

The rebellions of upper and lower canada

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The Rebellions of 1837 began after Papineau's rights were denied by the governor to 92 resolutions of reform. Papineau had thought it was important that the people of Lower Canada should have a more suitable government, rather than the small oligarchy. After his rights were denied he led the Patriots against the Oligarchy gov't. His attempt for reform through rebellion was unsuccessful however; it sparked the idea of rebellion of W. Mackenzie in Upper Canada. Mackenzie started his rebellion in a tavern/ bar fight. The Upper Canada Rebellion also ended quite unsuccessful.

After the rebellions, Both Papineau and McKenzie fled to the United States, leaving their follower rebels to face their punishments. As a result, the rebels would either have a death penalty or be transported to Bermuda/ Australia for 7 years. The lower Canadian rebels would have their crops and fields burned. William Lyon Mackenzie was a fiery and vocal critic of the Upper Canadian system in the 1820's and 30's. His temperament and conviction led him to the point where he not only advocated armed rebellion against the colonial government but led it.

He was born in Dundee Scotland on March 12, 1795 and immigrated to Canada in 1820 where he began writing for the Montreal Herald after a stint of manual labour building the Lachine Canal. In May of 1824 he decided that he could run a newspaper and started the Colonial Advocate, in Queenstown, which was a newspaper which served as an opposition position to the group known as the family compact who were firmly in power in Upper Canada. He moved to Toronto and continued his attacks on the lack of responsible government and the family compact's corrupt and self-serving record.

He quickly became a folk hero among the common man in Upper Canada who generally felt that he was right about the family compact and that something should be done. Not satisfied with just writing about the government, he ran for office in 1828 and was elected to the House of assembly for York County. 1829 was a critical year in his political development when he visited the United States and while in Washington he visited and had a meeting with the U. S. President Andrew Jackson.

He left this meeting feeling that his criticisms of the Upper Canadian political elite were justified and that a republican government was perhaps the only real answer to achieving political and social reform at home. In 1832 he travelled to London to make a personal appeal to the British Government concerning the grievous state of affairs in Upper Canada and was received with courtesy and a genuine sympathy. His aggressive and direct attacks upon the Family Compact brought an immediate response with threats of legal action, libel suits and an attack upon his newspaper office where his printing presses were broken and thrown into Lake Ontario.

He was continually re-elected to the legislative assembly and in 1834 when Toronto elected its first mayor, Mackenzie was their choice. The compact mounted a strong campaign against him in the 1836 legislative election and he was defeated. Mackenzie began to believe that power and money could not be defeated by the "fixed" electoral system in Upper Canada and regardless of who was elected to the legislature; they held no real power anyway. By December of 1837 his high opinion of the American Republic was leading him to believe that the American Revolution might be the only practical example of how change might be effected in Upper Canada.

On December 6, 1837 Mackenzie had gathered a group of reformers who were worked into frenzy and decided to march on Toronto. They came streaming down Young Street looking to destroy compact property and business as an act of defiance and potentially trigger a large scale rebellion. When they came up against the local guards they first group of reforms fired their weapons and because they were in a position that did not allow movement to the sides, lay down so the rebels behind them could fire next.

The men in the back thought that the men in the front were all being shot and killed and panicked and started to run. Within a few moments the panic had spread and the reforms fled back up Young Street to Montgomery's Tavern. On December 7th the government forces had recovered and were organized enough to mount an expedition to the Tavern where they easily routed Mackenzie and his men. Mackenzie was forced to flee to the U. S. and tried to mount a comeback but was Canadian Militia thwarted these attempts.

Although he failed in his attempt to start a revolution in the colony, the results were to stun the British Government who were finally moved to action and is dispatched a representative to the Canada's to look into all of the issues. Mackenzie spent 10 years in exile in the United States, one of which was in prison, and only returned to Canada in 1849 when he was granted a pardon. He quickly resumed his political career as MLA for Haldimand but by this time reform had been initiated and government had become responsible and much more representative.

He finally retired in 1857 and resigned his seat in 1858 after seeing many of the goals he had worked for either achieved or within reach of being achieved.

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By the 1830s the frustrations that had been building up in Lower Canada (the former New France, the former Canada, and the future Quebec) since the defeat of 1759 had reached a boiling point. In 1832 the elections held at Montreal's Place des Armes resulted in the deaths of three members of the largely French- and Irish immigrant supported Patriot Party. These reformists were opposed by the pro-British forces, the English colonial authorities and their strong-arm men of the Doric Club.

The Patriots, led by Louis-Joseph Papineau, opposed the British colonialists and had been calling for an American-style democracy. Two Patriot journalists, the Irishman Daniel Tracey and French-Canadian Ludger Duvernay had even been arrested for writing in the local press articles that said that " it is certain that before long all of America must be republican. " The Patriots, after several years of agitation for an elective Legislative Assembly and increased local powers, in 1834 addressed London directly with their 92 Resolutions, the key points of which seem fairly modest: the elected Assembly and control of the budget.

