Closing the Last Chapter of the Atlantic Revolution: The 1837–38 Rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada

MICHEL DUCHARME

HALF A CENTURY AGO, two historians, Robert Palmer and Jacques Godechot, proposed that the late-eighteenth-century revolutions of the Atlantic World be integrated into one analytical framework. They argued that the American Revolution of 1776, the Dutch uprising of the 1780s, the unrest in the Austrian Low Countries after 1787, the French Revolution of 1789, and all of the European revolutions of the 1790s were, in fact, a single phenomenon. It was, in their view, as if one single, great revolution had shaken the Atlantic world between 1776 and 1800.[1]

1. Robert R. Palmer and Jacques Godechot's proposal first appeared in 'Le problème de l'Atlantique du XVIIIème au XXème siècle,' in *Storia Contemporanea, Relazioni del X Congresso Internazionale di Scienze Storiche* 6 vols. (Florence: G. C. Sansoni Editore, 1955), 5: 219–39. Each wrote a history of the Atlantic Revolution: Robert R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution. A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959); Jacques Godechot, *Les Révolutions (1770–1799)* (1963; reprint, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986), 99–177.

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Even if we can appreciate the transnational ambition of their analysis, we must recognize that this description of the so-called 'Atlantic Revolution' was really quite limited in scope, as it focused only on the United States and Europe.[2] Not a single word was said about Saint Domingue, although its unrest and revolts of the 1790s eventually led to the creation of Haiti in 1804. In fact, if we exempt the United States, it was as if the entire New World had gone missing from this Atlantic Revolution. In recent decades, historians, including many participants in this conference, have tried to correct this deficiency. They successfully integrated the nineteenth-century Central and South American revolutions by exploring Spanish and Portuguese colonial histories.[3] Finally, it can be said that the historical analysis of the Atlantic Revolution covers all Europe and America, between 1776 and 1840. Or can it? There is, in fact, one country's history that continues to be left out of the Atlantic framework: Canada's.

When Canadian historians have studied Canadian history at the time of the American and French revolutions, very few have tried to integrate it into an Atlantic framework. The only conference to deal with the relationship between Canada and the Atlantic Revolution was held in 1969, at the Université de Montréal. The conference proceedings were later published in the *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* (1973). Then, during the 1970s and 1980s, Jean-Pierre Wallot showed some interest in this framework. In 1995, Allan Greer encouraged others to study the

2. Many American and European scholars have followed the path opened by Palmer and Godechot. See, among others: Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1967); Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1789* (1969; reprint, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 333–552; Simon Shama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780–1813* (1977; reprint, London: Harper Perennial, 1992); J. G. A. Pocock, 'The Dutch Republican Tradition,' in *The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century: Decline, Enlightenment and Revolution*, eds. Margaret Jacobs and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 188–93; Stephen Small, *Political Thought in Ireland, 1776–1798: Republicanism, Patriotism and Radicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Annie Jourdan, *La Révolution, une exception française* (Paris: Flammarion, 2004).

3. See, among others: David Patrick Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Lester D. Langley, *The Americas in the Age of Revolution, 1750–1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1996. Jaime E. Rodríguez O., ed., *Mexico in the Age of Democratic Revolutions: 1750–1850* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994).

1837–38 Canadian rebellions as part of an Atlantic revolution, without venturing to do it himself. In 1998, Jean-Pierre Boyer, a communications professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal, tried to integrate Québec in the Atlantic framework in an essay published at the end of a French translation of Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man*.[4] However, most French-speaking Québec historians, such as Yvan Lamonde, Gérard Bouchard, and Louis-Georges Harvey, prefered to study Québec history in its North American context, which they called 'l'américanité,' rather than in its Atlantic context.[5] In English Canada, historians were perhaps a bit too eager to promote what distinguished Canada from the United States to really try to integrate the Canadian past into the Atlantic framework. So, for instance, English Canadian historians writing on that period focused their attention on the arrival of the Loyalists after the American Revolution so as to establish the emergence of a distinct Canadian identity.[6]

4. Jean-Pierre Wallot, 'Révolution et réformisme dans le Bas-Canada (1773–1815),' *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 45: 213 (1973): 344–406; Jean-Pierre Wallot, 'Frontière ou fragment du système atlantique: Des idées étrangères dans l'identité bas-canadienne au début du XIXe siècle,' *Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers* (1983): 3–14; Allan Greer, '1837–1838: Rebellion Reconsidered,' *Canadian Historical Review* 76 (1995): 1–18; Jean-Pierre Boyer, 'Le Québec à l'heure des révolutions atlantiques,' in Thomas Paine, *Les Droits de l'Homme*, ed. Jean-Pierre Boyer (Sillery, Québec: Septentrion, 1998), 355–424.

