotte, Pierre Parisien and Marcel Roy, however, did. Although close to their old homes, the aforementioned families do not appear on the 1881 census and thus emerge, in a technical sense, as non-persisters.¹

St. Norbert's "old settlers" were also instrumental in founding another satellite community near the junction of the Red and Plum rivers. During the early part of the decade, six members of St. Norbert's Vandal clan took up lands

¹ The information relating to the founding of what later became the communities of St. Pierre-Jolys and St. Malo is drawn from J.M. Jolys, Pages de Souvenirs. The list of 59 claimants is found in the Addenda while the names of the first settlers are found between pages 53-56. Roy does not appear on the 1870 Census. His name is, however, found on the list of the 1868 Executive Relief Committee. (Roy also sold his rights to lot 81 to Ritchot in January 1870).

near the present site of St. Jean Baptiste. The Antoine, Norbert, Roger, Joseph, Louis, and Jean Baptiste Vandal families were joined by those of Joseph Delorme, Abraham Bélanger Guillaume Rochelot, Pierre and François Berthelette, Jacques St Denis and Daniel Branconnier.²

The attempts of the original inhabitants of St. Norbert and other Red River parishes to establish new settlements in Manitoba under the aegis of the Manitoba Act is a facet of the Métis diaspora which requires further research. The above examples serve to suggest that many Métis sought to improve their material well-being by relocating to less crowded but equally desirable locations near the older parishes. As was the custom under the old order, they sold their old claims for the price of the improvements and moved to the new acreages which they believed could still be had for the taking. If the Rat River speculation of July 1870 can serve as an example, Ritchot encouraged such practices in an attempt to consolidate the traditional land base of the Métis south of the Assiniboine and Seine rivers. One cannot fault Ritchot for the later interpretations and repudiations of the Manitoba Act which frustrated the pre-emption attempts of his parishioners. This is especially true

² The list is drawn from two sources: a manuscript history of St. Jean Baptiste prepared by Father Sylvio Caron shown to the author by abbé Pierre Gagné of St. Norbert, and from L.A. Prud'homme, "Monsieur l'abbé Joseph David Fillion", Mémoires de la Société Royale du Canada, Section I, 1927).

when one considers that in many cases the "staked" claims were no more secure than older, more established holdings.³

In the original plan for the acquisition of the Northwest, the Dominion had sent surveyors to lay out lots for the benefit of prospective Canadian settlers prior to the transfer. The chaos of the Red River Resistance, however, ended the premature surveys with the result that by 1871 newcomers were selecting lands prior to their being designated and surveyed. Furthermore, this unregulated claim staking by new immigrants was taking place before the settlement of the land claims of the original inhabitants as defined in the Manitoba Act. The time had come for the Métis to press for a settlement before all their birthright was lost.

Taché and his political friends presented the Métis case to Archibald in the form of a petition signed by Joseph Royal, Louis Schmidt, André Beauchemin, Angus McKay, Pascal Breland, James Cunningham, and Joseph Dubuc. All were members of the Legislative Assembly. The note asked Archibald to settle upon a method "to establish and regulate the rights of common and the rights of cutting hay" as well as to arrange for the distribution of the 1.4 million acres. In an understatement of the ramifications of further delay, the petitioners added that "the arrival of immigrants ren-

³ D.N. Sprague, "The Manitoba Land Question."

ders, it appears to us, more pressing than ever, the solution of the question."⁴

For his part, Taché seems to have carried on private consultations with the Lieutenant Governor. The result was an agreement which would have the various Métis communities to select large blocs of land which Archibald would withdraw from new settlement. It was perhaps during the course of these negotiations that Taché asked Ritchot if the former delegate had anything in writing concerning the method of distribution for the 1.4 million acres. Ritchot's written reply, sent on the eve of a land selection meeting in St. Norbert contained much more than a negative reply to the Bishop's query. Ritchot's note contained an implied comparison of what he believed the Métis had been promised in Ottawa with what Taché and Archibald wanted them to ask for in Manitoba.

Ritchot claimed that the Métis had been promised possession of all lands held by peaceable occupation at the time of the transfer; all areas where the rights of common were exercised such as the two mile hay privilege and other recognized cutting areas; elevated points for use during floods; and the portions of the 1.4 million acres owing to their children. A postscript also noted a promise that each individual would have right to a woodlot although Ritchot

⁴ PAC, RG15, Vol. 230, Macdonald Papers, file 167, Joseph Royal, et al, to Archibald, 24 May 1871.

could not say how such title was to be arranged and suggested that Taché would do well to find out.⁵

Having spelled out the nature of Métis land rights as he understood them, Ritchot then recapitulated what claims he believed Taché wanted the residents of Pembina, Ste Agathe, St. Norbert, St. Vital, Ste. Anne and part of St. Boniface to press at an assembly scheduled for the next day. The bloc to be requested for the Métis south of the Assiniboine was to consist of an expanded Pointe des Chênes settlement, a four mile belt of land west of the Red River south of Fort Garry and a fifteen or sixteen mile belt east of the same river.⁶

Ritchot's unease over the discrepancies between what had been promised and what Taché and Archibald were attempting to arrange, became apparent in a covering letter which accompanied the resolutions taken at the St. Norbert assembly of 18 May where Ritchot had forwarded Taché's opinions of what form the land claims would be presented. The priest described as "plus qu'étrange" the method being advocated for the settlement of Métis claims. Ritchot protested that while the meetings would do no harm, he could neither understand or approve of the manner in which the issue was being dealt with. For that reason, Ritchot added, he had been re-

⁵ Ritchot to Taché, 17 May 1871, transcript found in the ASHSB.