The elections of that year were a triumph for the Patriots, and the English party began a campaign of threats to keep the French population in place. It took three years for the British government to respond to the 92 resolutions, and when they did — with the so-called 10 resolutions — it was a stinging rejection of the Canadian demands. Demonstrations were held throughout the province, culminating in October 1837 in the Assembly of the Six Counties in Saint-Charles-sur-Richelieu, north of Montreal.

At the assembly, Papineau, more than ever the leader of the Canadian people, delivered a speech calling for people " of whatever origin, language

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or religion” to organize themselves, and elect their own judges and militia officers in opposition to the English. Papineau did not call for open revolt, though others, like the Anglo-Canadian Dr. Wolfred Nelson, said that the “time has come to melt our plates and our tin spoons to make bullets. ” Finally, on November 23, 1837 armed rebellion began, when Patriot troops led by Wolfred Nelson defeated British troops in the Richelieu valley town of Saint-Denis.

Though the number killed on each side was equal, the strength and tenacity of the Patriot forces shook the British, and they retreated from the battlefield. The leader of the Patriots, Papineau, was not in the town. In an incident that is still controversial, he had left the area, some saying for the good of the cause (as he'd be able to serve it in the future), while others accused him of cowardice. The second battle, at Saint-Charles-sur-Richelieu, resulted in a crushing defeat for the Patriots. This time the British were ready for a tough fight, and the Royal Scots attacked the Patriot positions in force, killing 150 and losing only three.

Though at this point many of the principal Patriot leaders fled Canada for exile in the US, the resistance to the British was not yet over. The British commander, Sir John Colborne, himself led the attack on Saint-Eustache, just northwest of Montreal. The arrival of 1500 enemy troops drove many of the Patriots to flee, but others decided to fight it out to the end. Barricaded in the town church they were bombarded for hours, a cannonade in which the local priest participated. All hope lost, the Patriots attempted to escape, but were gunned down. Again the casualties tell the tale: 66 Patriots killed, three British.

Enraged by the persistence of the rebellion the British troops went on a rampage, burning and pillaging rebellious villages. Papineau, from his American exile, remained optimistic: “ I sometimes believe, despite the immense disasters we've already suffered, that Providence will bring about the day when we will be employed in freeing our unfortunate country. ” And in fact the rebellion was not yet over. From their exile just across the border in Upstate New York, the Patriots formed a secret group, the Frères Chasseurs, and, in 1838, plotted to set off a wider rebellion.

This time they clearly called for a republic, and issued a Declaration of Independence, written by Dr. Wolfred Nelson's brother, Robert. Poorly organized, the troops gathered on the night of November 3 to await the orders of their leaders. Hearing nothing, the troops dispersed. Robert Nelson hadn't yet given up, and on November 9, after a failed attempt to seize arms, he led a diminished force against militia troops in Odell town. Seeing that defeat was inevitable, Nelson fled the scene for the US and, with this; the Patriots Rebellion came to an end.

This time the repression was even fiercer: the British troops burned everything in their path in the region south of Montreal, and arrested hundreds of rebels for treason. Many were jailed, others sent to the penal colony in Australia, and seventeen were hung for their role in the uprising. Papineau was to later to return to Canada, and in 1867 Lower Canada joined the Canadian Confederation as Quebec. By 1839, the rebellions were over but Upper and Lower Canada were plunged into a period of despair and bitterness.

More than two hundred Patriots and Upper Canadian rebels had died on the battlefield while others had been hanged or sent into exile. The forces of reform were decisively defeated and the economy took a turn for the worse. Poor harvests reduced numerous many farmers to poverty. Upon his return to London in 1838, John George Lambton, the Earl of Durham tabled his report, which outlined the conclusions he had drawn during his stay in the British colonies of North America. Lord Durham paid particular attention to the relations between the English and the "Canadians" of Lower Canada.

In his opinion, it was necessary to give the elected assembly more power. He proposed that the Governor choose his advisers - in effect, his cabinet - from among men who enjoyed the confidence of the Assembly. In this respect, Durham seemed to agree with the reformists Louis-Joseph Papineau, of Lower Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie, of Upper Canada and Joseph Howe, in Nova Scotia. Durham realized there was another, more serious problem, in the case of Lower Canada. To solve the problem, Durham proposed to unite Upper and Lower Canada, as the English party had previously suggested.

By uniting the two Canada's, the English would become dominant and the French Canadians would become a minority. He thought that French Canadians, whom he described as a people "without history and without literature", would gradually abandon their identity. Despite Lord Durham's recommendations, the British government refused to give the colonists more power. The British ministers worried that colonial autonomy would lead to the disintegration of the British Empire. Nevertheless, the uniting of the two Canada's was an opportunity to solve the French problem once and for all.

In Halifax in 1840, Joseph Howe, who had been a member of the Assembly for four years, was in favour of Lord Durham's reforms and wrote to the British Colonial Minister in London to support them. Howe was deeply disappointed when the government refused to reform the colonial parliamentary system. The Family Compact's power was greatly increased by the Upper Canada rebellion and the fear it generated. This effect was temporary as moderates soon rose to prominence. The Durham Report was greeted with enthusiasm by reformers, although its recommendations for responsible government were not put into effect until 1848.