

The Patriot War of 1837-1838: Locofocoism With a Gun?

Andrew Bonthius

Volume 52, 2003

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/ilt52art01>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Bonthius, A. (2003). The Patriot War of 1837-1838: Locofocoism With a Gun? *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 52, 9–44.

Article abstract

This paper presents a reinterpretation of the causes for the US Patriot movement of 1837-38, which rose up in support of the Canadian rebellion in Upper Canada (UC) initiated by William Lyon Mackenzie (the companion rebellion in Lower Canada is not considered in this paper since its causation was arguably considerably different). Most traditional treatments of this event, by US historians in particular, are stuck in narrative mode and lack convincing interpretation and analysis. The US Patriot war is usually quickly dismissed as the work of a few Anglophobes and adventurers seeking land and coin. The hypothesis advanced here suggests that the US Patriot movement and its progenitor rebellion in UC may be seen as an expression of the social class tensions growing out of the transition from a subsistence-barter/ household economy and culture to the more impersonal commodity market economy—a transition that was proceeding in an uneven and combined manner on both sides of the nominal Canada/us border. Mackenzie's UC rebellion was both motivated by and encouragement to radical Democratic anti-bank forces in the US. Historians are urged to consider the Patriot movement in the larger context of class conflict and accommodation then being played out on a shared Canadian/American stage.

ARTICLES

The Patriot War of 1837-1838: Locofocoism With a Gun?

Andrew Bonthius

Revolution in Upper Canada

To be sure, blood has not yet been shed, neither have the Canadas waged war with the parent government, but they have taken a stand which will soon bring them to that course. The people of Canada have passed the Rubicon.... Canada will now demand the full rights of free-men; and they will demand more than England will ever, consistently with its previous course, grant. With this state of things we confess ourselves highly gratified.¹

ONE MIGHT EXPECT that in the autumn of 1837 the fires of revolutionary America had all but expired and that popular energies were entirely focused on the westward movement or the raging depression. Indeed, for most Americans these were the major preoccupations of the day. However, for inhabitants on the northern frontier, which stretched from Maine along the St. Lawrence Seaway and the Great Lakes to Wisconsin, the fight for land and liberty, and hatred of British colonial oppression, remained burning issues as well. The focus of their concerns was the ensuing rebellions against British Crown rule to the North, led first by Louis-Joseph Papineau in Montréal, Lower Canada (LC), and shortly thereafter by William Lyon Mackenzie in Toronto, Upper Canada (UC). Nearly two decades of fruitless reform struggle against the intransigent rule of the Family Compact in UC and the Chateau Clique in

¹“Revolution in Upper Canada,” original in *Detroit Spectator*, quoted from *Cleveland Herald and Gazette*, 1 July 1837.

LC had made it a relatively foregone conclusion that the reformers would be pushed to the barricades. These two hereditary oligarchies held a monopoly on land, maintained a political choke-hold on legal and political institutions, stifled religious liberty, retarded the spread of public education, and thus ruled, in the colourful words of Mackenzie, as a "venal tribe, who ... are now fattening on the spoils of this country."² The uprisings had been widely anticipated on both sides of the United States/Canada border for months. Ill-prepared for their first attempts, Papineau and Mackenzie, along with hundreds of their troops, were quickly routed and forced to flee south to the US where they were welcomed with open arms by the vast majority of Americans. Allied with their Canadian brethren, Americans on the northern border eagerly joined what they called the Patriot movement to sweep British tyranny from the continent.³ Until late 1838 this movement engulfed the northern frontier of the US involving many thousands of Americans in military efforts to replace British "thralldom" in Canada with a radical republican form of government.

The US Patriot movement had far-reaching ramifications that merit a recognition they have not generally received by historians. As part of a bi-national Patriot movement, US Patriots presented a major military presence, though widely dispersed and poorly led, which, according to historian Allan Greer, threatened British sovereign rule in the Canadas.⁴ Combined with other simmering border disputes in the northeast, periodic Patriot filibustering posed the question of war between the US and Britain, ultimately compelling the two nations to coordinate diplomatic and military efforts to suppress the movement. In addition to action by the Van Buren and Tyler administrations, major Congressional legislation and deliberations in various state legislatures were necessary to suppress the Patriot militias within the US borders.⁵ In fact, President Van Buren's mobilization of troops against US Pa-

² Colin Read, *The Rising in Western Upper Canada, 1837-8: The Duncombe Revolt and After* (Toronto 1982), 4, 7; and Stanley B. Ryerson, *Unequal Union: Confederation and the Roots of Conflict in the Canadas, 1815-1873* (New York 1968), 113.

³ The term "patriot" as it is used in this paper has a very different meaning than is generally understood today. On the northern frontier (the Great Lakes region from Maine to Wisconsin) "patriot" was a term that broadly referred to all men and women, Canadian and American, who in one way or another supported the overthrow of British rule in Canada and its replacement with a republican form of government that more clearly addressed yeoman farmer, labourer, and small-producerist class interests. The term, however, was not the exclusive property of the Patriots for it was freely used by Whigs and Democrats across the political spectrum to describe themselves and their objectives as being true to republican principles and values.

⁴ Allan Greer, "1837-38: Rebellion Reconsidered," *Canadian Historical Review*, 76 (March 1995), 17.

⁵ On 18 March 1839 the Ohio State Legislature passed a resolution that supported the federal government's position to avoid war with Britain over US Patriot activities. See Francis P. Weisenburger, "The Passing of the Frontier, 1825-1850," in Carl Wittke, ed., *The History of the State of Ohio. Volume Three* (Columbus 1941), 361. *The Cleveland Observer* of 18 Janu-

triot was the largest deployment by the federal government against the republic's citizens since President Washington's mobilization of troops to put-down the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794.

Normally, developments of this magnitude would qualify for extensive coverage, but aside from a few notable scholarly works devoted to the Canada-US Patriot movement, US historians have been all but silent in their recognition of it. Following the lead of such preeminent authorities as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Frederick Jackson Turner, and Charles and Mary Beard, all of whom either ignored or marginalized the movement, most current US history surveys generally limit treatment of US-Canada relations in this period to coverage of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842 and generally cast it as a "diplomatic" settlement of the northeastern boundary dispute.⁶ The Patriot movement, which lasted into the 1840s, beyond the

ary 1838 reported that the New York state legislature formed a joint committee to consider the "whole subject" of the border hostilities.

⁶My own survey of more than 30 secondary and college level surveys found that the Patriot movement is not usually covered and the rare mention usually contains significant misrepresentations. Examples of the misinformation found are Mary Beth Norton, *A People and a Nation: A History of the United States, vol. 1 to 1877* (1982; Boston 1990), 364; Alan Brinkley, *American History: A Survey* (1961; New York 1995), 264. Both make it appear that the burning of the Patriot steamer the *Caroline* was the central motivating factor for American support to the Canadian rebellion and underplay the rebellion itself as the reason for mass US support. In *Our Nation From its Creation: A Great Experiment* (New Jersey 1966), 261, Nathaniel Platt and Muriel Jean Drummond write "to a small group of Americans, this uprising seemed similar to the American Revolution." The rebellion was anything but "small." In their work *A History of the United States. Volume One* (Boston 1971), 372, Richard and Louise C. Wade and Howard B. Wilder write "a band of loyal Canadians burned the steamship *Caroline*." This is a partial-truth that obscures the important fact that the burning of the *Caroline* was a hostile act conducted by the British Royal Navy in US territory. This fact, at the time, gave the incident much greater significance because it elicited allegations by Americans that Britain had attacked the US, thereby greatly increasing both talk and preparations for additional hostile acts against Canada by American sympathizers of the Canadian rebels. Any other band of attackers, no matter how loyal to Canada, would not have caused the widespread outrage across the US frontier. James West Davidson, *Nation of Nations: A Narrative History of the American Republic, vol. 1 to 1877* (1990; Boston 1998), Joseph R. Conlin, *The American Past: A Survey of American History* (1984; Fort Worth 1993), and Robert A. Divine, *America Past and Present, vol. 1 to 1877* (1984; New York 1995) all fail to address the Patriot Rebellion in any manner. I have not sought to locate the point at which US and Canadian Patriot activity dropped off the US historiographical radar, but the failure of eminent historians as far back as the 1940s must have contributed to its ultimate disappearance. Scholarly works that completely ignore the US Patriot movement are Charles A. and Mary R. Beard, *A Basic History of the United States* (New York 1944); Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston 1947); Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York 1965); Roger Butterfield, *The American Past: A History of the United States from Concord to the Great Society* (New York 1976); Edward Pessen, ed.,

12 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

scope of this paper, has interestingly been assigned to even greater obscurity than such truly unimportant events as the Pig War of 1859. This disappearance of the US Patriot movement from American history surveys has resulted in a nagging gap in the historiography of the US and US-Canada/British relations, having been exorcised from the historical lexicon so long ago that even many social historians, who would otherwise likely have addressed the subject, are now simply unaware of its existence.⁷

Since narratives of the Patriot movement abound, this paper will lean toward the interpretive and analytical. However, because interpretation and analysis hinge on quantitative data, it is first necessary to challenge the view, particularly held by US historians, that the numbers of US Patriots were few and their activities were marginal. Canadian historians, along with the few US historians who have considered this event in any depth, find causation for the movement in deep-layered socio-economic and political changes of the period. Hence, central consideration will be given to the class tensions of the day in the American republic, resulting from the transition from an egalitarian subsistence-barter economy based on agriculture to the more unforgiving commercial market economy based on a banking oligarchy, credit, and paper money. In presenting this latter interpretation as importantly suggestive rather than definitive, I will emphasize the commonalities of life in the US and UC, using Ohio as a test case, which led American and Canadian radical "reformers" to join hands in battle.⁸ In this initial attempt to persuade, I will reference various secondary Canadian and American treatments, both narrative and analytical, as well as original source material. Finally, it must be stated what this paper is not. It is not meant to be a statement on the decades-long fray over how to characterize this period ("Jacksonian," "Era of the Common Man," etc.), but rather, and most simply, to urge that the Patriot movement should be given its rightful place in that discussion.

The Many-Faceted Jacksonian Era: New Interpretations (Westport, CT 1977). Frederick Jackson Turner, *The United States 1830-1850: The Nation and its Sections* (New York 1935), 473-4, completely fails to capture the breadth and depth of US Patriot operations or the threat they caused to US-Britain relations. Unique for its several paragraphs of coverage is Samuel E. Morrison, Henry S. Commager, and William E. Leuchtenburg, *A Concise History of the American Republic* (New York 1977), 199-200, which nevertheless repeats Turner's omissions. For a very thorough coverage of the US Patriot movement see Samuel E. Morrison, *The Oxford History of the American People* (New York 1965), 464-6.

⁷For example, I found scarcely an article on the US Patriot movement in either *The Journal of Social History* or *The Journal of American History* for the last 30 years.

⁸I have chosen not to consider developments in Lower Canada because it may be fairly argued that the nature of the rebellion there had a somewhat different causation and political thrust complicated by national oppression and landed relations of the seigneurial system. Socio-economic and political conditions in UC and the US northern frontier hewed much more closely than they did in LC.

