

a combined interest in shaking off Eastern domination and in administering social justice in the territories." Aside from all the economic and political grievances, sheer distance between the centre and the regions is probably the single most sensational factor in the Westerner's complaint of alienation from Ottawa. All the other forms of alienation may be only functions of geographic distance. "When all the decisions are made 'out there' with no effective way existing to control the decision, when these decisions seem to be taken invariably in favour of big-city interests way past Winnipeg, the oppression seems real enough." And, of course, the quality of the decision is modified negatively by the fact that the institution is thousands of miles from the specific human situation.

John Hart, director of Canadian Studies at the Grant McEwan Community College in Edmonton, is one of the people assembling the True History of the West: he's in a position to know. Born in Settler, educated in Alberta, he specialized in Western Canadian history at the University of Calgary (and learned about job opportunities there through the London Times). The story of the West, not as told by civil servants in the Colonial Office, nor by pundits at Eastern universities, nor even by "colourful characters" in Western saloons. But by Westerners armed with a radical critique and a sense of timeliness.

On the farms and in the small towns, right-wing radicalism links up with what Hart calls "nativism": the close identification with the land, with the setting of experience. It is impossible

for strangers to identify with this and so you don't trust them. This is my home. This is my land, because I homesteaded it. I own it. The stranger, even if he is only from Ontario, has only a temporary or ulterior interest in the land. At best, the stranger is indifferent.

Which explains, somewhat, why Americans are not seen as strangers here but Easterners and Quebeckers are. "We have a lot of Americans in Alberta who are very appealing people. Open and friendly. All the more since they tend to come from the West and mid-West. We understand each other, we share experiences. Whereas we are never sure if Easterners think of us in any way besides as hillbillies. As for French Canadians, they are equated with the FLQ and the FLQ is equated with the Third World revolution. Violence, bloodshed, treachery." The paradox is that Westerners should be able to identify with Quebec separatism, experiencing as they do the same kind of political, industrial and cultural imperialism from the East. Intellectually, the Westerner does accept the identification. But at gut-level, you've got to be born under the sign of the Big Sky and in God's Own Acre to understand the desperate beauty of the West.

It occurs to me that if more people were to go back home, landscapes like that of Alberta would perforce contribute more to a collective Canadian fantasy. A fantasy which would look less like the view from the Royal York and more like the crooked trail of the Metis in their flight from the RCMP.

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