⁶ Ibid.

luctant to involve himself in the assembly.⁷ While Ritchot and Taché were debating the best method for framing the Métis land claims in the face of rapid immigration, the Government in Ottawa took the first of many steps in a process which would make the clerical dispute academic.

The authorities responsible for the distribution of Manitoba lands were also concerned over the precipitous claiming of lands by newcomers. Canadian officials agreed with the Métis that trouble was the probable result of conflicting claims and that legitimate rights needed protection. The Surveyor General, however, disagreed as to whose rights would be protected. The Secretary of State was advised by memorandum dated 23 May that immigration of farmers to Manitoba was preceding the survey. Rather than suggesting, as the Métis might have wished, that immigration be discouraged pending the settlement of the land claims of the original settlers and the completion of the survey, J.S. Dennis asked that the government officially contenance the premature occupation, "although irregular." This could be done by issuing instructions "for the guidance of such parties [of immigrants], by which means the disputes and confusion which will otherwise be sure to occur would be much lessened." The result was a 26 May Order-in-Council which declared that all settlers found on lands during the course of the surveys would have their claims protected by virtue of either pre-

⁷ AASB, T 8863-65, Ritchot to Taché, 26 May, 1871.

emption or homestead right. All that was required of these claimants was that they demonstrate that they had settled and improved the lot in good faith "as settlers under the land regulations."⁸ What Ritchot and the Métis had feared in the summer of 1869 had come to pass; the "Canadas" were to be free to select unoccupied lands in the province without regard for the traditional and negotiated rights of the original settlers.

As might be expected, response within the province was quick to manifest itself. Confused by the mixed signals emanating from Archibald and the Government in Ottawa, many turned to Ritchot for clarification of the land promises. Ritchot responded by challenging the legality of the Order-in-Council in a statement which he dictated to Louis Riel for publication in Joseph Royal's Le Métis. The missive, in an implicit manner, was also critical of the settlement formula being advocated by Archibald and Taché. Ritchot declared that the Order-in-Council contravened Section 31 of the Manitoba Act which set aside 1.4 million acres for the Métis as commutation for their share of the aboriginal title. The former delegate went on to charge that the Order also violated the arrangements made in Ottawa twelve months earlier. In his words, "il a été positivement expliqué, compris, et convenu que les Métis prendraient ces terres

⁸ AASB, T8866-67, "Copy of Report of a Committee of the Privy Council approved by the Governor General, 26 May 1871."

dans toute la province où bon leur semblerait."⁹ Ritchot added that the above rights of first selection had been promised by the ministers who spoke in the name of the Dominion and by the Governor General. The statement had little effect in the face of Ottawa's effort to promote rapid settlement at the expense of the Métis. Nonetheless, it demonstrated clearly how Ritchot was perceived to be the principal interpreter of the Manitoba Act as agreed to in May 1870.

Ritchot raised the land question during the course of his visit to Ottawa in the spring of 1873. On arrival he made contact with a number of Quebec Conservatives among whom he noted Joseph Charles Taché.¹⁰ The Bishop's brother soon arranged for the cleric to meet with Hector Langevin, the senior French-Canadian minister in the absence of Cartier. The two men met 8 March. Ritchot was received politely although little of substance passed between them. Following Ritchot's summary of his grievances, Langevin asked the visitor to prepare a written memorandum which was produced shortly thereafter.¹¹ Ritchot's concerns included the claims of the

⁹ PAM, Riel Papers, #498, Riel to Dubuc, n.d.

¹⁰ AASB, T 11680-82, Ritchot to Taché, 7 March 1873.

¹¹ Ibid., T 11696-98, Ritchot to Taché, 12 March 1873. Although the final draft of Ritchot's list has not been found, a series of handwritten notes found in the AASB provide a comprehensive list of items which would have served as the basis of any memoranda prepared by Ritchot in the spring of 1873. The documents in question include a nine point outline dated 8 March, (T 11692-93); a sim-

original settlers for control of the entire two mile settlement belt along the Red and Assiniboine rivers. The position was taken that since the aboriginal rights to the land had been ceded to Selkirk, the Dominion had to defer to the province in its division and distribution. Also at issue, were the activities of the surveyors on the river lots. Ritchot charged that their arbitrary measurements were cutting some lots in half and reducing others to uselessness. Despite repeated complaints and petitions, the Government had not yet responded.¹²

Another difficulty alluded to by Ritchot concerned the two mile hay privilege. He described it as an exclusive property right applicable to the hay on the two mile strips of land back of the river lots and as a right of common with regard to wood and pasturage. As such, Ritchot argued, the land in question could not be considered Crown Lands. According to Article 29 of the Manitoba Act, the Dominion would only control the uncultivated or unconceded areas of the province. The former delegate also noted that he and his associates "ont parfaitement bien expliquée et fait comprendre aux honorables ministres . . . que les habitants du Manitoba se consentiraient jamais à abandonner les susdits

ilar undated sheet, (T 52592); and a lengthy draft headed "Notes sur Manitoba" which is also undated, (T 8361-69).

¹² Ibid., "Notes sur Manitoba."

deux milles."¹³ Ritchot also accused the land agents and surveyors in behaving "comme s'il n'y avait pas eu un seul propriétaire de terre en Manitoba."¹⁴ He recalled the Canadian assurances of 1870 which would see various areas of high ground retained as commons for use during periods of flooding. As well, the westerner noted that difficulties had arisen over the commons on Point Douglas and along the Seine River.