US Mass Sentiment and Cross-Border Commonalities

A random sampling of contemporary accounts belies the traditional cant that the Patriot movement was a sideshow unworthy of mention or simply the self-interested actions of a few landless and unemployed. Within the state of Ohio alone active Patriot support radiated outward from the Patriot center in Cleveland East to Ashtabula and west to the tiny town of Huron with Patriots piling into meeting halls, grabbing their guns, or raiding local state arsenals. A mid-December 1837 article in *The Huron Commercial Advertiser* provides a sense of how deeply Patriot sympathies ran among the populace:

Public Meeting

The proceedings of a meeting, held last evening at the Huron House, will be found in our columns today. Never have we attended a public meeting of any kind, where more intense feeling existed and which seemed to pervade throughout the whole assemblage, than the one last evening—all [sic], all seemed to feel for the oppressed Patriots of Canada. Many speeches were made on the occasion, with loud cheering and animated applause. That noble and patriotic song, the Marsailles hymn, or French song of liberty, was sung on the occasion, by a number of gentlemen, which seemed to inspire every bosom and awaken up a spirit, worthy of the sires of '76.⁹

Some public meetings were held to oppose military filibustering on behalf of the uprising, but such efforts ran against the stream. Papineau, Mackenzie, and numerous other Canadian Patriots were able to operate freely on the northern frontier despite substantial bounties placed on their heads by the Crown in Canada, which, given the raging depression in late 1837, speaks volumes of the popular support the Canadian rebellion had garnered early on. A decidedly Democratic newspaper in New Lisbon (120 kilometres southeast of Cleveland), expressed a widely-held sentiment: "We certainly shall not regret it, if they are safely within our territory."¹⁰ If newspaper coverage of the time may be taken as an approximate indicator of popular feelings, then the wild underestimation of US historian Thomas Bailey that only "hundreds of hot-blooded Americans" were involved in the Patriot uprisings must be replaced by an estimation of thousands.¹¹ Despite political differences, Whig

⁹ "Public Meeting," *The Huron Commercial Advertiser*, 19 December 1837.

¹⁰ *The Ohio Patriot and Farmers' & Mechanics' Shield*, 29 December 1837. The same issue of *The Mechanics' Shield* reported that a \$4,000 (£1,000) reward was placed on Papineau and \$2,000 (£500) rewards were placed on various other Patriot leaders.

¹¹ Thomas Bailey, *The American Pageant: A History of the Republic* (Boston 1956), 283. In Troy, New York on the Hudson and at Ogdensburg on the St. Lawrence large and exited crowds expressed sympathy for the Patriot cause, while in Buffalo handbills were posted on the streets urging men to rendezvous in front of the town theatre and to be "prepared to take up their line of march, By order of the Commanding Officer." Albert B Corey, *The Crisis of 1830-1842 in Canadian-American Relations* (New Haven 1941), 30, 34; a *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser* article carried in *The Cleveland Observer*, 4 January 1838 reported that in

14 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

and Democratic coverage and editorials were often nearly indistinguishable and revealed not only a broad sympathy, but a general readiness of Americans in Ohio and elsewhere for military action to aid the Canadian rebels.¹²

A wealth of research by Canadians shows that the Patriot firestorm drew thousands of supporters and was not limited to Ohio's lakefront and the Niagara region of upstate New York. Farther afield, according to Canadian historian Stanley Ryerson, "public meetings in support of the Canadians were held in towns and cities from Detroit and Cleveland to New York" in the period that followed the upris-

mid-December 1837, "Patriot volunteers were enrolled through out the day, to a considerable number. All information that the Mayor and civil authorities would interfere was laughed to scorn." *The Ashtabula Sentinel*, 30 December 1837, reported that Canadian insurgents were openly recruiting in Burlington and other towns in Vermont and taking "men and munitions of war" into Canada.

¹²While some editors in the northern regions discouraged the raising of militias or the sending of aid to the Canadian revolutionaries, overall editorial opinion tended to lean heavily in favour of the Patriots, thereby, encouraging military involvement of US citizens. For characterization of press coverage see Corey, *The Crisis*, 27-9; Howard Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty: A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1843* (Chapel Hill 1977), 21-2. My characterization of the press is more nuanced than Corey's. He states that editorial opinions of the "most influential" press in the border towns and cities "were likely to advise moderation and caution," but does not name the papers. It may also be debatable as to which newspapers were the most influential. In the context, however, of the growing efforts to gather arms and form militias to invade Canada, the amount of space devoted to encouragement of Patriot activities stood in contradiction to the tepid comments urging moderation. An example is the following from the *Buffalo Whig and Journal* carried in the *Ashtabula Sentinel* of 30 December 1837:

We would discountenance anything like embodying an army, large or small, on this side of the line, to levy war against the British authority in the Canadas. From this we are restrained by the sanctity of a treaty and the laws of nations — and far be it from us to urge or sanction any violation thereof. If, however, any or all of our citizens see fit to attend a public meeting, to express their approbation of the revolutionary feeling in the Canadas — or if any individuals see fit to sell or give too [sic] reformers arms and ammunition [sic] or other military store — we claim a right for them to do so, and would cite the example of England as a precedent therefore, not only as respects their interference with our domestic relations, but also in reference to Spain and Portugal — to say nothing, either, about the battle of Navarino.

The reference to Navarino recalled Britain's attack on the Turkish navy. Such editorials can hardly be considered as urging caution, as they take with one hand what they give with the other. Patriots inclined to take up arms with their Canadian brethren were only encouraged by such editorial opinion. For the same reason, Jones does not go far enough with his statement: "Newspaper opinion leaves the impression that most Americans opposed active government interference with the rebellion, but that they did not mind a neutrality favoring the rebels." The editorial opinion of the two papers cited above is likely to have been closer to mass sentiment on the northern frontier and certainly can not be read as opposed to interference or for neutrality in the events.

ings. Although he attaches no number to his statement, historian Allan Greer found that by the time routed Canadian insurgents were fleeing to the US for refuge in mid-to-late December, they received "tremendous public support, especially in the borderlands of northern Vermont, New York, Ohio and Michigan." Colin Read has asserted that already by December "there were further challenges to the security of the province [UC], at each end of the western peninsula" from Canadian patriot refugees and their American supporters.¹³ Great interest in the Patriot cause was evinced as far South as Philadelphia and even Kentucky from whence "a company of fifty well-armed and able bodied men" was reported to have been marching North to Detroit to join others assembling there.¹⁴

US historians Oscar Kinchen, Howard Jones, and Lillian Gates have made important contributions, which conclusively document the regionalized and popular nature of the northern border Patriot movement. Their research sets them apart from the mainstream, which is either unaware of or, as yet, unconvinced of the breadth and depth of the Patriot agitation. In his seminal work *The Rise and Fall of the Patriot Hunters*, Kinchen found that along with the leading towns such as Burlington, Albany, Cleveland, and Detroit, smaller centres along the Great Lakes also saw "vast crowds" gather with sympathetic ears to hear the latest news of the Patriot activities and "freely subscribed" money, clothing, food, and weapons. Politicians, ministers, and prominent upper-class citizens, along with mechanics, labourers, and farmers, all rallied to the Patriot cause without hesitation.¹⁵ So inspired were these frontier Americans that, according to Jones: "Plans to eliminate British influence in North America were developed along both sides of the border from Lake Champlain to Lake Michigan." And by mid-December plans for a Patriot army of the US had been laid in Buffalo.¹⁶ While the yeoman, labourer, and mechanic made up the bulk of Patriot foot soldiers, there were more than a few men of high social standing in the ranks, making it all the more difficult for federal officials

¹³Ryerson, *Unequal Union*, 126; Greer, "Rebellion Reconsidered," 15; Read, *The Rising*, 114. See also Charles Winslow Elliott, *Winfield Scott, The Soldier and the Man* (New York 1937), 336, who determined that "thousands of patriot Americans" saw it as their duty to drive the British from the continent and set up democratic institutions in Canada.

¹⁴*United States Gazette* (Philadelphia), 11 December 1837. The *Gazette* noted its readers "would naturally be desirous of having the earliest information of the movements of insurgents, and of the regular opposing army" and that the editors would "hasten[ed] to give it publicity." In addition, the *Gazette* went to the expense of commissioning and publishing a map of the "theatre of war" (the Montréal environs, the Richelieu River Valley, and part of Lake Champlain on the border of New York and Vermont). See also *The Huron Commercial Advertiser*, 23 January 1838.

¹⁵Oscar A. Kinchen, *The Rise and Fall of the Patriot Hunters* (New York 1956), 17, 20-1; and for evidence of popular support also see John Duffy and H. Nicholas Muller, "The Great Wolf Hunt: The Popular Response in Vermont to the Patriote Uprising of 1837," *Journal of American Studies*, 8 (August 1974), 156.

¹⁶Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty*, 21.

16 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

to suppress the movement. Lillian Gates found this blunt response from Edwin Crosswell, the editor of the *Albany Argus*, the official Van Buren-Democrat newspaper in New York, to the New York District Attorney N.S. Benton, who had requested that he (Crosswell) urge his readers to obey the neutrality laws:

The truth is ... that the popular feeling — the democratic feeling particularly — is all with the suffering patriots. For one I believe their quarrel just and I am unwilling to afford or to appear to afford unnecessary facilities for the prosecution of supposed offenders. On the contrary I shall not regret to see them afforded all *legal* aid ... I do not believe unless the infraction of the law were open and palpable, no [sic] jury in this country would be found that would convict.¹⁷

Crosswell's remarks bolster the finding by US historian Albert Corey that from late 1837 to late 1838 the uprisings in Canada had "affected the whole of the settled frontier of the United States west of Maine."¹⁸ It was not long before the American "huzzas" for the Canadian Patriots were followed by the sound of fife and drum, military drill, and armed assault on Canadian turf.

In mid-December 1837, sentiment finally led to action. On 13 December 1837 a combined force of Canadians and Americans, led by the American General Rensselaer Van Rensselaer, occupied Canadian-owned Navy Island in the first of many attempted (but largely failed) military incursions into Canada that would include Americans. Navy Island, situated in the Niagara River two miles north of Buffalo, was selected as the invasion point for an eventual rendezvous in Hamilton, UC where Van Rensselaer's Patriot force was to meet up with others led by Dr. Duncombe and American Thomas Jefferson Sutherland, who were to advance on Hamilton from the London District and Detroit respectively. Although both the aggregate number of men and distribution of Canadians and Americans on the island are in dispute, it is most likely that from the very beginning of the occupation the vast majority of weapons and men came from the US. At the time, US Marshall N. Garrow, who may have been influenced by reports in the *Cleveland Observer*, placed the number of troops on the island at between 1,000 and 2,000. Other historians such as Charles Lindsey and Canadian Edwin Guillet prefer lower estimates of about 600 and 350-450 respectively.¹⁹ The island Patriots exchanged intermittent

¹⁷Lillian F. Gates, *After the Rebellion: The Later Years of William Lyon Mackenzie* (Toronto 1988), 20-21 (emphasis in original).

¹⁸Corey, *The Crisis*, 28.

¹⁹Charles Lindsey, *The Life and Times of Wm. Lyon Mackenzie: With an Account of the Canadian Rebellion of 1837, and the Subsequent Frontier Disturbances, Chiefly From Unpublished Documents* (Toronto 1862), 138; Edwin Guillet, *The Lives and Times of the Patriots: An Account of the Rebellion in Upper Canada, 1837-38* (Toronto 1968), 75-82. After the burning of the Patriot steamer *Caroline*, which had been supplying the Navy Island Patriots, Guillet states that the island force "consisted chiefly of American citizens." Guillet, *The Lives and Times of the Patriots*, 82; and Gates, *After the Rebellion*, 23, 25. Gates is closer to

fire with British forces at Chippewa, but military stalemate and political pressure forced Van Rensselaer to order an evacuation in mid-January. Though Canadian soil was abandoned, the insurgents felt anything but politically defeated as the occupation and the sinking of the Patriot steamer *Caroline* on 29 December had attracted hundreds of others to their cause. Most of the departing Patriots continued their invasion efforts unobstructed at more favorable points farther West or East.²⁰

In the US, popular discourse with regard to the Canadian uprisings was shaped by decades of prior political history between Britain and the US. To understand Patriot motives and consciousness we have only to listen to the Patriots and their sympathizers who themselves made the direct linkage between this history and their determination to extend republican institutions into Canada. Most historians who have delved into these events in any depth give causal recognition to the widespread pro-republican and anti-British sentiment that pervaded the US at the time. Anglophobia and inchoate desires to annex Canada had lingered throughout this region since the conclusion of the American Revolution and were reignited by the War of 1812. They abated somewhat after 1815 and were again festering in the 1830s-40s.²¹ As political conflict between Canadian reformers and the British ruling cliques heated up between 1835 and 1837, Americans cocked their ears northward ever more intent and eager to spill additional ink reporting developments. Thousands in the Great Lakes border region fervently hoped that westward movement would be complemented by northward movement to finally checkmate British tyranny, just as Mexican dictatorship had been staunchly by the establishment of the Republic of Texas in 1836. By 1837 British monarchists had good reason to think, if not actually fear, that annexation by the US was in the offing and that Can-

Guillet in her acceptance of 400 to 600 that evacuated Navy Island on 14 January 1838, and notes that after the *Caroline* burning "arms, ammunition, provisions and recruits poured into Navy Island." Corey does not give an estimate of the number of Americans on Navy Island, but he notes in *The Crisis*, 34-7, that the Navy Island occupation was "regarded as a considerable undertaking, both by Americans and Canadians," and that the *Caroline* had been "carrying new recruits and large numbers of sightseers and visitors to Navy Island." It should be noted that the *Caroline* was only operating between the US and Navy Island; and *The Cleveland Observer*, 11 January 1838, estimated 2,000 on Navy Island and another 3,000 camped near Niagara Falls. US Marshal Garrow's estimate is found in the *Carroll Free Press*, 19 January 1838; and Orrin Edward Tiffany, "Relations of the United States to the Canadian Rebellion of 1837-38," in Frank H. Severance, ed., *Publications of the Buffalo Historical Society* (hereafter *PBHS*), Vol. 8 (Buffalo, NY 1905), 32, 42, believes that the British attack on the *Caroline* tripled the initial "several hundred" recruits, thus putting Americans in the majority.

