

The Effects of the 1885 Resistance on Western Canada

The 1885 Resistance had profound short-term and long-term consequences upon Western Canada. In particular, the 1885 Resistance poisoned relations among the region's First Nations, Métis and Euro-Canadian and European settlers. The end result of the Resistance was the further marginalization of Western Canada's Aboriginal peoples.

In Manitoba, the 1885 Resistance made life difficult for Métis and First Nations, but provided short-term economic benefit to Euro-Canadian businessmen and farmers. When news of the Métis uprising in the Saskatchewan District reached Manitoba, Euro-Canadian settlers, fearful that local Métis and First Nations would also rise up against civil authority, established home guards in Brandon, Minnedosa, Shoal Lake, Woodworth, Oak Lake, Millford, Turtle Mountain, Virden, and Plum Creek. Some settlers, however, felt that such actions were irrational and that the fighting would not extend to Manitoba. Nevertheless, Manitoba's economy benefited from the outbreak of the Resistance. Hundreds of horses and oxen were needed to transport troops and supplies. Dozens of teamsters were hired from local farms to drive horse teams. (As a result, these farmers were unable to seed their crops). The federal government also spent over \$20,000 outfitting the Manitoba-based Boulton's Scouts. Farmers also sold their produce to feed the troops.

The non-Aboriginal population in the North-West Territories (now Alberta, Saskatchewan and northern Manitoba) also feared that the fighting would extend outside of the Batoche region. Mass hysteria made people believe false and sensational rumours, which were based on racist and irrational fears that the Métis, and particularly the First Nations, would behave "savagely" if given the opportunity. For instance, newspapers such as *The Winnipeg Daily Times* ran unsubstantiated and false stories such as the one that stated that the "rebels" had raided Saskatoon and stripped it of all its provisions. Other false reporting included a story in the March 27, 1885 edition of *The Saskatchewan Herald*, which stated that the Dakota Sioux from the local Whitecap Reserve had attacked Saskatoon. On April 16, *The Regina Leader* reported the same story adding that Saskatoon was looted and finally on April 21, *The Manitoba Daily Free Press* used the following bold headline, "The Saskatoon Settlement Plundered" and went on to state that twelve Dakota from Whitecap's Reserve had raided Copeland's store in Saskatoon and threatened to kill the shopkeeper. The same erroneous story was reprinted in almost every Central and Atlantic-Canadian newspaper. Even Canadian soldiers were upset with all the false reporting because some papers had written that they had been killed in battle, which caused their families to needlessly suffer.

Undoubtedly, the events at Frog Lake (in present-day Alberta near the Saskatchewan border) on April 2, 1885 in which Cree warriors led by Wandering Spirit (Kapapamahchakwew) murdered nine Euro-Canadians, including priests and an abusive Indian agent, only added to the hysteria.

However, this was an isolated act of violence because both Chiefs Big Bear (Mistahimaskwa) and Poundmaker (Pitikwahanapiwiyin) did everything possible to prevent needless bloodshed during the 1885 Resistance.

The 1885 Resistance would have long-term negative consequences upon Western Canada's Aboriginal population. After 1885, the dominant Euro-Canadian society put in place a new colonial regime, which systematically marginalized and assimilated Aboriginal people. For instance, First Nations were kept on reserves and were only able to leave them under the strictest of circumstances, and worse still their culture, including their languages and spiritualities, would come under assault through church-run and state-funded residential schools. The Métis would become ever further dispossessed and would be stigmatized as a "rebel" people. As a result, many Métis became landless squatters who worked menial jobs, and were unable to access proper healthcare or receive education for their children. Ironically, the memory of Louis Riel, Gabriel Dumont and the other Métis resistance fighters would become appropriated by Western-Canadian regionalists angry at what they perceive as the ongoing "colonization" of their region by Central Canada.

References:

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