5. For 'l'américanité', see: Yvan Lamonde, 'American Cultural Influence in Quebec: A One-Way Mirror,' in *Problems and Opportunities in US-Quebec Relations*, eds. Alfred O. Hero, Jr. and Marcel Daneau (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1984), 106–26; Gérard Bouchard and Yvan Lamonde, eds., *Québécois et Américains: La culture québécoise aux XIXe et XXe siècles* (Montréal: Fides, 1995); Louis-Georges Harvey, *Le Printemps de l'Amérique française: Américanité, anticolonialisme et républicanisme dans le discours politique québécois, 1805–1837* (Montréal: Boréal, 2005). Gérard Bouchard has integrated this 'américanité' in a broader framework: the new societies. See *Genèse des nations et cultures du nouveau monde. Essai d'histoire comparée* (Montréal: Boréal, 2000).

6. For recent works on the loyalists, see: Ann Gorman Condon, *The Envy of the American States: The Loyalist Dream for New Brunswick* (Fredericton, N. B.: New Ireland, 1984); Wallace Brown and Hereward Senior, *Victorious in Defeat: The Loyalists in Canada* (Toronto: Methuen, 1984); Christopher Moore, *The Loyalists: Revolution, Exile, and Settlement* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1984); Walter Stewart, *True Blue: The Loyalist Legend* (Toronto: Collins, 1985); Neil MacKinnon, *This Unfriendly Soil: The Loyalist Experience in Nova Scotia, 1783–1791* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986); J. M. Bumsted, 'The Loyalist Question on Prince Edward Island, 1783–1861,' *Island Magazine* 25 (1989): 20–28. On the loyalist myth, see: Jo-Ann Fellows, 'The Loyalist Myth in Canada,' *Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers* (1971): 94–111; Norman Knowles, *Inventing the Loyalists: The Ontario Loyalist Tradition and the Creation of Usable Pasts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

It is true that the British North American colonies that eventually became Canada did not join the thirteen colonies in their revolution. It is also true that these same colonies did not take the opportunity to declare their independence during the French Revolution, or during the subsequent French Revolutionary War. This is not to say that the American and French revolutionary and republican ideals did not spread throughout the colonies during the 1780s and '90s. This is especially so in the portion of the province of Québec that became Lower Canada in 1791. Fleury Mesplet, for instance, a French printer who had come from Philadelphia to Montréal in 1776, remained in the city after the withdrawal of American troops in May 1776.[7] Between 1785 and his death in 1794, he indirectly promoted republican ideals through his bilingual newspaper, *La Gazette de Montréal/ The Montreal Gazette*. The promotion of republican and revolutionary principles was not only the work of people within the colony. In June 1793, Edmond-Charles Genêt, the French minister in Philadelphia, strongly urged Canadians to join the French struggle for freedom in an appeal entitled, *Les Français libres à leurs frères les Canadiens*.[8] His appeal failed to rouse his 'brothers' in the colony.

So it appears that republicanism, the main ideology behind the Atlantic Revolution, did not represent a serious threat in the northern British colonies at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. The question arising is thus: Did republicanism or any of the key principles that inspired the Atlantic revolutionaries have any impact on Upper and Lower Canada—now Ontario and Québec? Some distinguished scholars have argued over the years that it had a 'negative' impact, Canadian history

7. For the biography of Mesplet, see: Jean-Paul de Lagrave, *Fleury Mesplet, 1734–1794: Diffuseur des Lumières au Québec* (Montréal: Patenaude, 1985); and Patricia Lockhart Fleming, 'Cultural Crossroads: Print and Reading in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century English-Speaking Montreal,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 112 (2003): 231–48.

8. Genêt's text is reproduced in Michel Brunet, 'La Révolution française sur les rives du St-Laurent,' *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 11 (1957):158–62.

being the result of a counterrevolutionary experiment.[9] It would be interesting to discuss this question, but I will confine my paper to exploring the direct or 'positive' influences of republicanism in Lower and Upper Canadian history between 1776 and 1838. I will argue that republicanism did indeed have a major 'positive' impact on these colonies, although much later than in other countries around the Atlantic.