²⁰ Guillet, *The Lives and Times*, 85-6.

²¹ Kinchen, *The Rise and Fall*, 13-5; Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty*, 20-1; Corey, *The Crisis*, 27-9; Duffy and Muller, "The Great Wolf Hunt," 156-7, 162.

ada would play Texas to the US with Mackenzie their own de Zavala.²² Excited references to the American Revolution, and by implication the unfinished business of removing British thralldom from the continent, were continually invoked on both sides of the border.

"Finish the American Revolution!" might well have been a chosen slogan. Though they do not assign exclusive motive to it, Lindsey and Guillet provide evidence of a virtual call-and-response, laden with references to the American Revolution, that echoed back and forth across the border. Sir Francis Bond Head's assessment that the province was to a large extent kept in a state of excitement by "strong republican principles [that had] leaked into the country from the United States,"²³ is confirmed in broadsides from Patriot newspapers:

The die is cast; the British ministry have resolved to set the seal of degradation and slavery on this Province, and to render it actually, what it was only in repute — the 'IRELAND OF NORTH AMERICA.' ... One duty alone now remains for the people of Lower Canada. Let them study the HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION....²⁴

Papineau, Lindsey notes, exhorted a large public meeting at St. Scholastique, county of Two Mountains, LC, to "examine what the Americans did under similar circumstances" to British oppression, and Dr. Chapin, a Buffalo Patriot, roused the crowds with invocations of "those evils which caused the thirteen colonies ... to throw off their allegiance to England."²⁵ Try as they might the British Crown and its Canadian clients had been notably unsuccessful in keeping Yankees and their anti-British sentiment south of the 49th parallel.

The Revolutionary War was an obvious reference point for US newspapers in justifying the Canadian rebels and encouraging their American supporters. In addition to a passing recognition of unemployment and adventure as motives, Guillet states that a large portion of the US press was "only too glad to attack British institutions in Canada" and "[t]he spirit of '76 was speedily revived along the border." Several Ohio newspapers that registered their agreement by comparing the Canadian risings to the "heroes of '76" were, according to Ohio historian Francis P.

²²Guillet, *The Lives and Times*, 7; Corey, *The Crisis*, 17, 45, 91; and Tiffany, "Relations of the United States to the Canadian Rebellion," *PBHS*, Vol. 8, 29. Lorenzo de Zavala was a Mexican-born Texan who joined the Texas revolution in 1835 and was elected vice president of the Republic of Texas. *The Huron Commercial Advertiser*, 26 December 1837, reprinted the following from *The Mercantile Advertiser* (a Whig journal): "When the standard of independence was raised in Texas, there was scarcely a press in the whole country that did not wish it success. Why should cold water now be thrown upon the efforts of the Canadians? Is their cause not as righteous, as meritorious as that of the Texans?"

²³Gerald M. Craig, "The 1830s," in J.M.S. Careless, ed., *Colonists and Canadians, 1760-1867* (Toronto 1971), 179, 190; Guillet, *The Lives and Times*, 3.

²⁴*Vindicator* (Montréal), 14 April 1837, as quoted in Craig, "The 1830s," 187.

²⁵Lindsey, *The Life and Times*, 12, 39, 49, 125.

Weisenburger, representative of the views of numerous Ohioans and their countrymen. The *Ashtabula Sentinel* picked up the widely circulated warning by the *New York Express*: "The lesson of Lord North is one the British government should never forget, when dealing with its colonies." The *Huron Commercial Advertiser* of 20 December 1837 editorialized that "the Patriots in Canada ... ask no more than we did in '76, and if our liberty is not a mere balderdash, we certainly ought to extend the hand of fellowship to the Canadians, and hope that they may enjoy the same blessings...."²⁶ As developments would soon conclusively prove, these were not the deluded utterances or nostalgic daydreams of idle yeomen, labourers, or middling professionals, but rather the firmly-held republican sentiments of men (and many enthusiastic women in non-combat roles) willing to wield musket, dirk, or pike, and risk the gallows, permanent banishment from the province, or even a long stint in the infamous penal colony of Van Diemen's Land in the South Pacific.

American historiography on the Patriot movement has long been hobbled by a false Canada-US dichotomy. Even Gates's otherwise fine history on Mackenzie gives scant recognition to the ethnically interpenetrated nature of UC as key to understanding the 1837-38 uprising. For Americans in the Great Lakes region, the border between the US and Canada was poorly guarded and scarcely more than a political formality to which they gave little practical consideration. From their point of view, the Canadas had become a cultural and economic, if not a political, extension of the US.²⁷ Patriot support south of the border in reality reflected an American cultural and political environment that had been growing north of the border for over a generation. UC, in particular, was strongly influenced by ideas and contacts with upstate New York and the frontier states of the old Northwest Territories. "New ideas on every variety of frontier life," wrote Chester Martin, "from school books and stoves to taverns and camp-meetings, came over the border." English farmer, Patrick Shirreff, who toured both sides of the border in the early 1830s, observed that in manners and customs UC inhabitants were "essentially Yankee."²⁸ One estimate is that by 1815 more than 100,000 American-born inhabitants lived in both UC and LC, accounting for as much as 80 per cent of the English-speaking pop-

²⁶Guillet, *The Lives and Times*, 71-2; *The Huron Commercial Advertiser*, 26 December 1837; *Cleveland Herald and Gazette*, 1 July 1837; *Ashtabula Sentinel*, 30 December 1837. The *New York Express* warning was also carried in *The Huron Commercial Advertiser*, 19 December 1837. For additional confirmation of the widely accepted comparison between the struggle of Canadian reformers and the American Revolution see Kinchen, *The Rise and Fall*, 13-4; Weisenburger, "The Passing of the Frontier, 1825-1850," 357-8; Corey, *The Crisis*, 27.

²⁷Read, *The Rising*, 52; Glen C. Altschuler and Jan M. Saltzgaber, "Clearinghouse for Paupers: The Poor Farm of Seneca County, New York, 1830-1860," *Journal of Social History*, 17 (Summer 1984), 590.

²⁸Chester Martin, *Foundations of Canadian Nationhood* (Toronto 1955), 128; and Patrick Shirreff, *A Tour Through North America: Together with a Comprehensive View of the Canadas and United States* (Edinburgh 1835), 95-6.

ulation. From New York's northern land border with LC to the Atlantic Ocean, contact between Americans and Canadians was virtually a daily occurrence in numerous towns and villages. Canadian historian Bryan Palmer has noted that the leaky border meant American mechanics and labourers were a strong presence in UC and their predominance served "as an irksome reminder to the official compact that their rule was a precarious one."²⁹

Indeed, so irksome was it that the Crown government took official action. Lieutenant Governor Sir John Colborne actually encouraged Irish and Scottish immigration to counteract the "tone of society in UC [which had] long remained deplorably 'Yankee' in many respects."³⁰ In a paternalistic, nascent industrial economy, control of land was the key to preservation of state power. Thus, to stem the alien tide of Yankee influence, the Crown placed severe limitations on the ability of American settlers to obtain land by enforcing anti-American laws that dated from the reign of King George II. Nevertheless, a Yankee-inspired republicanism persevered in the region and is seen by historian Colin Read as a direct cause of the appetite for rebellion. Read found that most of the sixteen rebel townships in UC were dominated by American settlers and their offspring, and summarized that the assembled data does "indeed suggest that the rebellion in the West was largely the work of American immigrants and native Upper Canadians although some inhabitants of other nationalities took up arms."³¹

Significant US presence in UC dated, at least, as far back as the development of the Talbot Road settlement along Lake Erie, which in 1809 was infused with "an influx of farmers from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, the Maritime Provinces, and England."³² Emblematic of this heavy Yankee labouring-class presence north of the border was the America-born L.A. Norton whose father and grandfather had lived many years on both sides of the border. Thus, when the Patriot rebellion broke out in November 1837, Norton did not hesitate to take a break from his hardscrabble life as a sailor on Lake Ontario and as a transient labourer on the sylvan Canada-US frontier to muster into the Spartan Rangers, a Patriot company from

²⁹In the Great Lakes' environs, two major western sources for cross-border fertilization were Detroit and Black Rock (near Buffalo, New York), which served as embarkation points for Canada-bound Americans since the American Revolution. See Charles D. Norton, "The Old Black Rock Ferry," *PBHS*, Vol. 1, 91; Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980* (Toronto 1983), 25, 46; Read, *The Rising*, 6.

³⁰Craig, "The 1830s," 179; Gerald M. Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years 1784-1841* (London 1963), 111.

³¹Read, *The Rising*, 6, 178, 184, 208. Read notes that most of the designated "Upper Canadians" were probably of American parentage, and on 180 that many who were critical of the Yankee presence made no distinction between the two categories.

³²Marcus Lee Hansen, *The Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples: Volume One* (New Haven 1940), 88.

the village of Sparta in Yarmouth Township. Sparta was one of those numerous small "Yankee villages" in western UC that produced a sizeable number of rebel contingents. Norton's involvement in Dr. Duncombe's western rising was a family affair in which he was joined by uncles and his father's sister, Mrs. Anna Burch, who gathered intelligence for the Patriot militias disguised as a "doctress."³³ The extant historiography, which establishes a great degree of cultural, socio-economic interpenetration between UC and the Great Lakes states, as represented by three generations of Nortons, is not disputed by scholars who have studied this region, and yet remains absent from most treatments of US Patriot activities. But what, aside from familial bonds and personal gain might have motivated so many labourers, such as Norton, to join in the rebellion? Did republican passions go beyond merely ridding the continent of the last vestiges of British monarchical rule?

A Counter-Theatre of Resistance and Egalitarianism

Under a spreading chestnut-tree
 The village smithy stands;
 The smith, a mighty man is he,
 With large and sinewy hands.
 And the muscles of his brawny arms
 Are strong as iron bands.

...

His hair is crisp, and black, and long,
 His face is like the tan;
 His brow is wet with honest sweat,
 He earns whate'er he can,
 And looks the whole world in the face,
 For he owes not any man.³⁴

Bryan Palmer has stated that in Canada the insurrectionary movement brought the concerns of the producing classes to the fore, and that in order to hear and see them clearly we must consider, among other things, a "set of moments of defiance enshrined in symbolism and a counter-theatre of resistance and egalitarian politics."³⁵ This description applies equally to the Patriot movement south of the border, which was a subset of a broader egalitarian movement of social reform, class formation, and political violence. The 1830s were a turbulent decade in which Americans were drawn to a multitude of organizations bent on remaking society by liberating the individual morally, socially, and economically. Associative connec-

³³Read, *The Rising*, 69, 91, 208; Lewis Adelbert Norton, *Life and Adventures of Co. L.A. Norton* (Oakland, CA 1887), 10-2, 31, 57-9.