Ritchot also raised the question of the Métis Reserves during his stay in Ottawa. These were the several townships that Archibald had asked the Métis to select in order that he might exclude new immigrants. Despite the actions of the Lieutenant Governor, the sections of the reserve closest to the existing settlement belt had been withdrawn by the Dominion Land agents. The value of the remaining "reserve" was further destroyed by the wholesale concession of cutting rights to the wood located along the rivers. Once again the petitions and protests prepared by the inhabitants failed to secure any response from the authorities.

In particular, the lack of recognition of land claims made beyond the settlement belt prior to the transfer would have galled Ritchot. He had fought hard to win promises of

¹³ Ibid. A separate unsigned and undated memorandum in Ritchot's hand expands on the Hay Privilege question. (AASB, T 11849-52).

¹⁴ "Notes sur Manitoba."

satisfactory treatment of those claims. He believed Cartier's note of 23 May which clarified the fourth clause of Section 32 was a sufficient guarantee. Once again, Ritchot found himself explaining how the simple act of staking or cultivating a lot had, in the past, conferred recognition of a claim by all the original settlers. Dominion land agents in Manitoba, however, were not as prepared to confer title even though the two mile strips paralleled the township lines, and several were already occupied by settlers. Ritchot noted that most of these so-called staked claims were along the Sale and Rat rivers. The writer also complained that while Colonel Dennis had ordered a survey carried out and a map prepared indicating the location of the claims, nothing had resulted. The petitions for recognition still awaited answers from the authorities.

Another difficulty mentioned in Ritchot's notes concerned the delays and alterations in the proposed distribution of the 1.4 million acres of land to the children of Métis families resident at the time of the transfer. In reaction to an Order-in-Council which called for distribution to all Métis, a meeting had been held 13 February 1872 in St. Norbert. Resolutions had been passed which called on the Governor General to ensure the original terms of the distribution were carried out. Pointedly, Ritchot recalled how Cartier had elaborated the demanded mode of selection to the

House of Commons in 1870.¹⁵ Other points at issue in the spring of 1873 centred on the unfulfilled commitment of the Federal Government to pay for the construction of the major public buildings in Manitoba, the lack of French speaking employees in the Land Office, and the poor reception Pierre Delorme received when he attempted to take his seat in Parliament.

While Ritchot and the politicians continued their back-round manoeuvring, Parliament busied itself with some legislation pertaining to Manitoba. In a mid-April report to Taché, the St. Norbert priest commented on two of these items. The first of these was entitled "An Act respecting claims to Lands in Manitoba for which no Patents have been issued", (36 Vic, c 6, S.C. 1873). It established a Manitoba based judicial procedure to regulate the granting of Crown Patents based on the claims of the original settlers.¹⁶ Ritchot was pleased with the Bill in general, but had reservations. He felt it did not adequately define the rights to be secured; only the means.¹⁷

The second Bill to which Ritchot referred dealt with the distribution of the land allotment destined for the Métis children. As originally understood by the delegate, Section

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ D.N. Sprague, "Government Lawlessness", Appendix B.

¹⁷ AASB, T 11874-77, Ritchot to Taché, 11 April 1873.

31 of the Manitoba Act was to provide only the children of the original mixed-blood settlers with access to the 1.4 million acres in question. He and Taché, however, feared that the land might fall into the hands of the parents who might in turn sell their children's birthright. The "Act to remove doubts as to the construction . . ." of the relevant Section pleased Ritchot by excluding heads of families from sharing in the allotment. Nevertheless, Ritchot warned Taché "enfant de famille" was not well defined.¹⁸ He later reported that the definition adopted by the government excluded children who had married subsequent to the transfer.¹⁹

Ritchot seemed to have sensed the effect his activities were having on the government. When he advised Taché that the question of the undistributed 1.4 million acres had been raised in the House by Robert Cunningham, Ritchot suggested that his own presence was at least embarrassing the ministry into pretending to do something.²⁰ Even so, the emissary felt this was little to show for the time so far spent in the nation's capital.²¹

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., T 12073-75, Ritchot to Taché, 12 May 1873.

²⁰ Ibid., T 11747-52, Ritchot to Taché, 22 March 1873.

²¹ Ibid.

On the other matters being dealt with during his stay in Ottawa, Ritchot reported mixed results. The Two Mile Hay Privilege and the staked claim difficulties appeared far from resolution. Ritchot asked his Bishop to ensure the Métis maintain their resolve; "le gouvernement ne peut les dépouiller sans leur consentment."²² With regard to the sections of the proposed Métis reserve along the Red River, Ritchot feared they would be lost despite his continuing effort.

Ritchot's frustration with Ottawa perhaps accounts for his public silence on matters relating to Sections 31 and 32 over the next several years. Nonetheless, Ritchot sent an almost condescending letter to Macdonald in 1881 which dealt with the question of claims which should have been protected by Section 32 of the Manitoba Act. He began by describing how the pre-1870 availability of land meant that claimants "were not particular in taking possession thereof."²³ Ritchot reminded Macdonald those customs were explained in 1870 and that the Ministers agreed "that the Government would be liberal and generous towards the inhabitants . . . with respect to lands claimed by them." The former delegate further recalled showing Cartier and Macdonald a map illustrating areas beyond the Settlement Belt where claims existed.

²² Ibid.

²³ PAC, Macdonald Papers, pp. 141514-26, Ritchot to Macdonald, 15 January 1881.