Canada during the Atlantic Revolution (1776–1828)

In 1791, a few years after the British acknowledged American independence in the Versailles Treaty, the British government granted a new constitution to the province of Québec. It was called the Constitutional Act in Canada, but known as the Canada Act everywhere else. One of the conscious goals of the British government in adopting the Constitutional Act was to stop the dissemination of republican principles in the province. To achieve this, the British parliament split the province into two distinct colonies: Upper Canada (now Ontario), which was mainly settled by refugees from the United States or, as we know them, 'Loyalists,' and Lower Canada (now the province of Québec), comprised of French Canadians with a vocal English-speaking minority. Thus, the Crown made sure that the Upper Canadian Loyalists could no longer complain that they were living in a French colony, while French Canadians in Lower Canada could feel less afraid of being outnumbered in their colony, could continue to live under their own civil laws, and could have free exercise of their Roman Catholic faith. This division also allowed for the granting of rudimentary parliamentary institutions to the two new colonies. The British government organized these colonial governments along the principles of 'mixed' government—a

9. Seymour Martin Lipset, *Revolution and Counterrevolution: Change and Persistence in Social Structures* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1968), 31–63; and from the same author, *Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 1–56, 59–60; Jerry Bannister, 'Canada as Counter-Revolution: The Loyalist Order Framework in Canadian History, 1750–1840,' lecture, The Liberal Order in Canadian History Conference, McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, March 3, 2006.

system in which the king (represented by the governor or the lieutenant-governor) had the executive power and in which provincial legislatures (composed of the governor, an appointed legislative council, and an elected legislative assembly) had the legislative power. The system of government conferred on Canadians in 1791 followed the usual British political system and practices, as far as colonial status would allow.

Since one of the objectives of the British government was to prevent republicanism from becoming a real threat in the province of Québec—and thereby preventing the colony from falling into an American-style revolution—the Constitutional Act can be seen to have been a great success. It effectively prevented the spread of republican practices into the colonies. Looking at their new legislative assemblies, Canadians thought they were enjoying an excellent form of government. The fact that the assembly shared the legislative power with a British governor and an appointed legislative council did not seem to bother anyone at first.[10] On the one hand, French-speaking Lower Canadians were too busy trying to exercise their new rights in the parliamentary system to pay attention to such 'details.' On the other hand, Upper Canadians were too busy trying to wrestle a life out of the Ontario forests to really criticize their constitution.

If the last decades of the eighteenth century were more or less quiet in Upper and Lower Canada, things changed during the first decade of the nineteenth century. In both colonies, reform movements appeared in 1805–6, although the Lower Canadian movement was better organized, more coherent, and more efficient than its Upper Canadian counterparts. While these movements were created at the same time as the Central and South

10. Samuel Neilson, a Whig reformer, and Fleury Mesplet, a republican, welcomed the Constitutional Act by publishing the same text promoting the new constitution in their respective newspapers: *La Gazette de Québec/ The Quebec Gazette* (February 23, March 1, 8, and 15, 1792) and *La Gazette de Montréal/ The Montreal Gazette* (March 15 and 22, 1792). Its author, Solon, was Jonathan Sewell, the future chief justice of Lower Canada (1808–38): John Hare, *Aux origines du parlementarisme québécois 1791–1793* (Sillery, Québec: Septentrion, 1993), 46, 131.

American colonies were fighting for their independence, their objectives were very different. On the whole, Canadians did not fight to obtain independence or articulate republican demands, though there were a few exceptions in Upper Canada.

Most of these reformers did not question their belonging to the British Empire or the legitimacy and form of their government. Until 1828, their demands, inspired by their reading of Locke, Blackstone, and De Lolme, aimed at gaining, for the assembly, genuine control over the executive power through a kind of ministerial responsibility, through impeachment trials, or through budgetary management, all three of which were political mechanisms that had allowed the eighteenth-century members of the British House of Commons to exercise power over the government.[11] In the end, we can say that republicanism did not have a direct or positive impact in the colonies before 1828.