³⁴Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Village Blacksmith," in *The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (1842; Edinburgh 1867), 107-8.

³⁵Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 46.

tions among the populace at large, ranging from temperance to trade unionism, utopian socialism, asylum and education reform, female suffrage, and abolitionism, were par for the political course throughout the decade.³⁶ The political discourse was particularly heated when it came to the question of the economy and the basis upon which it should be founded — on the “honest sweat” of the debt-free farmer, his labour creating a life of happiness and wealth on the soil (or like the blacksmith lauded by Longfellow, in some way serving the agriculturist), or on the developing commodity and money markets characterized by credit manipulations, debt creation, and increasing social stratification? Put another way, the debate was over the question of whether the economy should be organized around republican social values or whether social values should be reshaped to fit the needs of the newly developing commercial market. By the 1830s, the role of the US Bank and banks in general had long been the lightening rod for the political debate. Ohio quickly became fertile political soil for competing visions of the role of banking and the economy that were taking root on both sides of the Great Lakes.

The Bank War galvanized the heated attention of the masses, particularly in the Far West and northern border region where it was daily grist for newspapers and often brought tens of thousands of people to outdoor rallies to hear politicians and partisans expound on it and other issues. The political battle lines were drawn taut, resulting in a combustible politics in which violence so often accompanied the discourse that Hezekiah Niles, editor of *Niles' Register*, wrote: “Society seems everywhere unhinged and the demon of ‘blood and slaughter’ has been let loose upon us.”³⁷ Even as 1840 dawned, the proclivity for political violence had not abated. John Q. Adams wrote that he “detected a revolution in the habits and manners of the people ... their manifest tendency is to civil war.”³⁸ Nothing close to civil war transpired in this period, but major civil strife reared its head. The US Bank was broadly understood by a significant portion of yeomen, mechanics, urban wage earners, and small producers as the direct cause for their destitution in the 1837 depression. The turbulent political landscape, which produced labourers like Norton and farmers seeking land and cash in return for their service in the Patriot army, also produced bread riots in several large cities in the summer and autumn of 1837.

Patriot activity on the frontier directed at the British Crown and urban unrest (accompanied by a new trade union class-consciousness) were two sides of one coin of a class-based civil strife, wherein, the participants, largely working class in social composition, cited the Bank for much of their woes and often framed their

³⁶Aileen S. Kraditor, “Garrison’s Political Tactics Reevaluated,” in Pessen, ed., *The Many-Faceted Jacksonian Era*, 263.

³⁷Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson*, 210.

³⁸Henry Clyde Hubbard, *The Older Middle West 1840-1880* (New York 1936), 10-1; Robert G. Gunderson, “The Dayton Log-Cabin Convention of 1840,” *Bulletin of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio*, 7 (October 1949), 204-6.

critique in terms of what would best serve the meaning and purpose of a republican polity.³⁹

Ohioans had been hard hit by the money and banking crisis of 1819-25, and harboured ideas and attitudes toward banks that militated against those of the eastern banking establishment. Banks that served the collective interests of local and state small-producers (the "public good"), such as the Miami Exporting Company (incorporated by the state legislature in 1803 as a cooperative exporting company and farmers' bank), were generally welcomed by the populace. Thus, the Exporting Company's practice of selling shares with five dollars down and a promise of the balance in produce over two years was a uniquely agrarian feature that would not have been counseled by the apostles of capital accumulation at the US Bank.⁴⁰ When the First Bank of the US ceased to function in 1811, the Ohio General Assembly encouraged charters of farmers' and mechanics' banks and others like the Bank of Muskingum at Zanesville whose charter required that one third of bank directors be active farmers and mechanics, allowed for a state tax, and payment of shares before dividends were distributed. None of these practices squared with the dictates of an emerging national system of capitalism. Hostility toward a federalized banking system was dramatically manifested when the US Supreme Court decided (*McCulloch v. Maryland*, 1819) that a state tax on banks was unconstitutional. The response of most prominent Ohio leaders, including then Governor E.A. Brown, was to flout that decision by forcibly collecting the state tax from the US Bank at Chillicothe.⁴¹

Locofocoism, a radical offshoot of Jacksonianism, developed as the organized political expression of this radical conception of banking and by the mid-1830s had become the new motor force of radical democratic politics in much of the nation, including most of the Great Lakes states and large parts of the West.⁴² Ohio was part of the "free West" that leaned heavily toward the radical anti-bank principles of

³⁹Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson* (New York 1966), 185; Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York 1984), 240, wherein he writes: "The impetus for this more class-conscious trade unionism came, somewhat ironically, from the Bank War."

⁴⁰Hubbart, *The Older Middle West*, 10-1; George W. Knepper, *Ohio and Its People* (Kent 1989), 143; and William T. Utter, *The Frontier State 1803-1825. Volume Two* (Columbus 1942), 266.

⁴¹Utter, *The Frontier State*, 266, 270, 301, 304-6; "Great Public Meeting," *Cleveland Herald and Gazette*, 11 August 1837.

⁴²The name Locofoco derived from an incident in 1835 when conservative pro-bank Democrats turned the gas lights off in a NYC meeting hall on anti-bank radicals who then struck the new friction matches (popularly called "locofocos") to provide light in order to continue the meeting. A word needs to be said here about the use of the term "bank." Locofocos may properly be considered anti-bank in the strict capitalist sense to the extent that they were against all banks of issue. However, they did not oppose lending agencies that dealt in specie and produce, which at the time fell within the broad interpretation of a bank.

Jackson advisers Amos Kendall and Francis Blair, though political alignments on the banking question generally fell along class and not regional lines. Locofocoism was a multi-class rump formation of anti-bank/anti-state radicals in New York City in 1835, who soon formed the Equal Rights Party (ERP). The ERP advocated free and equal education, popular election of the president, and free grants of public lands to the landless. A corollary to these programmatic points was the demand for a "hard money" economy based on gold and silver specie as a counterweight to the rising tide of paper money, credit, and speculation foisted on the nation by an unelected cabal of "monied aristocrats."⁴³ Locofocos had tapped into the mother-lode of mass antipathy toward banks, which spread as far as Ohio where by 1835-36 the state legislature granted only 1 of the 34 petitions requesting local bank charters.⁴⁴

The latter half of the decade saw no let-up in radical anti-bank democratic activity among Ohioans. This was most convincingly demonstrated by the state legislature's March 1836 approval of a 20 per cent tax on all bank dividends unless banks discontinued circulation of small notes, and the fact that the state was home to nine of Jackson's "pet banks."⁴⁵ In May 1837, radical Democrats in Columbus had proposed a "convention of the people of Ohio" to be held in their city for the purpose of organizing opposition to "despotic rule, and ... to rescue the country from oppression and misrule." In one of many such public meetings that took place in towns and villages throughout the nation in 1837, Cleveland mechanics and workingmen attacked the Bank as an aristocratic institution that encouraged wild speculation and advanced monopolies to the "detriment of honest industry," thereby "creating distinctions incompatible with the genius of our institutions, ennobling the rich and depressing the poor."⁴⁶ The growing legions of leading Locofocos included men like Joseph Cable, secretary of the Columbiana County Democratic Party in eastern Ohio, who attacked the "Government Agent Bank" for "cheating contractors and laborers by paying them in worthless paper and keeping the specie it borrowed" and charged the US Bank's incurring of public debt was a fi-

⁴³Weisenburger, "The Passing of the Frontier," 311; Turner, *The United States 1830-1850*, 126.

⁴⁴Carlyle Buley, *The Old Northwest Pioneer Period 1815-1840* (Indianapolis 1950), 611; Weisenburger, "The Passing of the Frontier," 311.

⁴⁵Weisenburger, "The Passing of the Frontier," 312; Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 144. Although the Whig press indiscriminately applied the term "Locofoco" to the Democratic Party as a whole (ignoring real divisions within it over banks), Van Buren's support for the Independent Treasury system in late 1837 was unquestionably the result of radical (Locofoco) activity in the Democratic Party and a triumphant expression of the influence radical anti-bank forces had over that party. Three and five dollar bills were considered less likely to be presented for specie and hence more likely to be over issued by banks. Small notes tended to drive out specie in areas where they were abundant.

⁴⁶Weisenburger, "The Passing of the Frontier," 340, 350; *Cleveland Herald and Gazette*, 27 May 1837; "Great Public Meeting"; Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson*, 208-9, 234-5.

nancial "reign of terror."⁴⁷ With President Van Buren's support of the Independent Treasury plan in late 1837, Locofocos had gained the "imprimatur of the White House" and essentially achieved political hegemony in the Democratic Party nationally.⁴⁸

The President's support of the Independent Treasury plan further stoked the fires of an already raging national debate on the economy causing the disciples of finance capital to respond to the Locofoco critique with impassioned and lengthy defenses of their "credit system."⁴⁹ In its fourth essay in a series on business, *The New York Times* made a bid for understanding: "If all the banks were abolished the rich would engross all the money, and the poor but enterprising man could not borrow as he can now. He would then spend his life before he could, in the language of his loco foco friends, procure his 'established bushel, and the tools of his trade.'"⁵⁰

Anti-bank sentiment was so deeply embedded in the popular mind that the pre-eminent Whig spokesman of finance capital and land speculator, Daniel Webster, saw the need to address it at length in his speaking tour of the West in 1837. In July, at Rochester, New York, he directly attacked payment of debt in kind, a corollary to the "hard-money" system: "Men have entered into contracts to pay dollars, not bushels of wheat," he sneered. In the same speech Webster labeled "an absurd sentiment" the popular maxim that: Those who trade on borrowed credit ought to break." In an attempt to sell the new counter-ethic of commercialism, he bracketed his remarks with arguments for the necessity of a government-regulated currency and an economy based on paper money and credit. The idea of an exclusive metallic currency, he said, was "a chimera, impossible and perfect folly." Webster's remarks were geared to liberal Democrats waffling on the issue, but certainly not to radicals, like those in Ohio, who bemoaned their "bank-ridden state" and, in a violent sentiment that often bubbled to the surface of public discourse, called for "committing ... to flame" the notes of a recently failed bank.⁵¹ Hard-money, anti-bank Democrats in Ohio, whose motto might as well have been "perish credit," held center stage against the conservative pro-bank wing of the party. In only two short years the radicals had gained control of the gas lights in most meeting halls and kept their locofocos dry for more leisurely uses.

The radical Democratic successes of the late 1830s put conservative pro-bank Democrats and Whigs evermore on the defensive against the Locofoco critique. Publicly tarred as "excrescences on the body politic" by radicals and now denied, by the Subtreasury plan, a free rein to capriciously create credit, manipulate the

⁴⁷ *The Jeffersonian*, 12 October 1837.

⁴⁸ Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson*, 235.

⁴⁹ "Difference between Privileges and Advantages," *United States Gazette*, 8 August 1837 reprinted from the *Boston Post*; *United States Gazette*, 13 September 1837.

⁵⁰ *United States Gazette*, 13 September 1837.