Having refreshed Macdonald's memory, Ritchot made his point. Sarcastically, he noted the claims were challenged only by the agents of the Dominion "who cost far more to the Government than the lands in question are worth." Otherwise the land was regarded as private property and even subject to municipal taxation. Ritchot then declared, "if this is all the liberality and generosity which the Hon. Ministers promised, . . . it was not worthwhile to mention it." The writer then suggested the government could at least be "just" and allow the claimants peaceable possession.²⁴

Ritchot's frustration with the administrative betrayal of the constitutional land promises made in 1870 emerged following his citation of the opening phrases of clause 4 of Section 32 of the Manitoba Act.

the meaning of those words was not intended to say that all persons having a good written title and duly registered etc. etc., that he shall have continually resided and cultivated so many acres of lands yearly and for so many years before the transfer to Canada, and that he shall cultivate and continually reside during the period of ten years after the transfer to Canada, so many acres etc. etc., to be entitled to Letters Patent for lands so cultivated and inhabited. Well this is what is required today by the Government through their employees.²⁵

The note returned several times to the flagrant discrepancies between what had been said and written in 1870 with what the Department of the Interior was currently demanding.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

In particular, Ritchot recalled the changes made to the Act following the end of the formal negotiations. At the time the delegates were told "the meaning of the said Act met the views expressed" by the delegates and "the lands in question were, by the said Act, secured to those who claimed them."²⁶ Ritchot then asked the Prime Minister the following questions:

Was it, then, the intention of the Hon. Ministers, seeing our good faith, or our inexperience with matters of that kind, to deceive and thus dispossess us of a few hundred acres of land which we would never have consented to abandon to the government . . . ?

was it their intention [when framing the Act] to add [a] few words to the phrases which would, later, deprive the Manitoba settlers of their just rights?

Diplomatically, Ritchot answered the questions in the negative. He suggested Macdonald, apprised of the facts, would take steps to better instruct the Dominion's agents in Manitoba.

The story of the note is in itself interesting. With Taché in Ottawa, Ritchot sent the Bishop the text of the letter along with a blank sheet featuring his signature. Taché was told to make any changes he felt necessary and to forward the note to Macdonald over the priest's signature. However if Taché wished, he could destroy the letter.²⁷ It would seem the two clerics still respected each other's

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ See AASB, T 25104-6, Ritchot to Taché, 15 January 1881.

judgment despite the disappointments and frustrations of the previous decade.

Chapter IX

IN DEFENCE OF THE PARISH OF ST. NORBERT

Ritchot has thus far been presented as the trusted friend of Riel and defender of the Manitoba Act, one who struggled to preserve and defend Métis society. But even in his own Parish, Ritchot failed in both objects. Population data document the failure as well as any other evidence. According to the 1870 Census of Manitoba, 1121 respondents claimed St. Norbert as their place of residence.¹ By 1881 only 446 of these original settlers re-appear on the nominal returns of the Dominion Census for the enumeration districts encompassing the St. Norbert riverlot survey.² Although the addition of the 108 deceased settlers raises the number of persisters to 554, the fact remains that 50.6 percent of the original St. Norbert population left the parish between 1870 and 1881. Such a high level of outmigration was increased further by the departure of another 88 persisters between 1881 and 1884.³ The St. Norbert Métis were no less immune to the general demographic upheaval which changed the face of

¹ PAM, MG2, B3, Manitoba Census, 1870.

² PAC, C13282-85, 1881 Census, Nominal return for Manitoba, British Columbia and the Territories, District of Provencher (Cartier and LaVerendrye subdistricts).

³ See Appendix for an explanation of the means used to establish the above data.

Manitoba during the first twenty years of its history after Confederation. Why did Ritchot fail to maintain the Métis character of his own parish? Even more to the point: why did the constant defender of the Métis amass a personal fortune on the profits of transactions in Métis lands?

Ritchot's own correspondence is almost silent on the matter of Métis dispersal. In May 1871 Ritchot wrote a series of letters for several of his Métis parishioners, asking Bishop Taché to lend the bearer a specified number of barrels of seed wheat. Ritchot undertook to repay the debt if payment in kind were not made in the fall.⁴ Such transactions implied support for Métis persistence.

By 1881, however, Ritchot's correspondence with the Bishop pertained to sales, more than persistence.⁵ But the urge to sell appeared to have more to do with speculative optimism than frustration with Ottawa. The Métis were simply doing their part to cash in on the Winnipeg land boom. Frustrated by events beyond his control Ritchot wrote:

La fureur des achats de terres se reprend dans les campagnes. Je ne sais vraiment pas ou ca va s'arrêter, nous sommes presque déjà engloutis et ce n'est pas tout. Pour le moment la fureur est à St. Norbert, les Parenteau, les Pilon, les Normands, les Rochelots, Carriere, etc. ont déjà vendu. Nous les laissons faire. Le brave monsieur Fillion voudrait, lui, les arrêter, je lui souhaite--

⁴ AASB, T 8786-805, Ritchot to Taché, 15, 16, 17 May 1871.

⁵ See for example Ibid., T 25104-6, Ritchot to Taché, 15 January 1881.

--."⁶

Ritchot's reference to Fillion, parish priest of St. Jean Baptiste, betrays a sense of resignation. Ritchot's comments imply that he too had often attempted to dissuade the Métis from selling.

The above represents the sum total of Ritchot's private observations on the process of Métis dispersal from the riverlots along the Red River. In assessing the clergyman's role in stemming or abetting the outmigration, evidence of his efforts as a colonizer and land broker are the only documents available.

In a discussion of constitutionally based Métis land claims, the Native Council of Canada presents a table of "Riverlot Speculators." The list is headed by John Schultz and Donald A. Smith.⁷ Ritchot's nineteen riverlot patents were insufficient to place him in the same league as Schultz and Smith with fifty-six and forty-three patents respectively. Ritchot nonetheless places third in a second group of speculators and fifth overall. Ahead of the priest were James McKay, twenty-five, and A.G.B. Bannatyne, twenty three lots.