Republicanism in Upper and Lower Canada (1828–38)

Until 1828, Upper and Lower Canadian reformers, as their label implies, were not demanding revolution. But results count, and after more than twenty years of political struggles in both colonies, they had achieved nothing. By 1828, the reformers understood that they needed tougher vocabulary if they were to convince the British to reform the Canadian system.

11. In Lower Canada, Pierre Bédard was the first to ask for the introduction of a kind of ministerial responsibility in the colony in his newspaper *Le Canadien* between 1806 and 1810. In Upper Canada, this claim was first articulated by William Baldwin in 1828–29 in a petition to the king and then in a letter to the Duke of Wellington: 'Petition To the King's Most Excellent Majesty,' reproduced in *Appendix to Journal of the House of Assembly of Upper Canada*, 1835, 1st session of the 12th Provincial Parliament (January 15–April 16, 1835), 1: 51; 'William Warren Baldwin to the Duke of Wellington, January 3rd, 1829' in *Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada 1819–1828*, eds. A. Doughty and Norah Story (Ottawa: J. O. Patenaude, 1935), 482. Lower Canadian reformers asked for the creation of a system of impeachment trials against judges and civil servants during the 1810s. In Upper Canada, Baldwin mentioned the installation of such a system in his 1828 petition to the king. During the 1800s, in Upper Canada, and the 1820s, in Lower Canada, reformers saw the vote on supplies as their only means to influence the executive power. The confrontation between the Lower Canadian House of Assembly, on the one hand, and the governor and the upper house of the Legislature, on the other, on this issue during the 1830s paralyzed the political life in Lower Canada.

And this is how colonial reformers rediscovered the power of the republican discourse. Republican rhetoric not only gave them stronger arguments against the status quo, but it also encouraged them to question the legitimacy and the organization of the colonial political structure. After 1828, republicanism as discourse and ideology became the main source of inspiration for Lower Canadian Patriots and Upper Canadian radicals. From that moment until 1838, Canadian colonies went through a political process that corresponded to the criteria of the Atlantic Revolution. The Upper and Lower Canadian unrest of the 1830s, and its culmination in the 1837–38 rebellions in both colonies, must be considered, in my view, as the last chapter of the Atlantic Revolution, a chapter that did not end happily for Canadian republicans.

During the 1830s, all colonial republicans invoked the ideas, examples, and authority of well-known Atlantic republicans. By making these references, they were trying to gain respectability, credibility, and legitimacy. It is interesting to note that they did not often refer directly to Greek or Roman republicanism. Unlike the American patriots, the Canadian republicans did not try to connect their movement to ancient times. They were instead consciously trying to connect it to the Atlantic republican tradition that had developed during the eighteenth century. During the 1820s, their inspiration came mainly from the United Kingdom and, during the 1830s, from the United States and, to a lesser extent, from Ireland. Canadian republicans sometimes mentioned and celebrated Central and South American revolutions in their newspapers, but they were not particularly inspired by these events. Rousseauian-style rhetoric about the social contract was widely used, especially in Lower Canada, but its author was rarely mentioned or quoted extensively, nor were other French republicans. The painful memory of the Terror and the ultimate failure of the Revolution, heralded by the Restoration, led the Lower and Upper Canadian republicans to turn to Anglo-American references.

The American example was seen as useful, during the 1830s, for at least two reasons. Firstly, the American Revolution was a success and its republic an emerging power. Secondly, the Canadian republicans hoped that, by presenting their cause in a distinctly American manner, the Americans would eventually side with them, should a conflict arise between them and the British.

In 1835 Louis-Joseph Papineau, the Lower Canadian French-speaking Patriot leader, argued that if the British parliament tried to dominate Lower Canada as it had tried to dominate the thirteen colonies during the 1770s, many a new Jefferson or Washington would rise in Lower Canada.[12] In Upper Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie, an important radical leader, sometimes referred to Scottish heroes, such as William Wallace, Archibald Campbell (the first Marquess of Argyle), and William Russell to promote Canadian autonomy.[13] But, as in Lower Canada, it was the American Revolution and the American republic that was his real source of inspiration. In his *Sketches of Canada and the United States* (1833), Mackenzie did not hide his admiration for America's independence and institutions.