⁵¹ "Speech of Mr. Webster," *United States Gazette*, 4 August 1837; *The Democrat and Herald*, 6 September 1839.

value of currency, and personally profit from investment of government funds, Bank partisans, unmediated by any democratic restraints, lashed out publicly at the Subtreasury plan with their own plan of political blackmail. The Bank's official organ, the *New York Courier and Enquirer*, fulminated that Bank directors should make "the wheels of government ... stand still" if the independent treasury was not abandoned.⁵² That rabid outburst had exposed the dictatorial tendency of early industrial-finance capital and confirmed all the worst allegations of the radical Democrats, proving the need for their call to bring "Czar" Biddle and the Bank to heel.⁵³

The banking oligarchs reaped a political whirlwind in rhetoric reminiscent of the American Revolution, which continued to be a reference point for anti-bank forces. *The Jeffersonian*, a Locofoco newspaper in Carrollton, Ohio, proposed that if the dictatorship of capital were successful: "It would prove that the banks are stronger than the people; that THE BANKS ARE THE GOVERNMENT, and THE PEOPLE THEIR SLAVES." It likened the *Courier* to the "Tory press" and posed the question: "Will the people govern themselves? or will they submit to the spirit of despotism?"⁵⁴ The debate over currency and the economy was widely understood as fundamentally a political one of which class should rule — the honest workingmen of rural and urban America or a parasitic class of morally corrupt bankers? Was Biddle's aristocratic cabal of finance capitalists to be allowed to subordinate the very liberties and republican structure of government for which the American Revolution had been fought? Would the honest yeoman, farmer, labourer, and mechanic retain his equality and sovereignty? Cleveland workingmen, in assailing the "bank aristocracy," answered these questions by resolving to "support no one for the office of Senator or Representative, who is now, or has been within the last year either a stockholder or director in any bank...."⁵⁵ Certainly de Tocqueville's felicitous assertion that "the sovereignty of the people has acquired, in the United States, all the practical development which the imagination can conceive" would have been scorned at many a tavern table and popular hall.⁵⁶

⁵²"Shall the Banks Govern? Or Shall the People Govern?" *The Jeffersonian*, 26 October 1837; and *Cleveland Herald and Gazette*, 27 May 1837.

⁵³Fascism has been cogently described as "capitalism under the gun," meaning that when faced with an organized and militant working-class opposition to its rule, the first impulse of capitalists is to opt for "stability" of production and profits over democratic structures, even if it means resorting to bonapartist military rule or fascism. This tendency, in embryo, is clearly exposed here in the Bankers' plan to forcibly subordinate republican government to capitalist class interests even in this early period of industrial capital.

⁵⁴"Shall the Banks Govern?" (emphasis in original).

⁵⁵"Great Public Meeting."

⁵⁶Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Henry Reeve, trans., Henry Steel Commager, ed., (London 1947), 49. See *Spirit of the Times*, 20 June 1838, which charged former US Bank president Nicholas Biddle with "distributing his favours amongst the press, his relatives, the great speculators and brokers of the day, showering down discounts upon

If US Patriot activity can be seen as a dimension of Locofocoism, it is largely attributable to Mackenzie's integration of it into his vision for a new republican Canada. He understood better than many historians today that those living on either side of the border were, as he stated: "The same people, having the same native energy, the same origin, and speaking the same language."⁵⁷ Radical democratic objectives in the US melded well with Mackenzie's reform orientation, which had long "opposed the hereditary right, pseudo-aristocratic character of the elite Compact" and condemned the privilege and patronage of the UC gentry.⁵⁸ Hence, it made perfect sense to him to immerse himself in the radical movement of the US. For years his political evolution had hewed closely to developments in the US, the vibrant frontier of which he increasingly saw (rightly or wrongly) as the economic salvation of Canadians. At first critical of Andrew Jackson as president, he adopted Jacksonian ideology after a visit to the White House in 1829 and readily embraced its feistier offspring, Locofocoism. He became part of a dispersed fraternity of radical journalists, which included George Evans (*Workingman's Advocate*), with whom he exchanged newspapers; William Leggett (*The New York Evening Post* and *The Plain Dealer*); and John L. O'Sullivan (*United States Magazine* and *Democratic Review*), all of whom were vociferous hard-money, anti-bank exponents. As Gates has noted, Mackenzie and American radical Democrats both saw the Bank of England as the "arch villain" behind the system of paper currency and easily made the connection between the abolition of that system throughout the continent (i.e. the US Bank as well) and deposing the British monarchy.⁵⁹

Mackenzie's radicalism jelled programmatically in his November 1837 Draft Constitution for the State of Upper Canada only months prior to insurrection and revealed the Patriot movement (in UC) to be manifestly a programmatic expression of the radical Democratic critique of the newly developing money market economy. The opening line of the draft constitution addressed the "farmers, mechanics and labourers, and other inhabitants of Toronto." In it he sliced away at all the capitalist sacred cows. Early on in section three the "whole of public lands within the limits of this State ... and all the land called Crown Reserves, Clergy Reserves, and rectories and also the school lands ... are declared to be the property of the State and at the disposal of the Legislature, for the public service thereof." In Section Twenty he declared private property shall be "always subservient to the public welfare." This was followed by a severe restriction on capital creation in Sections 51 and 52, which respectively gave a democratically elected legislature the power to regulate

members of Congress, with bank counsel and stockholders in the Senate and the House, and an entire control over both bodies...."

⁵⁷ Anthony W. Rasporich, *William Lyon Mackenzie* (Toronto 1972), 60. Mackenzie made this observation in the 24 August 1836 issue of his newspaper *The Constitution*. See Craig, *Upper Canada*, 163-4.

⁵⁸ Bryan D. Palmer to author, 12 July 2001.

⁵⁹ Gates, *After the Rebellion*, 40-3.

the value of money and called for a specie-based currency. Upping the ante even further for capitalists were Sections 55 and 56, which respectively placed all banking authority in an elected legislature and outlawed banks; from Mackenzie's viewpoint, the Bank of Upper Canada was no less a scourge on the Canadian people than was the US Bank on the Americans. In the latter section Mackenzie also eschewed John Locke's hesitation that labour was only nine-tenths responsible for all value by boldly claiming: "Labour is the only means of creating wealth."⁶⁰

While heeding F.H. Armstrong's cautionary assessment of how best to define Mackenzie politically, the draft constitution was arguably a programmatic, if not ideological, gauntlet thrown down to an early stage of capitalism in the US and UC.⁶¹ Mackenzie's radicalism stopped just short of a pre-Marxian socialistic agrarian (à la Thomas Skidmore and John Commerford) vision for Canada, but neither can he be accurately described as fully-capitalist simply because he had opposed a strike by printers in his shop. His "anti-compact, anti-gentility rule fit well with the small producerism of the household economy, which contained aspects of a capitalist worldview, in as much as market relations, the sovereignty of individualism, and the ideology of advance by merit, ... were embedded in it," but his hard-money, anti-monopoly prescriptions for a democratically-run economy militated against the natural flow of the new capitalist free-market system.⁶² In the most objective sense, Mackenzie's vision presaged a breach of the bourgeoisie property norms upon which the American Republic had been founded. If his vision had triumphed, it certainly would have had a transforming effect on an already vigorous American rural and urban radical movement that was challenging, albeit not on the barricades, many of the core capitalist assumptions. To the great dismay of Mackenzie

⁶⁰Rasporich, *William Lyon Mackenzie*, 4, 10, and 66-68; Charles L. Sherman, ed., *John Locke, Treatise of Civil Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration* (New York 1965), 27. Actually, Section Twenty declares: "Private property ought, and will ever be held inviolate, but always subservient to the public welfare...." As a middling professional, Mackenzie had had a dispute with his own workers, but even at this stage in his life, he was a political work in progress. His contradictory expressions regarding private property clearly reveal that he was struggling with the role property should play in society and the economy. Only the republican seizure of power would have resolved the contradiction.

⁶¹F.H. Armstrong, "Reformer as Capitalist: William Lyon Mackenzie and the Printers' Strike of 1836," *Ontario History*, 59 (September 1967), 187-96. While the debate over how to label Mackenzie (revolutionary anti-capitalist, a temporarily out-of-joint independent small producer-capitalist, or somewhere in between) has its place, it is ahistorical to think that Mackenzie alone would have determined the character and conclusion of the movement he helped set in motion. Analysis of mass movements requires a finer calculus than the political profile of a single leader allows. Mass movements must be judged on the basis of their entire leadership cohort, the social composition of their base, political trajectory and political program, not solely by the illusions or subjective intentions of any given leader.

⁶²Palmer to author, 12 July 2001

and many Patriots, however, Van Buren quickly divorced himself from efforts to advance radical democracy in the Canadas at the end of a gun.

As the decade came to a close Ohio remained hotly contested ground where Patriot activity proceeded apace and banking issues were being decided along straight party lines in the state legislature.⁶³ Thus, the political white waters yielded a public address by Ohio radicals as part of a get-out-the-vote campaign for the 1838 fall elections. The address excoriated the banking institution by which "the servant had become the master," and appealed to the "freemen" of the state to muster their "high character" and "patriotism" if they were to remain "as free citizens of a sovereign state." Editors of one newspaper in Georgetown, a stone's throw from the Ohio River, ran the address and sounded the Locofoco tocsin: "*Freemen*, are you still resolved to be FREE? If so, then it is time to wake up, the banks are in the field, the enemies to the free *unbought* suffrages of the People are martialled in a solid phalanx. The united and harmonious action of the Democratic party is now imperiously demanded by the endangered liberties of the country."⁶⁴

Strictly economic matters were inextricably linked with saving the republican democracy from a "moneyed government" for the common white man and woman small-producer who earned their bread through "honest labours." "Freemen" were widely understood to be those whose livelihoods were tied (indirectly or directly) to the soil. In a distinctly Locofocoite message to a joint session of the state legislature in 1839, Ohio Governor Wilson Shannon praised the toilers of the land and hailed "agriculture ... as the great leading interest of the state from which our principal wealth and resources must be derived, and which is specially entitled to fostering care of the legislature." He also called for severe restrictions on capital accumulation that were anything but laissez-faire: much ampler specie basis for note issues; the altering or amending of bank charters when the public good required; bank charters that made stockholders liable for their portion of the corporate debt; restraining directors and stockholders from borrowing from their own banks; and suppression of bank notes of under five dollars. Banks he declared, contrary to good capitalist impulse, were to consult the interests of the people.⁶⁵ The

⁶³Weisenburger, "The Passing of the Frontier," 346.

⁶⁴*Democratic Standard*, 20 July 1838.

⁶⁵Weisenburger, "The Passing of the Frontier," 350-51; *Hamilton Ohio Intelligencer*, 12 December 1839. Among other things, Shannon expounded the following:

[A]gricultural interest in its usual prosperity and flourishing condition, upon which mainly depend all the other great and leading interests of the State. Our climate, soil and geographical position, designated us as an agricultural people; and upon this branch of industry must we principally depend for all our wealth and resources. It is from a soil of unsurpassed fertility, and great agricultural capabilities that we must sooner or later draw the necessary means of paying our debts, and sustaining the credit of the State But it is not in the infancy of a country that we see manufacturing establishments springing into existence, and rivaling agriculture in the creation of actual

legislature, both houses of which had been under radical Democratic control since sweeping the autumn 1838 elections, took this last cue by passing the Bank Commissioner Act (February 1839), which required banks to pay their notes on demand in gold or silver and appointed three commissioners to patrol state banks, examine their books, and make public reports.⁶⁶

The Hunters' Lodge Movement and the Pursuit of Equality

Given the programmatic similarities of the Canadian rebels and the Locofocos, it is not surprising that the US Patriot movement gained large numbers of adherents. By all serious accounts, the US had more partisans than UC where, according to Palmer, only hundreds were galvanized in actual rebellion.⁶⁷ Cleveland, and large swaths around it, proved receptive to democratic radicalism as was underscored by the Locofoco gerrymandering of Ottawa, Summit, and Lake counties in 1840. Clevelanders like Mr. St. John and Mr. D. Hersh played dual roles as leading public figures in both the Patriot and anti-bank movements.⁶⁸ By mid-1838 the main vehicle for organizing support south of the border was the Patriot Hunters' Lodge movement, which had its headquarters in Cleveland (Cuyahoga County). The lodges formed first in May 1838 in Vermont and spread quickly, enrolling from 25,000 to 40,000 members in nearly 1,000 lodges from Maine to Wisconsin and points south. In Canada, according to Greer, they "quickly attracted a mass following, particularly among the habitants of the District of Montreal." Though he likely inflated the numbers to his advantage, Sir John Colborne communicated to US Army General Alexander Macomb that the Hunters were organized "in every city and village" along the Canadian border and that they had a minimum of 25,000 militiamen.⁶⁹ With money scarce in most parts of Ohio (and the West in general), and thousands of yeoman and labourers rendered idle and poverty-stricken by the rag-

wealth: manufactures are always of slow growth, and rarely arrive to much importance until the labor of a country becomes greater than the demands of agriculture require. We must therefore look to agriculture for the present, and for sometime to come, as the great leading interest of the state from which our principal wealth and resources must be derived, and which is specially entitled to the fostering care of the legislature.