⁶ Ibid., T 26296-99, Ritchot to Taché, 9 February 1882.

⁷ Native Council of Canada, Native People and the Constitution of Canada: The Report of the Métis and Non-Status Indian Constitutional Review Commission, (Ottawa: Mutual Press, 1981), Table 5, p. 64.

The prominence of Ritchot's name on such a list is damning from a Métis perspective. In fact, even the tabulation just recited understates the extent of Ritchot's dealings in Métis riverlot claims. Further examination of Ritchot's activities produce even more interesting statistics. The records of the Manitoba Land Titles Office and the Manitoba Act Grant Files of the Department of the Interior indicate that Father N.J. Ritchot purchased 45 of St. Norbert's 256 riverlots between 1867 and 1900. Ritchot's principal buying spree took place prior to 1880 with half the purchases occurring in 1871. During that period, thirty-four purchases were made from thirty individuals or their heirs. Of these vendors, six cannot be considered resident parishioners as defined by inclusion in the 1870 Census, or the 1868 enumeration of the Executive Relief Committee. The transfer of their St. Norbert claims to Ritchot may be construed as an effort by the priest to maintain local control of lands held by non-residents.⁸ Furthermore, ten of the pre-1880 sellers appear on the 1881 census with six remaining beyond 1885. In the end, only fifteen individuals can be said to have sold their land to Ritchot as a consequence of a decision to leave the parish in the immediate future.

⁸ The individuals in question are Joseph Tétrault, Andrew McDermot, Jean Laderoute, Remi Bernard, Roger Marion and Félix Latreille.

As noted earlier, several families left St. Norbert during the first half of the 1880's. Their lands, however, were not acquired by Ritchot. His four purchases during the same period were all from individuals who persisted beyond 1885. Subsequent to that year, the priest made over a dozen additional purchases of land. As interesting as some of these later transactions may be to any critical analysis of Ritchot's real estate transactions, they have little to do with the issue of Métis dispersal prior to 1885.

A case by case examination of Ritchot's dealings in land, complex and varied as they were, does reveal a basic pattern. Lots were purchased by Ritchot from Métis who were perhaps interested in acquiring capital to improve other holdings, and those planning to move away from a province in which they were becoming an insignificant minority. After saving the lot from possible sale to outsiders less interested in the cultural future of St. Norbert, Ritchot invariably sold his land to newly arrived Catholics of Canadien or European background, often before securing a patent in his own name. The sales were marked by easy terms. The suitable immigrant was asked to make a small down payment and to make annual or biannual payments on the principal amount owing at a rate of about six per cent. In other cases Ritchot donated land to religious orders in order to help secure and underwrite the establishment of institutions within his parish. The principal benefactors of this policy were the

Trappist Fathers and the Sisters of Misericordia.⁹

The history of lots 56 and 57 illustrates Ritchot's efforts to preserve the demographic characteristics of his parish with regard to language and faith. On 10 April 1871, Jean Baptiste Zaste (also Zasse, Zace or Zastre) sold Ritchot a six chain lot which he claimed by virtue of fifteen years occupancy. The price was £8.¹⁰ In later affidavits, Zaste indicated the lot sold to Ritchot neighboured that of his father on which he lived and received a patent. This being the case, Zaste sold Ritchot a surplus lot in order to acquire some capital. Furthermore, the vendor remained in the parish at least until 1890.

The acquisition of lot 56 was less direct. Here the land belonged to Jacques St-Denis Sr. who sold his lot to Joseph Vandal in November 1870. Vandal in turn sold his claim to Ritchot in August 1871.¹¹ Subsequent to the Vandal/Ritchot transfer, Jacques St-Denis died and Vandal became part of the new settlement on the Plum River. Perhaps ignorant of the previous sale of the property, Widow St-Denis and her

⁹ See Philippe R. Mailhot St. Norbert: The Development of a Red River Parish 1800-1914, unpublished manuscript, (Historic Resources Branch, Province of Manitoba, 1985), for a discussion of Ritchot's charity towards institutions.

¹⁰ PAC, RG15, DII, 2, Manitoba Act Grant Files, #MA2576, Lot 57; "Acte de Vente, Jean Baptiste Zasse to Ritchot, 10 April 1871.

¹¹ Manitoba Land Titles Office, Old System Documents, Quit Claim Deed, Joseph Vandal to Ritchot, 7 January 1882. The document refers to both earlier sales.

son Jacques sold the same lot to Andrew McDermot in 1874 at a price of \$150.¹² Four years later, the Winnipeg merchant accepted \$125 from Ritchot in exchange for quitting his claim to the lot.¹³

As benign as Ritchot's acquisition of lots 56 and 57 appears to be, their sale was even more so. In late December 1881, Ritchot sold the combined acreage to Louis Mizaël Dufort, "formerly of the Parish of Boloeil in the County of Verchères." The price paid for the 443.25 acres was \$1800.¹⁴ Ritchot and Dufort further arranged a Mortgage on the same day. Under its terms Dufort was required to pay \$1000 to Ritchot if he in any way alienated all or a portion of the land within five years of the agreement.¹⁵ Dufort fulfilled the terms of the agreement, acquired Crown Patents for the land from the Dominion, and secured a Mortgage Discharge from Ritchot's estate in 1917.¹⁶ Descendants of the Dufort family remain in the Parish to this day.