In 1836–37, the American Revolution was clearly used to encourage Canadians to fight for their rights. It had by then become 'the' example to follow. In Lower Canada, the Patriots organized a boycott of British products during the summer of 1837, just as the American patriots had done during the 1770s. In October 1837, they organized a 'militia' called *Les Fils de la Liberté* (the Sons of Liberty).[14] A most important public assembly was held in October 1837, a few weeks before the rebellion, which saw the adoption of many resolutions. Interestingly, the first of these was to translate the second paragraph of the American Declaration of

12. Papineau, 'Nécessité de nommer un délégué de la Chambre d'Assemblée à Londres' (House of Assembly, November 17, 1835), in *Un demi-siècle de combats: Interventions publiques*, ed. Yvan Lamonde and Claude Larin (Montréal: Fides, 1998), 367.

13. *Constitution*, October 19, 1836.

14. See the 'Adresse des Fils de la liberté de Montréal aux jeunes gens des colonies de l'Amérique du Nord,' October 4, 1837, reproduced in *Assemblées publiques, résolutions et déclarations de 1837–1838*, ed. Jean-Paul Bernard (Ville St-Laurent, Québec: VLB éditeur, 1988), 216.

Independence, beginning with 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'[15] At this same public assembly, a few of the Patriots urged violent actions against the state, although Papineau, their leader, was not in favor of it. He fled the colony a few weeks later, just before the rebellion. In Upper Canada, Mackenzie defended the right of Canadians to choose their form of government as a 'right [that] was conceded to the present United States at the close of a successful revolution.'[16] He went as far as to reprint, in the summer of 1837, in his newspaper the *Constitution*, Thomas Paine's pamphlet, *Common Sense*, first published in 1776 to promote American independence.[17] Mackenzie also wrote in his newspaper, in July 1837: 'Canadians! It has been said that we are on the verge of a revolution. We are in the midst of one; a bloodless one, I hope, but a revolution to which all those which have been will be counted mere child's play.'[18] By November, he published a short text entitled *INDEPENDENCE* in which he openly promoted rebellion.

The desire of Canadian republicans to connect their movement to the Atlantic Revolution, especially in its American incarnation, was clearly apparent during the 1830s.

Republicanism in the Canadas: the Ideology

Lower Canadian Patriots and Upper Canadian radicals not only appealed to the example of the republican thinkers of the Atlantic world but also adopted their ideals and principles. Therefore, they were Atlantic revolutionaries.

For Lower Canadian Patriots and the Upper Canadian radicals, as for all other republicans, freedom and equality were very closely linked. For them, individuals needed to be equal in order to be free. When republicans talked about equality, they were not talking only about equality under the law or equality of rights;

15. This resolution was reprinted in *La Minerve*, October 30, 1837.
16. *Constitution*, August 2, 1837.
17. *Constitution*, July 19 and 26; August 2 and 9, 1837.
18. *Constitution*, July 26, 1837.

they were also talking about moral equality and a certain amount of material equality. This is why both Papineau in 1823 and Mackenzie in 1833–34 were shocked by the inequalities they saw in the United Kingdom during their visit in the metropolis.[19] Not that the Canadian republicans were social levellers; they never intended to level fortunes. But they thought that it was impossible for individuals to be free (to participate equally in political life) if there was too great a disparity between citizens, because the rich could bribe the poor and establish a form of clientelism. Amury Girod, a Swiss immigrant who came to Lower Canada in 1831, took the side of the Patriots during the 1830s, and fought as a 'general' in Saint Eustache in 1837, considered that 'la propriété est une des causes premières de tout bien et de tout mal dans la société. Si elle est également distribuée, les connaissances et le pouvoir le seront aussi [. . .] la liberté en sera tôt ou tard le résultat immanquable.'[20] Mackenzie thought much the same, and he quoted Abbé Raynald: 'People of America ! [. . .] Be afraid of too unequal a distribution of riches, which shows a small number of citizens in wealth, and a great number in misery—whence arises the insolence of the one and the disgrace of the other.'[21]

In order to ensure the economic and social equality of citizens, these republicans envisioned a society of small landowners, all independent of one another. Mackenzie himself said: 'Agriculture, the most innocent, happy and important of all human pursuits, is your chief employment—your farms are your own—you have obtained a competence, seek therewith to be content.'[22] This economic independence would ensure political independence. For

19. Even if Papineau was not a republican in 1823, he was shocked by what he saw in Britain. See the letters he wrote to his wife between April 5 and September 22, 1823: Louis-Joseph Papineau, *Lettres à Julie*, eds. Georges Aubin and Renée Blanchet (Sillery, Québec: Septentrion, 2000), 72–91. For Mackenzie, see *Colonial Advocate*, June 27, 1833.