⁶⁶Weisenburger, "The Passing of the Frontier," 351-2.

⁶⁷Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 53. This is not true with regards to the rebellion in LC, where Palmer estimates that "as many as 10,000" took part.

⁶⁸*The Olentangy Gazette*, 17 April 1840; *Cleveland Daily Advertiser*, 3 January 1838; *Cleveland Herald and Gazette*, 11 August 1837. The men's names are given here as rendered in these cited newspapers.

⁶⁹Tiffany, "Relations of the United States to the Canadian Rebellion," *PBHS*, Vol. 8, 61-3. Tiffany indicates that estimates of membership in the Hunters Lodges vary widely from 15,000 to 200,000. See also Corey, *The Crisis*, 76; Allan Greer, *The Patriots and the People: The Rebellion of 1837-1838 in Rural Lower Canada* (Toronto 1993), 341; Kinchen, *The Rise and Fall of the Patriot Hunters*, 36, 41-2.

ing depression, Patriot leaders shrewdly offered volunteer soldiers in its northwestern Army ten dollars per month (the average annual wage of a yeoman or labourer), "equipment," and clothing. This offer was further sweetened with a bounty of 400 acres to each soldier who served to the conclusion of the rebellion.⁷⁰ Not even Patriots could live on republican ideals alone.

The Hunters' main lodge in Cleveland was the site of their first convention from 16-22 September 1838 at which 160 delegates approved a quintessentially Locofocoite banking plan designed to fund their cause and serve a new republican economy in Canada. The plan was explicated by Dr. Duncombe, who expressed more than a hint of the Skidmore radical agrarian leveling tendency. A circular sent to all Patriot Lodges disseminated his radical prospectus for a "republican bank controlled by the people through delegates chosen to elect directors" with all profits to be equally the property of every citizen of the state. The circular left little room for mistaking the Hunters all-encompassing vision for anything less than the refashioning of Canadian civil society along radical republican lines: "All institutions of the country should be for the benefit of the people. There should be no landed aristocracy, no established church, no bank monopoly, no union of the monied aristocracy with the executive." The exigencies of capitalist development, particularly in the US, had made this latter call for the separation of state and bank the calling card of radical, democratic republicans on both sides of the border for without a national banking system the new commercial commodity and capital markets could not function.⁷¹ Thus, even though they were using the word "bank," theirs was obviously not intended to operate in any traditional capitalist sense, and eastern bankers would certainly have scoffed at the Duncombe "bank" plan approved by Patriots in Cleveland.

Patriots recruited openly to their ranks with handbills such as the following (Figure 1)⁷² that upon careful reading reveals another primary link between politi-

⁷⁰In most parts of the West and the northern border region the average annual wage of labourers was between ten and twelve dollars per month. See William Cooper Howells, *Recollections of Life in Ohio, From 1813 to 1840* (Cincinnati 1895), 137, 139; Shirreff, *A Tour Through North America*, 16, 250; "Regulations and Pay," (photostatic copy), Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, August Todd, Papers Relating to His Participation in the Rebellion of Upper Canada, MSS P-C 217.1. There is no more basis to argue that these incentives compromised the revolutionary nature of the Patriot movement than there is to argue with American Revolutionary War practices, wherein incentives were offered to whites (money and land) and blacks (promises of freedom). See comment in footnote 61 re: the political calculus necessary to determine the revolutionary worth of mass movements.

⁷¹Kinchen, *Patriot Hunters*, 35-6, 38-43, 49-50; it was rumored that Patriot notes circulated around Buffalo at one point, Carl Wittke, "Ohioans and the Canadian-American Crisis of 1837-38," *The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly*, 58 (January 1949), 24.

⁷²Tiffany, "Relations of the United States to the Canadian Rebellion," picture plate following 122. This handbill is only partially rendered in this paper.

PATRIOT
MEETING.

W.E.H.U.N.T.T.O.O.

Spirit of '76!

"Liberty and Equality thro'out the World"⁶⁸

Figure 1. *Poster of Buffalo's "Patriot Lodge," 1838.*

cal developments in the US and the Canadian rebellion that has been largely missed by historians of this period.

The tag line here unambiguously connects the fight for liberty with the pursuit of equality, which in context extended beyond the straight economic and political to the social realm. Even the proposed Patriot bank bills were designed with the words "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity" in the margin. The political message reflects, as Sean Wilentz has well established, that in this period the changing relations of production had caused politicians and party spokesmen in the US to think "primarily not in straightforward liberal terms but in classical republican terms leavened by egalitarian notions of natural political rights — of a polity of independent virtuous citizens, working to build and maintain a commonwealth of political equality."⁷³ The demand for equality was everywhere in political currency on both sides of the Canada-US border. Newspapers from Cleveland to Detroit expressed the popular opinion that "as believers in the doctrine of equal rights — we cannot but feel the warm gushings of sympathy" for the Patriot cause. The cause in the minds of many represented the continuation of the struggle for land and social equality harkening back to Jackson's 1832 Bank veto message, which attacked "artificial distinctions" that made the "rich richer and the potent more powerful," and called for equal opportunity and equal rights.⁷⁴ The seeds of an egalitarian movement, which in the US had spread from Georgia to Indiana and from Maine to Ten-

⁷³Sean Wilentz, "On Class and Politics in Jacksonian America," *Reviews in American History*, 10 (December 1982), 54.

⁷⁴Richard B. Latner, "A New Look at Jacksonian Politics," *The Journal of American History*, 61 (March 1975), 954; Wittke, "Ohioans and the Canadian-American Crisis," 21.

nesses, had also taken root in UC largely due to Americans, though not exclusively, who according to Read, offended many Canadians with a galling air (ironically) of superiority.⁷⁵

The pursuit of all-encompassing equality in America had become so dominant in the public discourse that even author James Fenimore Cooper was induced to comment on it in his 1838 treatise on government. He observed that equality was never a governing principle of the institutions of the US, and "neither the word, nor any inference that can be fairly deduced from its meaning" can be found in the Constitution. By the outbreak of insurrection in the Canadas that fact had become all too apparent to large numbers of American yeomen, mechanics, and wage labourers.⁷⁶ In this context, the flag raised by Patriots on Navy Island emblazoned with "Liberty — Equality" was obviously meant to speak to citizens of both nationalities and could easily have served Hunters (most of whom were Van Buren supporters until 1838) as a campaign banner in their Ohio and New York electioneering during the 1838 fall elections.⁷⁷ When invoked by radical Democrats, including some of their petit-bourgeois political bloc partners, the search for equality was part of a larger overarching attack on the ugly head of unrestrained capitalism, which was driving the masses to wage slavery, penury, and idleness. "Democracy," one radical, anti-bank newspaper instructed, is: "Destructive only of despotism, it is the sole conservative [sic] of liberty, labor, and property. It is the sentiment of freedom, of equal rights, of equal obligations."⁷⁸ While the call for equality by Hunters (indeed most radicals) invoked something short of Skidmore's expropriatory radical leveling, it also referenced something more than a liberal Lockean demand for "no taxation without representation" — it was not their "Founding Father's" notion of equality.

Though industrial development in the US outpaced that of Canada, weighed down as it was by the heavy yoke of a paternalistic mercantilism, class formation in both nations led the plebian masses to hit strikingly similar notes of protest in which an unmistakable bias toward the land and equality was evident. The financial panic and depression of 1836-37, then gripping the Canadian provinces and the US, only heightened the perception of radicals that the aggrandizing capitalist, having strayed from a virtuous life rooted in the land and close to nature, was the bane of human existence. In the winter and spring of 1837, Ryerson observes that *The Vindicator*, a vigorous Patriot organ in LC, lauded the farmer who:

⁷⁵ *The Jeffersonian*, 3 October 1839; *The Jeffersonian*, 21 November 1839; Read, *The Rising*, 25.

⁷⁶ James Fenimore Cooper, *The American Democrat* (London 1989), 110.

⁷⁷ Samuel Unger, "The Hunters' Lodges and the Canadian Rebellion of 1837-1838," MA thesis, Ohio State University, 1931, 39-40.

⁷⁸ Tiffany, "Relations of the United States to the Canadian Rebellion," *PBHS*, Vol. 8, 30; see Kinchen, *Patriot Hunters*, 55, for the reference to equality contained in the oath taken by Hunters in Lower Canada, and 43 and 54 for electoral activity; *The Jeffersonian*, 21 November 1839.

34 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

[I]s a member ... of a class on which we must mainly depend for the steady and effectual defence of the institutions of liberty, amidst the violent assaults, which, it is easy to foresee, mercantile rapacity will fiercely wage against them. To the cultivators of the soil, gentle and simple, and to the hardy followers of the mechanick [sic] arts, we turn our eyes in these days of passion and prejudice, for that calm good sense and intrepidity, which are necessary to the great blessing of equal political rights.⁷⁹

The irate Kingston (UC) mechanic, who in 1837 complained of the grievous wage slavery and degradation of his craft would likely have readily endorsed the following sentiment then prevalent among his US farm bretheren.⁸⁰

The experience of this year will go far towards convincing farmers that theirs is a truly enviable situation, when compared with that of merchants, manufacturers and businessmen generally. If prudent ... instead of a load of debt harassing the mind, and giving that anxious cast of countenance so common of late in our streets, he merrily wields the axe, the hoe or the scythe, or whistles "o'er the lea," as his jocund team turns the smooth furrow. When the labors of the day are at an end, and his frugal repast has been enjoyed with a zest that only labor gives, he seeks repose, and proves that "the rest of the laboring man is sweet"; while the objects of his envy are tossing upon a restless pillow, their minds excited well nigh to madness, by the troubles and difficulties of the day, and upon the rack for devices to be put in practice on the morrow. So long as the fertility of the soil and the seasons themselves are not affected by the madness or folly of our rulers, he may set at defiance their worst efforts. Secure in the independence his farm confers upon him, his property is not scattered over the land in the shape of credit given to hundreds on their purchases of goods, wares and merchandize ... his acres are safe and at par when paper securities are comparatively valueless.⁸¹

This confident, even poetic, assertion of the *superiority* of agrarian life was a widely held bedrock ethic in these times. Among a vast portion of rural, small-producing classes was a generalized acceptance that socio-economic equality, indeed even mental and emotional stability, were impossible except through cultivating the land. "What employment is there, in life," asked one agricultural essayist rhetorically, "so highly favorable to all the benign influences of exercise, so conducive to repose and tranquility of mind...."⁸² This and other rejections of the stress-inducing acquisitiveness and the socially alienating effects of the banking system and its commodity markets help us answer how both Canadians and Americans viewed the new commercial market system, in what numbers and to what extent they were pursuing or resisting it. But what else about the material conditions of the labouring and small-producer classes might have beckoned them to risk life

⁷⁹Ryerson, *Unequal Union*, 60-1.

⁸⁰Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 12-4.

⁸¹*Cleveland Herald and Gazette*, 1 July 1837.

⁸²Jesse Buel, "The Farmer's Companion," in Carl Bode, ed., *American Life in the 1840s* (New York 1967), 10.

and limb in a fight against the Crown in Canada? What other elements of daily life on the frontier animated the ethics and ideals of radical democracy?