¹² PAC, Manitoba Act Grant Files, #MA2576, "Deed" Geneviève St-Denis et al, to Andrew McDermot, 8 May 1874).

¹³ Ibid., "Quit Claim Deed, McDermot to Ritchot, 6 July 1878).

¹⁴ Ibid., "Quit Claim Deed", Ritchot to Dufort, 26 December 1881).

¹⁵ Land Titles Office, Old System Documents, Mortgage #4810, Ritchot to Louis M. Dufort, 26 December 1881.

¹⁶ Land Titles Office, Abstract Book #124 St. Norbert, Lots 56-57.

Ritchot's brokerage efforts were not always so successful as the above case would indicate. On some occasions his claims for title would fail, while on others the subsequent owners would not fulfill Ritchot's expectations. In March 1871, Jean Carron sold a 6 chain lot to Joseph Lemay for £6. Shortly thereafter Lemay sold the claim to Ritchot for £8.¹⁷ The Deeds covering the transactions both referred to the property as Lot 864 according to the HBC Survey. Ritchot's application for Patent failed on the grounds that while he claimed title to Lot 174 of the Dominion Survey; Lot 864 of the old system formed part of Lot 170 in the new. Furthermore, all of Lot 174 (HBC 863 and 864) had passed into the hands of Donald A. Smith through a string of transactions begun by the Logan family. The claim of the Logan family was in turn supported by the records of both the HBC and the Dominion Surveyors.¹⁸ Ritchot lost on all counts.

In another series of transactions Ritchot acquired lot 230 from Félix Marcelin for \$18 and lot 231 from Pierre Ouellet for \$106.¹⁹ Ritchot sold both lots to Ernest Lecourt

¹⁷ PAM, RG17, D2, Manitoba Mines and Natural Resources Lands Branch, Parish Files re ownership and patenting of Parish Lots 1-256, St. Norbert; Lot 174, "Deed", Jean Carron to Joseph Lemay 18 March 1871; "Deed", Joseph Lemay to Father Ritchot, 11 May 1871.

¹⁸ Ibid., Lot 170, 174, passim.

¹⁹ PAM, Parish Files, Lot 229, 230, 231; "Deed" Marsolais [sic] to Ritchot, 20 February 1872 and Pierre Ouellet to Ritchot, 21 December 1872.

in May 1874 for \$250.²⁰ In this case the buyer appears to have been a speculator. Lecourt sold the two lots one month later for a total of \$800.²¹ Even worse, from Ritchot's perspective, would have been the sale of Lot 195 to John Christian Schultz by Raphael Bellefeuille the day after the latter secured a ratification of the lot's earlier purchase from the cleric.²² Both examples illustrate the abundance of buyers eager to acquire St. Norbert property at prices greater than Ritchot tended to sell. Still, Ritchot's land ventures were generally quite profitable.

Prior to his death in 1905, thirty-six of his forty-five lots were sold for substantial profit. The remaining St. Norbert holdings were assessed at \$7,660 based on a modest five dollar an acre valuation. Close analysis of the clergyman's land dealings presents the image of a priest motivated by extraordinary greed until one considers the uses of his profits.

The extent of Ritchot's land based wealth and the uses to which it was put are best illustrated by the "Affadavit of Value" prepared by the Executor of Ritchot's estate, Father Alphonse Avila Cherrier. At the time of his death in 1905,

²⁰ Ibid., "Deed", Ritchot to Ernest Lecourt, 3 May 1874.

²¹ Ibid., "Deed", Lecourt to Walter Frederick Gouin, 4 June 1874.

²² Ibid., "Quit Claim Deed", Ritchot to Bellefeuille, 10 August 1874 and "Deed", Bellefeuille to Schultz, 11 August 1874.

Ritchot's household goods were worth \$300 while his livestock and implements were assessed at \$1000. His savings consisted of \$4,670.74 in the bank and \$2,000 worth of debentures. In considering the value of these personal possessions it is worth noting that Ritchot's presbytery had been destroyed by fire two months prior to his death. The bulk of Ritchot's estate was not tied up in Railway Stocks or Share Certificates but in personal loans, mortgages, and land. Although not itemized, the Estate held over \$23,000 in promissory notes. Furthermore, fifteen mortgages totalling \$13,920 were listed. The net value of the mortgages was set at \$11,742.80. All but three of the mortgage agreements postdated 1900 and all were earning six percent interest. The Estate also held over 1900 acres of land to which Cherrier assigned the modest value of \$9,650. Finally, interest accrued from the various mortgages, agreements of sale and promissory notes raised the total value of the estate to \$49,660.00.²³

In examining the distribution of Ritchot's funds as administered during his lifetime, one must conclude that Ritchot functioned as a community conscious banker. The profits which resulted from his minimal cash outlays were used to acquire other local properties as they became available. Furthermore, he helped finance the progress of both old and new settlers. Ritchot's funds also helped make St. Norbert

²³ APSN, "Affadavit of Value", [Ritchot Estate].

an attractive magnet for French-Catholic immigrants. The impressive Parish Church, the Monastery of the Trappist Fathers, the Orphanage of the Sisters of Misericordia, and the convent-School of the Grey Nuns all provided institutional reassurance to the intending French or French-Canadian settler.

Under Cherrier's administration, the "Fonds Ritchot" continued to grow. The Winnipeg priest increased the albeit undervalued estate by four hundred percent through the sale of land during the prewar boom in suburban real estate prices. An example of such inflation is found in the history of Lot 204. Ritchot purchased the property from Gilbert Léger dit Parisien for £8 in 1871.²⁴ In 1905 Cherrier had assessed the lot's value at \$1,275. Five years later the same lot sold for \$14,000.²⁵ Cherrier's greatest coup came in 1913 when he sold thirty acres of Lot 83 for \$35,000.²⁶ The entire 185 acre lot had been assessed at \$920 in 1905.