20. Amury Girod, *Notes diverses sur le Bas-Canada* (Village Debartzch: J. P. de Boucherville, 1835), 63. Translation: 'Property is the cause of all good and all evil in society. If it is equally distributed, knowledge and power will be also . . . . Liberty will sooner or later be the inevitable result.'

21. Mackenzie, *Sketches of Canada and the United States* (London, E. Wilson, 1833), 60.

22. *Colonial Advocate*, September 9, 1830.

most Canadian republicans, life in Canada was already characterized by social equality. Their main goal was to reform political institutions to fit this social reality. In this context, colonial republicans were very suspicious of accumulation of wealth, of capitalism, of primogeniture, and of bank monopoly, which they considered detrimental to equality among citizens and might allow corruption to destroy freedom.

Canadian republicans incorporated these principles into a sophisticated set of political proposals. Considering the importance that they were giving to equality, they structured their political institutions around the idea of political equality. For them, the right of the citizens to participate in the political process was their first and most important right. The importance given to political participation implied that citizens should have the right to elect their representatives. These representatives were the only ones who could legitimately adopt laws for the well-being of all. In this context, the Patriots and the radicals concentrated their claims around the constitution of legislative power during the 1830s. Their efforts had two objectives. The first was to improve the representativeness of the Legislative Assembly in Upper Canada. In this colony, unlike Lower Canada, the radicals could not gain control of the Assembly, except between 1834 and 1836. It was clear to them that if they could not obtain a majority of the seats in the Assembly, the problem lay not in themselves but in the way that representation was framed.[23] In both colonies the efforts of colonial reformers aimed at making the legislative councils of the colonies elective, not composed of appointed members of the elite. During the 1830s, colonial republicans did

23. Mackenzie began to contest the state of representation in Upper Canada in 1831. A committee of inquiry was created the same year with Mackenzie as its chair. Its report was introduced in the House on March 16, 1831. Its conclusions were predictable: 'the imperfect state of the representation in the House of Assembly is and has been the cause of much evil to the Community.' (*First Report on the State of the Representation of the People of Upper Canada in the Legislature of that Province* [York: Toronto Office of the Colonial Advocate, 1831], 4). Major reforms were necessary, but this report notwithstanding, no major changes were brought to the representation in Upper Canada before the 1837 rebellion.

not concede any legitimacy to the appointed legislative councils, the upper houses of the Upper and Lower Canadian legislatures. While a few demanded outright abolition of these bodies, most wanted to make them elective. This was the Lower Canadian Patriots' main demand. Thirty-four of the 'Ninety-Two Resolutions' (the charter of Lower Canadian republicanism) adopted by their Assembly in February 1834 concerned this reform (resolutions 9–40, 51, 54).[24] Upper Canadian republicans also fought for this reform, though not with the same energy as the Lower Canadians. In its *Seventh Report on Grievances* of 1835 (the charter of Upper Canadian republicanism), a committee of the House of Assembly, chaired by Mackenzie, presented the 'elective institutions [as] the only safeguards to prevent the Canadas from forming disadvantageous comparisons between the condition of the colonists and the adjoining country.'[25]

By contesting the authority of the legislative councils, the colonial republicans were contesting the existing constitutional order of the two colonies, based on the British principle of mixed government. They were demanding the reconfiguration of power relations in both Canadas according to a model of state legitimacy drawn from republican principles. They were asking the British government to acknowledge the sovereignty of the people rather than the sovereignty of parliament.

In this context, though, as in the past, Canadian republicans were loathe to criticize the legitimacy of the British monarchy or the governor's presence in the colony. If they did not do so, it was because they thought that once the legislative power was made to really represent the 'people,' the legislature could then impose its will on the governor. The governor would then be transformed into the first of all civil servants, with no independent voice. The People would become, effectively, The Crown.

24. *Journals of the House of Assembly of Lower Canada*, Fourteenth Provincial Parliament, Fourth session (January 7–March 18, 1834), 311–35.

25. 'Seventh Report on Grievances,' *Appendix to Journal of the House of Assembly of Upper Canada*, Twelfth Provincial Parliament, First Session (January 15 –April 16, 1835), 1:11.

