

summer time are blue fireweed and orange Indian paintbrush and purple Saskatoon berries and wild mustard and goldenrod. There are deserts, farms, grasslands, glaciers, forests and the lines of the land move through gulleys, ravines, mountains, foothills, riverbeds and, yes, flat, flat, unchanging, limitless, inviolate prairie. This is a fantastic place. And, maybe, prophets of God have always moved more easily in the prairie of the West than through the streets of civilized cities in the East because, out here, the sky holds the whole earth close in one vast, blue embrace. A man can leap directly into the lap of God and there is no need of priests.

Men and women deal directly with the character of the earth out here, especially with the changing catastrophes of the seasons. This is a confrontation you can't avoid and a fact of God you can't turn away from. Ice forming in the cells of your lungs because it is that cold. Wipe-out, regeneration, wipe-out on the farms where the rivers flood and the worms eat up everything. Mountain slides destroying whole towns and dinosaurs as the last species that ever lived in the sucking heat of the Badlands. Unlike the affability of West Coast climates or the sullen protection of big cities, the nature of the prairies forces you to prepare for your survival.

I left Edmonton five years ago when it was a big town and I return now to a city. There are those who would build it to Torontonian proportions and, by some evidence, they are having their way. The pattern of development in Edmonton is metropolitan and doesn't everybody love a big skyscraper? And you gotta have a skyline.

So, already too many cars trying to cross seven bridges over a polluted river that once ran clean from the glaciers west of Jasper. High-rise apartments, too expensive for students, going up in the university area and the university itself, once a seat of minor learning and now 20,000 strong, pushes its fat, million-dollar body into what was one of Edmonton's happiest districts. They are pulling apart the wooden homes in Garneau and bulldozing the beautiful trees, tearing up the roots of vegetable gardens, not to mention the roots of a community where kids, Chinese grocers, cleaning ladies and students used to live together.

A CONDITION of exploitation is the co-option of energy. A condition of the cultural exploitation of regions by centralized institutions is the co-option of mental energy. A condition of the exploitation of my generation was the co-option of our political, intellectual and moral energy by the howling priorities of American and Eastern Canada. We spent an incalculable length of days in a mental anguish over the mess in America and in a perpetual ecstasy over the inevitable coming of (somebody else's) revolution. With a lot of our rhetoric and responses based on the analysis of evil and goodness as handed down to us via radicals in Toronto and Montreal.

While all around us, of course, were conditions of oppression, rip-off, despair, anger and revolt that we never noticed. Or noticed only to dismiss as secondary to the "real" struggle; the FLQ,* the Chicago trial, the grape boycott. If their struggles were real and ours were not, where did that leave us as politicians? It left us wandering in a fancied wilderness where the deliberate flooding of a delta, the passing of the family farm and the advent of agri-business, the unchallenged sale and depletion of resources, the expatriation of talent were never taken seriously by us as political events. Because what were our problems, our sense of abuse and grievance, our hayseed's complaints compared with the earth-shaking, soul-searing importance of a busted sit-down strike at the University of Toronto and the imprisonment of a Black Panther? Why, nothing at all. So we continued to root for the triumph of a squabbling, quasi-fascist American underground, the triumph of the French language and the triumph of Canadian ("Because It's Ours") capitalism at the expense of doing some real work right at home.

WHERE most of us come from the West was the pioneer experience. We are farmers' children. Even if we've never seen a cow in our lives, the fact remains that we are who we are, where we are, because our parents or grandparents came to these acres of black soil and farmed them. Uprooted trees, built sod huts, planted potatoes, gave birth to fifteen children and died as beaten, withered, scarred and poor

*Quebec Liberation Front.