²⁴ PAM, Parish Files Lot 204, "Bargain and Sale", Gilbert Léger dit Parisien to Ritchot, 25 March 1871. See also "Ratification of Sale", Lisette Adam (Widow-Cardinal) to Ritchot, 20 December 1881. She sold her one chain share of the twelve chain lot to Ritchot in 1871. Unfortunately the value of the original transaction is not recorded.

²⁵ APSN, "Affadivit of Value" and Gabriel Cloutier "Codex Historicus", 30 September 1910.

²⁶ Ibid., Codex Historicus, 1 February 1913.

It would appear that Cherrier did not follow Ritchot's example of personal financial assistance in the form of loans and mortgages. The funds generated by the Estate were channelled into major institutional projects as well as other "good works." Of the \$103,058.24 spent in Ritchot's memory between 1905 and 1925, \$76,000 was spent within St. Norbert. The major projects included structural repairs to the St. Norbert Church which included a crypt for the remains of Ritchot, a new presbytery which still stands today, a Boys' School called Le Collège Ritchot, a major expansion of the Orphanage which was renamed L'Asile Ritchot, and major work on the Convent of the Grey Nuns.²⁷ The Archdiocese of St. Boniface also benefitted from Ritchot's estate with close to \$16,000 donated to aid in the construction of the St. Boniface Basilica and the "Petit Séminaire", later the St. Boniface College building.

It would appear that while Ritchot's interest in land, and the wealth derived from land cannot be denied, Ritchot was a speculator who dealt in real estate to develop his parish more than his private standing. And returning to the theme of Métis persistence, it is worth repeating that only a minority of his many acquisitions were obtained from Métis intending to depart from their Manitoba homeland. The con-

²⁷ Ibid., "Succession Ritchot--Dépenses en bonnes oeuvres. This document prepared by Cherrier preparatory to the centennial celebrations of Ritchot's birth itemizes many of the major expenses.

clusion seems inescapable that Ritchot did not exploit Métis dispersal for private gain. If he had, it is doubtful he would have remained one of the few officials in whom Riel never lost faith.

Riel continued to correspond with Ritchot, and, what may be more important, the former President continued to write fondly about his former counsellor in letters to others. Riel's dealings with Ritchot created difficulties for the priest which were recognized by the Métis leader. In a note to Dubuc, Riel complained that the moderate defenders of the Métis were as hated by the Orangemen as those who had been linked intimately with the Provisional Government. As an example he remarked "Monseigneur [Taché] est aussi maltraité que Monsieur le curé de St. Norbert."²⁸ A year later Riel wrote Ritchot directly, thanking the priest for offering some assistance to his mother. Riel was struck by Ritchot's kindness since, as he wrote, "je sais tout ce que vous a coûté notre lutte depuis 6 ans."²⁹ Riel's concern for Ritchot's reputation perhaps explains the absence of any correspondence from Ritchot in his own papers. That this concern was shared by others, including possibly Ritchot, may also explain the "editing" of Ritchot's 1869 notes with ink blots, tears, and removed pages. Riel, however, did not obliterate the memory of Ritchot's aid from his mind.

²⁸ PAM, Riel Papers, #253, Riel to Dubuc 27 May 1874.

²⁹ AASB, T 16153-56, Riel to Ritchot 15 July 1875.

In the eyes of Louis Riel, the star of the St. Norbert curé remained constant while that of the St. Boniface Bishop declined. In a rambling political memorandum sent to Joseph Dubuc in September 1874, Riel complained of Taché's efforts to promote a compromise stand between "les orangists" and the men of the Provisional Government. The Bishop's politics were contrasted with those of Ritchot and other clergy who "sustained" the Métis movement with their "moral force."³⁰ With the other leaders unable to come forward, Ritchot often undertook the painful task of organizing secretly the protest meetings of the Métis. However, when the arrest of Lépine and the flight of Riel allowed Taché to sway Dubuc and the others towards the politics of moderation, the isolated Ritchot "n'avait plus qu'à pencher la tête"³¹. Riel's political analysis went so far as to describe himself (or perhaps his fate) as representative of the Manitoba Act. Ritchot was in turn described as "le sens et l'esprit" of the same legislation.³²

Riel wrote Ritchot directly several weeks later. Intended clearly for a political confidant, the letter dealt at length with Riel's efforts to promote the cause of the Métis as a fundamental question of French Canadian nationalism.

³⁰ PAM, Riel Papers, #278, Riel to Dubuc 10-29 September 1874.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

Riel also described naive political scenarios which he thought would produce an amnesty. With regard to provincial politics, the Métis leader spoke of the creation of a united Métis political party whose organization and leadership he would entrust to Royal and Dubuc. Despite the possibility of Royal having briefed Ritchot already, Riel related the plan anyway, "comme j'ai coutume de le faire chaque fois que j'ai quelque plan à exécuter."³³

The tone of Riel's references and letters to Ritchot began to change after the granting of the conditional amnesty in 1875. Riel spoke less of politics and more of his devotion to his old ally from St. Norbert. In January 1876, Riel penned the following tribute as part of his New Year's greeting:

L'attachement et le respect que je vous ai gardés depuis nos années de trouble ne se sont pas affaiblis chez moi. Je puis dire qu'ils se sont accrus devant Dieu³⁴.