The republican discourse in both Canadas during the 1830s focused primarily on the concept of political liberty, not on those of individual rights or civil liberties. In a larger sense, Canadian republicans wanted to impose virtue. In Canada, as elsewhere in the Atlantic, virtue was one of the key words in republican rhetoric. This word had at least three meanings. First, a virtuous citizen was a citizen who was independent socially and economically: this independence was the best guarantee that he could not be corrupted and that he would be independent politically. Secondly, to be virtuous implied an ethic of simplicity and frugality. Thirdly, virtue meant the willingness of a citizen to defend the common good instead of his own personal interests; in this sense, virtue meant patriotism. Because the Canadian rebels adopted this vision of a virtuous society, they cannot be seen as classical liberals, as some have argued. They were not demanding more civil freedom, nor autonomy from the State. They aimed instead to control the state.

The Rebellions and their Failure

The republican discourse in the Canadas during the 1830s echoed the discourses that American, Central American, Caribbean, French, and British republicans had articulated earlier in the Atlantic Revolution. The political struggles of the 1830s in the two Canadas and the rebellions of 1837–38 can be best explained by the challenge that republicanism represented for the colonial constitution. Republicans were contesting the premises upon which the authority of the colonial state rested.

In Lower Canada, for instance, by 1836–37, it had become clear to the Patriots—who controlled the Assembly—as it was also to their opponents—who controlled the Legislative Council—that their struggle could only be settled outside the framework of existing colonial institutions. The Patriots did not recognize the legitimacy of the Legislative Council, and their opponents rejected most of the reforms proposed or adopted by the Patriot Assembly. By 1837, under such conditions, neither

NOTES OF AN EXILE

TO

VAN DIEMAN'S LAND:

COMPRISING INCIDENTS OF THE CANADIAN REBELLION IN 1838, TRIAL OF THE AUTHOR IN CANADA, AND SUBSEQUENT APPEARANCE BEFORE HER MAJESTY'S COURT OF QUEEN'S BENCH, IN LONDON, IMPRISONMENT IN ENGLAND, AND TRANSPORTATION TO VAN DIEMAN'S LAND.

ALSO,

AN ACCOUNT OF THE HORRIBLE SUFFERINGS ENDURED BY NINETY POLITICAL PRISONERS DURING A RESIDENCE OF SIX YEARS IN THAT LAND OF BRITISH SLAVERY, TOGETHER WITH SKETCHES OF THE ISLAND, ITS HISTORY, PRODUCTIONS, INHABITANTS, &C. &C.

Slaves can breathe in England.

BY LINUS W. MILLER.

FREDONIA, N. Y.:
PRINTED BY W. McKINSTRY & CO.

1846.

Fig. 1. A first-hand account of the rebellion and its aftermath. Linus W. Miller, *Notes of An Exile to Van Dieman's Land* (Fredonia, N. Y.: W. McKinstry & Co., 1846).