The Household Economy as Protector of Equality

In a provocative rethinking of the ambiguities and conflicts of agricultural history and republicanism in the first half of the 19th century, historian Michael Merrill has lent valuable insight into the deep-layered socio-economic changes that might have motivated many of the Patriots. In a critique not yet accepted by the mainstream, Merrill offers a new paradigm opposed to the traditionalist renderings, which maintains that the transition from the agrarian subsistence economy to the commercial market economy in this period was, by and large, aggressively pursued by an entrepreneurial rural society eager to accumulate wealth. In opposition to that consensus model, Merrill found the locus of socio-economic conflict of the early 19th century to be in the new challenges that commodity production for profit presented to the longstanding system he calls a "household mode of production."⁸³

The household mode of production, which Merrill found prevalent among American farmers in this period, was a non-commodity mode of production that rested on very personal and equal exchanges of cooperative labour that required production of use-values "for specific persons to meet their specific needs."⁸⁴ Account books and other records indicate that this web of cooperative production and labour exchange extended beyond the farm to include craftsmen. In return for help on the harvest a tradesman or townsperson might receive a labour equivalent of farm products. A craftsman might pay for farm products with a custom-made harness or some horseshoeing or take his pay in grain as did many shoemakers, tailors, and blacksmiths.⁸⁵ There is even intriguing evidence that labour equivalents were an accepted practice among the middling professional class of building contractors and proprietors in the cities of Buffalo and Cleveland. In the former city, barter financed the building of four homes and in the latter Isaac Newton paid for \$272 in furnishings for his American House, Cleveland's first large hotel, with a four-month promissory note.⁸⁶

⁸³ Michael Merrill, "Cash is Good to Eat: Self-Sufficiency and Exchange in the Rural Economy of the United States," *Radical History Review*, 4 (Winter 1977), 46.

⁸⁴ Merrill, "Cash is Good to Eat," 57-9, 63.

⁸⁵ Howells, *Recollections of Life in Ohio*, 138.

⁸⁶ Martha Fitch Poole, "Pleasant Memories of the Social Life of Buffalo in the '30's and 40's," *PBHS*, Vol. 8, 465, writes that Oliver G. Steele and Mr. Poole contracted with Benjamin G. Rathbun to build four homes, which cost \$9,000 to complete, "part of which was to be paid for in crockery from my husband's store, and part in books from Mr. Steele's store, and the balance as should be 'agreed upon later by all the parties.'" See The Ohio Historical Records Survey Project Services Division, Works Project Administration, *Historic Sites of Cleveland: Hotels and Taverns* (Columbus 1942), 4.

Wealth creation alienated from hard manual labour on the land was a fantastical notion for radicals because it was at odds with the basic presumptions of the household economy. Resistance to the idea that manipulations of credit and money supply were necessary for the creation of wealth and a healthy economy came from lone voices as well as political party formations. From William Beck of Cincinnati came an elaborate plan in defense of the household mode of production. Declaring that "a money system" was the "parent of much political, social and moral evil; that it fetters commercial transactions with an unnatural and arbitrary condition" and that the system of money credit was responsible for a "whole catalogue of evils," Beck proposed that in place of a banking system, the existing system of "book accounts" be established in every locality to keep track of credits and debts:

If we consider one hundred persons as representing the whole of society — that these have one general agent for the settlement of their pecuniary concerns and claims upon each other — that to this agent each one sends a list of his claims upon others of the ninety nine, and that the agent transfers each claim of a creditor to the debit of his corresponding debtor, all claims and debts thus balanced by contrary items, will be completely paid and satisfied without the aid of money.⁸⁷

A chain of intermediate offices would handle the transference of debts and credits between persons in different localities. In much of the West the money market system simply did not exist or could not provide the needed commodities. Becks's system would have institutionalized the already pervasive informal system of credit and debit bookkeeping used by so many. For Richard Cooke of Cleveland and Joseph Stevenson of Carrollton Beck's system might have prevented them from having to reconcile their own "book debts" by placing notices in their local newspapers notifying the public that "notes" (really IOUs, not to be confused with printed paper money also known as notes of issue) signed by them would not be honoured due to disputes with the bearers.⁸⁸ With the finances of the state in disarray and multiple banking plans competing for the resolution, *The Jeffersonian* editorialized that Beck's plan was "deserving of our notice" and forecast that there were probably "greater obstacles in the power of opposition than any defects which may be found in the plan itself."⁸⁹

By the late 1830s, the household mode of production and distribution was operating at a very "high degree of development" in more places in Ohio and the West than the cash-based market. Even so-called cash articles (requiring cash for purchase) like tea, coffee, leather, iron, powder, and lead could be purchased with

⁸⁷"Money and Banking," *The Jeffersonian*, 10 October 1839. From this article it is unclear as to whether the publisher William Beck and the author of the book are one and the same.

⁸⁸*The Cleveland Daily Advertiser*, 22 March 1838; *The Jeffersonian*, 7 November 1839.

⁸⁹Weisenburger, "The Passing of the Frontier," 352; *The Jeffersonian*, 10 October 1839; *The Olentangy Gazette*, 30 November 1839.

other products treated as cash, such as linen, cloth, feathers, beeswax, deerskins, and furs.⁹⁰ Some elements of household production, like fulling and carding, had already exited the home for the mills and ready-made clothing was beginning to erode homespun production, but on both sides of the border most necessities of life were still obtained through barter or mutual aid like corn huskings, barn-raising, and kicking parties.⁹¹ Farm life based on household production was actually ascendant, providing an increasingly vibrant and commodious standard of living that many saw as both endangered by and unobtainable in the new commercial market. Indebtedness, a major feature of the household economy, was the common financial condition of UC farmers, no less than their US counterparts.⁹² Quilting, the art of coverlet weaving, and dyeing were refined arts, which lent a colour and gaiety to farm life that was often missing in the lives of urban denizens. Working for wages on the neighbour's farm was still the exception rather than the rule and not relished; those who did hire on expected to be treated as family.⁹³ "Particularly remarkable," noted William Howells upon reflecting on life in Ohio during this period, "was the general equality and the general dependence of all upon the neighborly kindness and good offices of others."⁹⁴

Is it really any wonder that people might put up a fight against the new fangled uncertainties of money and commodity markets for the more traditional, yet predictable and rising standard of living on the land? The social equality achieved by the household mode of production was one important ingredient in the mortar that bound communities together in an extended web of common interests and exchanges of labour that would continue to flower, according to Merrill, until 1850.⁹⁵ Demands for equality in economic and political spheres may be seen as a defence of the equality already obtained in the social sphere within a largely money-less frontier economy. Not surprisingly then, on the Ohio frontier, where Patriot activity was intense, the household economy was also prevalent. A random sampling of newspaper ads from around the state indicates that while cash was making inroads into daily transactions, it was generally given parity rather than preference to bartered goods in the late 1830s. At his establishment in Cleveland, William Shepard sold dry goods "on the most reasonable terms for prompt pay — or in exchange for

⁹⁰Howells, *Recollections of Life in Ohio*, 137-8.

⁹¹Fred Landon, *Western Ontario and the American Frontier* (Toronto 1941), 267-8; Howells, *Recollections of Life in Ohio*, 144-6.

⁹²Buel, "The Farmer's Companion," 11; John Howison, *Sketches of Upper Canada, Domestic, Local, and Characteristic: To Which are Added, Practical Details for the Information of Emigrants of Every Class; and Some Recollections of the United States of America* (Edinburgh 1825), 96, 252, 260, 279; Shirreff, *A Tour Through North America*, 81, 345, 363-4; and Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It In The Bush or Life in Canada* (Boston 1886), 224, 453-4.

⁹³Buley, *The Old Northwest*, 202, 208, 211-2.

⁹⁴Howells, *Recollections of Life in Ohio*, 145.

⁹⁵Merrill, "Cash is Good to Eat," 66.

most kinds of lumber." In the town of Roseville in Butler County, tucked in the southwest corner of the state, P.G. Smith advertised boots and shoes in return for cash or "as usual Paints, Oils, looking-glass and window glass." In Columbiana County on the border with Pennsylvania, where the county Democratic Party was vigorously Locofocoite and Patriot sentiment ran high, wool was solicited in return for dry goods by several purveyors. Among other items, gingham, calicoes, muslins, and French and English bonnets could be purchased for a quantity of wool. In the center of the state, Delaware County harness and saddle makers, A. and J.H. Dean, advertised they would exchange their products for "country produce."⁹⁶

Early signs that the economy was in transition toward a cash-only basis were in evidence as some producers occasionally showed a preference for cash. At his eastern Ohio woolen mill, Israel McElderry proudly announced that his new machinery allowed him to spin 40 to 50 dozens of good yarn per day and that carded wool was available for five cents cash or six and a quarter cents if credit was given. He also took "wool at a reasonable price [taken] in payment." A dry goods operator offered schoolbooks, groceries, hardware, broadcloths of various colours, and Kentucky jeans "*cheaper than ever for cash*, or in exchange for all kinds of country produce."⁹⁷ This preference for cash, however, by no means signaled a mad dash for profits, and it would take many more years before cash achieved hegemony over "country produce" and assorted other goods in exchange.

Those who articulated the superiority of the cooperative life on the land did not go quietly when they saw the new commercial commodity money market system threatening their standard of living. While society was not yet unhinged, large eddies of discontent were swirling dangerously close to the mainstream threatening to engulf it. Though radicals both inside and outside the Democratic Party presented ideas on the economy and society that had revolutionary implications, none made calls to seize state power in the name of their class. The principled radical agrarian opposition of Skidmore and Commerford to private property had not garnered enough support to make it a serious political factor. In fact, rather than a perspective of violent political revolution, radical Democrats generally expressed faith in the reformability of the existing system and urged use of the ballot rather than the bullet. In the editorial opinion of the quintessentially Locofocoite newspaper, *The Jeffersonian*, most radicals wanted neither to "break our steam engines, nor to make a bonfire of our power looms and spinning-jennies [sic]" any more than they

⁹⁶ *The Cleveland Daily Advertiser*, 22 March 1838; *The Hamilton Ohio Intelligencer*, 28 November 1839.

⁹⁷ *The Olentangy Gazette*, 30 November 1839; *The Jeffersonian*, 12 October 1837, 10 October 1839, 16 January 1840. In this period, a preference for cash can be seen creeping its way into advertising pages, but barter for needed items was still the dominant form of exchange (emphasis in original).

dreamed of "throwing aside our ploughs, or breaking our spades, banishing the use of iron, and taking to scratching the earth with our claws."⁹⁸

Nevertheless, these developments indicate that significant numbers of yeomen and small producers in the first half of the 19th century were expressing, at the very least, an agitated ambivalence to the newly emerging market economy and society, which they saw creating stress, socio-economic inequality, and poverty. The heart-felt appeals of radicals demanding liberty and equality indicated that a significant minority was not yet ready to worship at the altar of profit and personal gain, and many, when given the chance, were willing to pick up arms to fight for a life of agrarian freedom and equality in the Canadas if not in the US.

The revolutionary thrust of the competing radical ethos was that broad layers of class-conscious yeomen, wage labourers, and assorted small-producers were vigorously defending and seeking a life of cooperation, honest labour, and happiness outside of and opposed to the alienating world of capitalist commodity markets, paper money and credit, and artificially created scarcity. To this latter they expressed a strong preference for an economy more independent (not tied to impersonal central lending agencies or even national and world markets) and traditional in its social form, one based more on familiarity and subsistence, which Merrill notes, "tended to reproduce its own structure if left alone" and "resisted a commercial orientation."⁹⁹ The desire to produce goods ("honest" or "natural" hands-on production) for readily discernible uses, not for unseen future profit, within a familiar network of social relations, is what brought meaning to life for many on the frontier. Though technology and the resulting surplus value from saved labour was beginning to make inroads into agrarian consciousness, this held little attraction to the vast majority of farmers and small producers in the late 1830s. Studies, according to historian Paul Johnson, indicate that "the imperatives of subsistence and succession [of land within families] gained ideological force from a revolutionary republicanism" and thus for the rural radical physical labour on the land remained at the core of his economic and cultural existence.¹⁰⁰ For the urban radical it meant maintaining a control over his/her working conditions and production that was fundamentally incompatible with capitalist modes of production, distribution, and capital accumulation.