Riel further cited Ritchot as the pillar of his own enterprises. Later that year, while in the Beauport asylum signing Revelations as Prophet, Infallible Pontiff and Priest King; Riel interjected a homily to Ritchot in the middle of a scathing attack on Macdonald. The passage referred to Ritchot as a new Aaron and as the constant, loyal and vigou-

³³ AASB, T 14921-47, Riel to Ritchot, 5 October 1874. See also APSN or PAM, Riel Papers, Riel to Ritchot, 1 February 1875 for another political communiqué.

³⁴ APSN, Riel to Ritchot 14 January 1876.

rous priest of St. Norbert.³⁵

Of particular interest is a letter Riel wrote to Ritchot a month after his release from Beauport. The former Métis President was contemplating a move to Nebraska where he intended to take up the quiet life of a farmer. The note bore the tone of a final farewell. Riel thanked Ritchot for all that he had done in his favour and declared he would always be attached to the curé because of their past association. As he reflected on his troubled career, Riel cited Ritchot as the inspiration for his own political credo.

Et en marchant sur les traces d'un homme comme vous Monsieur le curé, je m'appliquais à bâser ma politique d'un coté sur ce que l'homme veut qu'on lui fasse, et de l'autre, sur ce que je suis tenu en conscience de faire pour autrui.³⁶

Riel's parting words to Ritchot were also reverential. Riel asked that God provide the curé with good health and a long life. Jesus was asked to reward Ritchot in his own lifetime for the immense sacrifices he had offered during their years of trouble and difficulty.³⁷

Riel apparently never wrote Ritchot after 1878. The priest's name, however, was raised favourably by Riel to the end of his days. In 1884 Riel wrote a lengthy panegyric

³⁵ Collected Writings, 2-025, p. 81-82, Révélation contre John A. Macdonald, 24 May 1876.

³⁶ APSN, Riel to Ritchot, 1 March 1878.

³⁷ Ibid.

which opened with the statement "Noël Joseph Ritchot! J'aime votre prêtrise."³⁸ Three months before his death by hanging, Riel penned a prayer in his "Regina Journal" which asked that he be united even more intimately with the "virtuous" priest in order that they could form one heart and one soul. Together, Riel prayed, they could work under Taché's direction for the greater glory of God, the honour of religion, the triumph of truth and even the improvement of their enemies.³⁹ Whatever difficulties Riel may have suffered after 1870, whatever the feelings of betrayal he occasionally harboured towards Taché, Royal and his other associates, Riel never lost faith in the bearded curé who had befriended and aided him in 1869, and Ritchot never left the parish that first took him west in 1862. He died there in 1905, and in accordance with Ritchot's request, his remains were buried in St. Norbert, below the church he had done so much to foster.

³⁸ Collected Writings, 4-120, p. 336-43.

³⁹ Ibid., 3-196, Regina Journal, 15 August 1885.

Appendix A

NOTE ON SOURCES AND METHOD

As suggested in the preliminaries, the treatment of Ritchot in the secondary literature has been scant with the noted exceptions of G.F.G. Stanley's Louis Riel, and W.L. Morton's "Introduction" to Alexander Begg's Red River Journal and other Papers Louis Arthur Prud'homme's biography of Ritchot, Monseigneur Joseph-Noël Ritchot, 1825-1905, is little more than hagiography which contributes little detail on Ritchot's political and real estate activities. For this reason, this narrative was based almost exclusively on Ritchot's letters and papers which are dispersed among the holdings of the Public Archives of Canada, the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, les Archives Paroissial de Saint-Norbert, and les Archives de l'Achevêché de Saint-Boniface. The latter two repositories are located in the St. Norbert presbytery and in the Bishop's Palace in St. Boniface. Some of Ritchot's papers were also published as part of the Report of the 1874 Select Committee. Furthermore, the published versions of his Ottawa Journal by Stanley and Morton were also useful, although the original was consulted often to resolve problems occasioned by Ritchot's difficult script. The narrative was rounded out by consult-

ing the Macdonald and other papers found in the PAC, the Red River Disturbance and Riel papers in the PAM, and by building on the narrative line set out by Stanley and Morton.

The demographic data discussed in the last chapter was drawn from machine readable files based on the Censuses of 1868, 1870, and 1881, found in the PAM; Henderson's Directories of 1881, 1886, 1892, 1897, and 1901; and the Parish Registers of St. Norbert, 1870-1890. The ability to sort names alphabetically facilitated the task of manual cross-referencing which allowed the determination of family linkages and location over time.

The material relating to Ritchot's land dealings were drawn from a variety of sources; the selection criteria being evidence of Ritchot's involvement of any kind in the legal history of a St. Norbert lot between 1870 and 1905. The "Parish Files" (PAM), and "Manitoba Act Grant Files" (PAC), of the Department of the Interior contain the various affidavits, surveyors abstracts, correspondence, and memoranda relative to Section 32 applications for Crown Patents to river lots in Manitoba. A second source is found in the Manitoba Land Titles Office. Using Abstract Book #124 (St. Norbert), as a finding aid, the "Old System Documents" collection was searched for the legal papers surrounding the priest's real estate transactions. The above information was then collated on a lot by lot basis which allowed the ownership history of the lot to be unravelled.

While every effort was made to find all existing papers produced by or dealing with Ritchot, some were certainly missed. One must also consider the problem of culling which may or may not have been carried out by his executor or his religious superiors in an effort to "protect" Ritchot's reputation. Nonetheless, the preceding represents as complete a picture of Ritchot's secular career as has yet been produced. It is hoped this narrative will serve as an starting point for further examination of one of Manitoba's more important but little known historical figures.