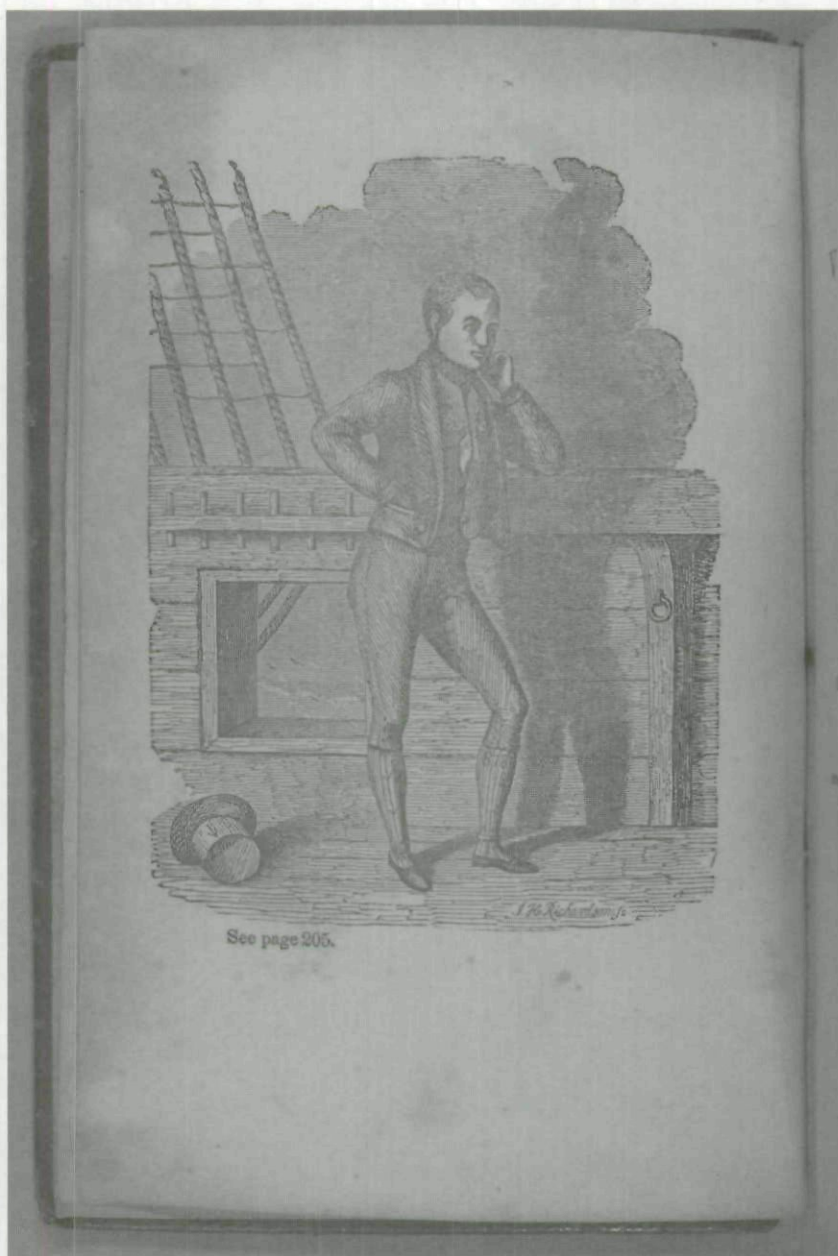

Fig. 2. The character standing on the deck is hatless, referring to a point in the story in which his hair has been shaven off to show his status as a prisoner.

camp could negotiate with the other. Paralysis of legislative power was the result.

Lower Canada's Patriots launched an attack on the state in November 1837. Three battles ensued. After an initial victory at Saint Denis, the British won at Saint Charles and Saint Eustache. In December 1837, Upper Canada's radicals then began their drive to overthrow the colonial government. The two rebellions were crushed, as was a second Lower Canadian uprising in November 1838 and the unrest at the Upper Canadian border with the United Sates. In 1837–38, superior British military might decided that the Canadas would not be republics. Just as the 1776 Declaration of Independence and the subsequent British military defeat heralded the beginning of the Atlantic Revolution, the failure of the Canadian rebellions and the victory of British forces and Canadian volunteers, sixty-two years later heralded its true end.

Conclusion

Political life in Upper and Lower Canada became very difficult from 1828 onwards, especially in Lower Canada, where the Patriots controlled the Legislative Assembly for a decade—something the Upper Canadian radicals were never able to do. By the fall of 1837, the Patriots of Lower Canada and the radicals of Upper Canada had launched an assault on the legitimacy of the colonial state in British North America. These two groups were not simply seeking to overthrow the existing government. At a more fundamental level, they were trying to refashion the existing constitutional order of the colonies and to reconfigure power relations in both Canadas, according to a model of state legitimacy drawn from republican principles. In accordance with their republican ideals, the Patriots and the radicals fought for, among other things, the ultimate sovereignty of the people, primacy of legislative power over executive power and the economic and political independence of all citizens. In this way, the Canadian rebellions participated in the larger revolutionary movement that was fundamentally reshaping the Atlantic World at the end of the

eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. Although the Canadian uprisings occurred much later, they were not ideologically different from the upheavals that preceded them. Had they succeeded, they would have been known as the Canadian Revolution.

It is because these movements failed to overthrow the state—their leaders being better at articulating speeches and making constitutional claims than at organizing a rebellion, that the Patriots and the radicals are not often connected to the wider political and intellectual currents that were reshaping the Atlantic World at the time, even though they were clearly inspired by them and aimed to create republics in Canada. The 1837–38 rebellions may have been a failure, but they were very closely related to the complex story of the Atlantic Revolution at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. They are best understood as its last chapter.

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