Concluding Remarks

So just what was all the political "shouting" that accompanied the Patriot movement and the period in general about? Two items offer some insight into the essence

⁹⁸"Reform not Destroy," *The Jeffersonian*, 12 October 1837.

⁹⁹Merrill, "Cash is Good to Eat," 46.

¹⁰⁰Paul E. Johnson, "The Market Revolution," in Mary K. Cayton, Elliott Gorn, and Peter Williams, eds., *Encyclopedia of American Social History: Volume One* (New York 1993), 548.

of the "shouting" and gesture toward an answer. In 1833, Robert B. Thomas, the editor of the *Farmer's Almanac*, scolded farmers: "If you love fun, and frolic, and waste, and slovenliness more than economy and profit, then make a husking." In 1836, French Canadian dam workers in the state of Maine struck because the employer wanted them to stop smoking their pipes on the job.¹⁰¹ What these two seemingly isolated anecdotes have in common is that they reveal an often unexpressed aspect of capital's assault on labour, proceeding at only a slightly different pace on either side of the 49th parallel. That assault was not simply economic or political, for it also aimed at the cultural heart and soul of the small producer; a producer who sought to preserve a slower more contented pace of life within a larger more personal socio-economic and cultural matrix, and who was not summoned by the sirens of personal gain, market "efficiencies," and elevated social status. Indeed, from the discourse and essays of the period it is evident that the impulse of radical democrats and agrarians to preserve liberty and equality from the price-rationing vortex of the new money economy was also, more simply and profoundly, a struggle for the pursuit of "happiness" and the "enjoyments of life," in the hopes of avoiding the "crazed ambition at home [that] drives the frenzied passions of men to madness and all its excesses."¹⁰² In many respects, the America that Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur observed in 1783, where money was seldom seen and "subsistence remained the goal of most white families," had changed little by the 1830s, especially on the northern frontier.¹⁰³ It would take several more decades for market advocates to redefine republican values and reshape society along lines compatible with their unrestrained drive for production and profits.

By dint of this early stage of capitalist development, the 1830s-40s were a historical conjuncture where small commodity producers, as servants to an agrarian economy and culture, resisted crossing the line into an economy of possessive individualism where all human and social relations turned on exchange values rather than use values. Resistance was possible because US capitalists had not achieved what Marx described as the "dull compulsion of economic relations," which under advanced relations of capitalist production "develops a working class which by education, tradition, habit, looks upon the conditions of that mode of production as self-evident laws of Nature."¹⁰⁴ Neither had capitalists gained an unquestioned

¹⁰¹ Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790-1840* (New York 1988), 298; and George E. McNeil, *The Labor Movement: The Problem of Today*, (New York 1891), 84. A "husking" was a gathering together of friends and neighbours to help husk the harvested corn.

¹⁰² Buel, "The Farmer's Companion," 4-13; Shirreff, *A Tour Through North America*, 60-5; *Cleveland Herald and Gazette*, 1 July 1837.

¹⁰³ James W. Davidson, William E. Gienapp, Christine L. Heyrman, Mark H. Lytle, and Michael B. Stoff, *Nation of Nations: A Narrative History of the American Republic to 1877* (Boston 1998), 240.

¹⁰⁴ John Hoffman, *The Gramscian Challenge: Coercion and Consent in Marxist Political Thought* (New York 1984), 86.

control of the mechanisms of coercion necessary to keep wage labour in line, as the court cases of *Hudson Shoemakers* (1836) and *Commonwealth v. Hunt* (1842), among others, demonstrated.¹⁰⁵ The mid-to-late 1830s saw an extended debate take place nationally wherein capitalists were forced to respond to the radical critique, which charged banking institutions with the creation of a "privileged" class that was "destructive of equal rights, and good government." Organs of capital served up the pseudo-intellectual distinction that the wealthy enjoyed not "privileges" but only "superior advantages" by virtue of private circumstances of wealth and fortune. In dulcet tones, the masses were reassured that "advantages" showed not an aristocracy, but a system whereby advancement was attained by "individual merit and qualification."¹⁰⁶ This latter argument combined with strategic use of courts, police, and army, would ultimately prove a powerful elixir to the working masses.

In an uneven and combined manner, competing interpretations of republicanism, that of the urban and rural labourer/producer on the one hand and the capitalist on the other, were at loggerheads simultaneously on both sides of a nominal Canada-US border. In Canada, where industrialism had just begun to breach the confines of a paternalistic social order and an aging mercantilist economy, class formation, was a "delicate balance between resistance and submission, between collective defiance and mediation." Class tensions in the two nations mirrored each other sufficiently that a Canadian small-producer animus, under the Phrygian cap of republicanism, and a radical "Yankee" republicanism readily united in a cross-border cohort of small farmers, artisans, and labourers against socio-economic inequality and aristocratic rule under whatever guise. In Canada it was expressed in a revolutionary attack on the UC Family Compact, while in the US it took the form of the Patriot movement animated by an already vocal working-class offensive against an emerging landed and monied ("aristocratic") cabal that appeared to be undermining the republican gains of the American Revolution.¹⁰⁷

When put in the context of the period in which it took place, the Patriot movement is eminently an expression of the more general political "shouting" of the period. If Canadian historiography on the movement is plagued, as Greer has stated, by "teleological modes of explanation" and "a particularly advanced case of historiographical apartheid," contemporary US historians are fatally hobbled by a collective loss of memory about the subject.¹⁰⁸ Theirs is, by and large, a sin of omission rather than commission. The blame for this gap, I imagine, primarily lies at the feet of the consensus historian hypnotized by the machinations of the elite and

¹⁰⁵ Christopher L. Tomlins, *The State and the Unions: Labor Relations, Law, and the Organized Labor Movement in America, 1880-1960* (Cambridge 1985), 39-44.

¹⁰⁶ "Adjourned Meeting," *Cleveland Herald and Gazette*, 11 August 1837; "Difference between Privileges and Advantages," *United States Gazette*, 8 August 1837, reprinted from the *Boston Post*.

¹⁰⁷ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 57; Palmer to author, 25 June 1998.

¹⁰⁸ Greer, "Rebellion Reconsidered," 4-7.

weighed down by US-centeredness; tracking its trajectory off the historical radar screen could be an interesting task in itself. As an expression of Locofocoism and radical democracy, the ignored step-children of US historical surveys, it is no surprise that the Patriot movement has been so successfully shunted aside. Its erasure is a reflection, I suspect, of the influence of the consensus historian on the modern social historian.

I have presented only the broad brushstrokes of a hypothesis that needs more fleshing out. Much more needs to be done to put this reinterpretation on solid ground. In their history from-the-bottom-up approach with an emphasis on the developing class tensions of the time, Canadian historians Ryerson, Read, Greer, and Palmer, among others, point the way forward in what should be a joint Canadian-American salvage effort to raise the Patriot movement to the surface of US historical consciousness. Canadians, too, could only benefit by a deeper understanding of this shared history. In salvaging this part of history, care must be taken not to commit certain errors that will either thwart recovery or make it less worthwhile. The Patriot phenomenon can be fully understood only when it is first placed squarely within the radical context of the period and its multiple deep-layered socio-economic and political changes, and second, understood as a bi-national event engaged in by the white yeomen, labourer, and small-producer classes.¹⁰⁹ These are two views shared by only a few US historians today. Some questions which require additional research are: What other evidence exists that the US Patriot rank-and-file was mainly drawn by the call of Canadian republicans for mass land distribution and an antipathy to banks? In what numbers and where on the political spectrum of anti-bankism did they fall? What were other motivating factors aside from these? Who, besides Messieurs St. John and D. Hersh, and how many, were dual members of the Patriot and Locofoco movements? Was the anti-partyism (the hallmark of the revolutionary Workingmen's movement) expressed by the Buffalo Patriot Lodge, representative or anomalous of most Patriot lodges?¹¹⁰ Keeping in mind the cross-class nature of the Patriot coalition, how many Patriots were rising rural or urban entrepreneurs and how many were of struggling or declining small-producer status? What more evidence exists that the popular discontent and campaign for republicanism in the Canadas was animated by a defense of the household mode of production as Merrill has elaborated? Lastly, to what extent may the rebellion in LC be considered part of the larger tapestry of radical democracy unfolding in UC and the US? A serious consideration of these and other related questions will be greatly aided by collaboration of US and Canadian historians, so

¹⁰⁹ Racism was the Achilles heel of radical Democracy in the US. US blacks were largely absent from the Patriot ranks despite Point Seven of Mackenzie's draft program, which specifically entitled "People of Colour ... to all the rights of native Canadians." The same is true for Canadian blacks who served the Crown in large numbers to put down the rebellion.

¹¹⁰ Tiffany, "Relations of the United States to the Canadian Rebellion," picture plate following 122; Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 195, 197.

that the Patriot movement achieves its rightful place as a shared history of both nations.

Finally, even viewed as a snapshot of history the Patriot movement would hold some importance. But if the insight that “history is the living past” is to be fully appreciated, then we must consider the Patriot movement as one element on a continuum of revolutionary working-class struggle against the multiple pathologies of industrial capitalism in its earliest stages of growth. In the process of excavating this history of militant yeoman, small-producerist (early industrial working-class) opposition to nascent capitalism, it is striking to see how the arguments of radical democrats (and agrarians) and their urban counterparts in the 1830s reverberate in the present era of growing mass opposition to neo-liberal global capitalism and its Trojan Horse, the World Trade Organization, more than a century-and-a-half later. The Patriot movement, as a component part of a broader radicalism that dominated the age, posed virtually all of the same fundamental questions that are presented in these contemporary struggles against the machinations of early 21st century international finance capital: democratic control of the political economy, the causes of poverty and artificially created scarcity of healthcare and education, and the destruction (through commodification) of human relations. Further critical study and a reinterpretation of the underlying causes of the US/Canadian Patriot movement can only expand our knowledge of the past and inform our understanding of both the present and the future.

I would first like to thank Kathryn Ziemnik whose immense support helped bring this paper from gestation to fruition. The comments of the peer review readers and colleagues, Diane Hill and Bob Mandel, who were generous with their time and thoughts are also greatly appreciated. Finally, I am most indebted to editor Bryan Palmer whose knowledge of this subject and insightful observations unquestionably improved the paper.

Libraries & Culture

EDITOR: Donald G. Davis, Jr., University of Texas at Austin



"Feature articles, which are refereed, are well written and usually very interesting. Anyone with an interest in the history and social context of books and libraries will enjoy this publication"

— **Magazines for Libraries 2000**

THE FLEUR COWLES SYMPOSIUM 2000,

The Infinite Library

Old Worlds and New: Manuscripts, Archives,
and Special Collections in the 21st Century

CURRENT CONTENTS INCLUDE:

"Before the Public": Some Early Libraries of Antigua

GREGORY FROHNSDORFF

"A Few Good Books": South Dakota's Country School Libraries

LISA LINDELL

A Corrupt Medium: Stephen Burroughs and the Bridgehampton,
New York, Library

SUSANNA ASHTON

Discipline and the Discipline: Histories of the British Public Library

G. K. PEATLING

The Destruction of Jewish Libraries and Archives in Cracow during World War II

MAREK SROKA

False Optimism: Modernity, Class, and the Public Library in Britain
in the 1960s and 1970s

ALISTAIR BLACK

"The Spirit of an Age": Public Libraries and Professional Librarians as
Solutions to Society's Problems, Iowa, 1890-1940

DANIEL GOLDSTEIN

Behind Adobe Walls and Iron Bars: The Utah Territorial Penitential Library

MELVIN L. BASHORE

Single copy rates: Ind. \$15, Inst. \$24,

Canada/Mexico, add \$3.50; other foreign, add \$5.50 (airmail).

Yearly subscription rates: Ind. \$38, Inst. \$77, Student/Retired \$24,

Canada/Mexico, add \$14; other foreign, add \$22 (airmail).

Refunds available only on unshipped quantities of current subscriptions.

University of Texas Press Journals, Box 7819, Austin, Texas 78713-7819

Phone # 512-232-7621, Fax # 512-232-7178, journals@uts.cc.utexas.edu

