



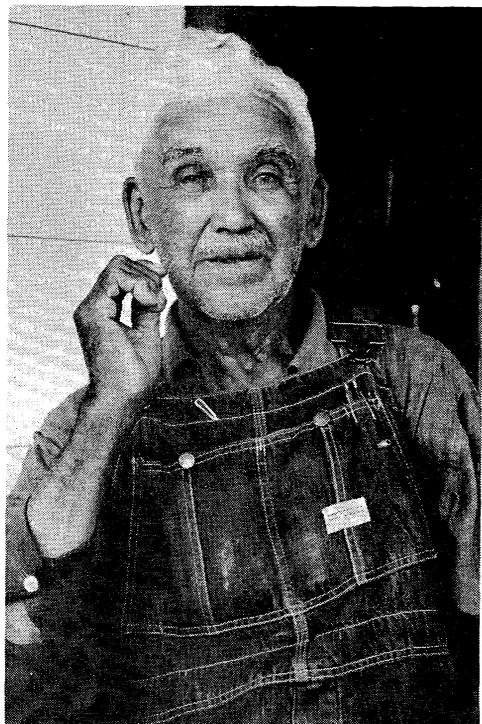
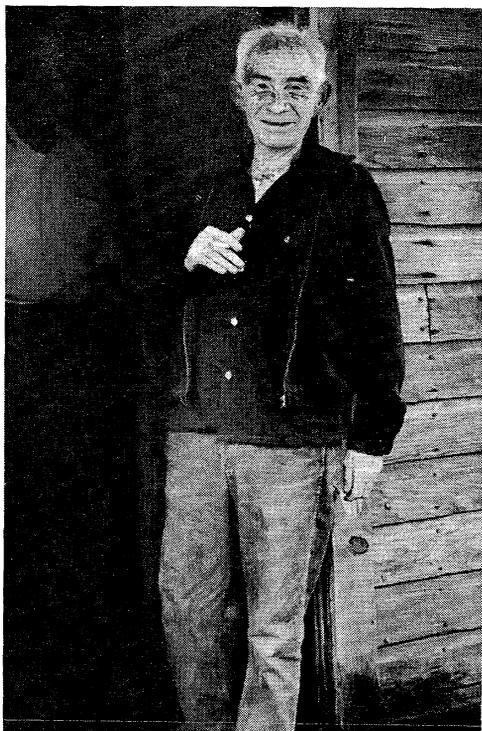
CULTURE CHANGE, STRUCTURAL
STABILITY AND FACTIONALISM
IN THE PRAIRIE POTAWATOMI
RESERVATION COMMUNITY

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Rather than proceeding according to the orderly logico-deductive ideals of scientific growth described by philosophers, it is notable that the accumulation of reasonably valid social science theory actually comes to us out of a series of fits and starts, punctuated by sometimes unaccountable methodological and speculative fads. The efforts of anthropologists to generate knowledge concerning socio-cultural processes among American Indian and other societies is by no means an exception to this rule, yet here as always there are bright spots. A few of the places where rich systematic thinking is meaningfully linked to defined problems and aggregates of fact are, for example, in such areas as understanding the nature of messianic or cultural revitalization movements, the processes of innovation and inter-cultural transfer of novelties, and the antecedents of cultural disorganization. In recent years anthropologists have produced exciting contributions to knowledge in these and similar aspects of cultural process. One purpose of this article is to suggest that the phenomenon of factionalism is perhaps another such area of theoretical growth.

The connection between this intention and the contemporary Prairie Potawatomi community is that this human group provides one of many available laboratories for the study of factional and other sociocultural processes. But if this group is a testing-ground it is not the only one. The study on which I am basing this article might well have been conducted within most if not all other contemporary reservation Indian communities. I am using the Potawatomi, then, as a kind of sample at least partly representative of a larger universe. This group of Indians is by no means the only one which has experienced or is experiencing the effects of persistent, uncontrolled conflict, for the causes of factionalism are much too generally distributed among modern Indians to allow this case uniqueness. Our conclusions should thus, in part, apply to many other contemporary American Indian populations.

In a sense my comments here must be construed as a progress report, for the factional conflict I have been studying among the Potawatomi is as yet unresolved, and my monitoring operation continues. The aim of the study has been to obtain a natural history of the antecedents, course, character and outcome of this particular factional situation. On the one hand



SOME POTAWATOMI PEOPLE. TOP LEFT: John Wahwassuck, a contemporary leader of the conservative element of the Prairie Potawatomi. **LEFT:** Patrick Matchie. One of the very few Prairie Band members who have become successful farmers. Mr. Matchie's carefully developed bottom lands are now threatened by a proposed reservoir. **ABOVE:** Nora O'Bennick, whose home is a disused one-room school house on the fringes of the Potawatomi reservation.

this contributes to special knowledge of the Potawatomi, while on the other it provides one kind of test of an existing set of ideas purporting to explain and to allow comprehension of factional conflicts in general.

SOME DEFINITIONS

The conceptual scheme I have been using to guide my research comes primarily from the recent efforts of Alan R. Beals and Bernard J. Siegel, and of David French, to formulate a coherent body of propositions concerning factional conflicts.¹ Because the word factionalism comes straight from the standard English vocabulary, let me first specify what I do not mean. In ordinary speech "factionalism" marks the opposition of parties to some sort of conflict, while "faction" refers directly to a group of persons bound together by common interests or purposes. However, in most instances the idea involves groups which work through their conflicting interests according to some set of rules, so that while they may remain contentious over the long run, conflicting objectives may be compromised, issues resolved and the conflict somehow regulated. But in the technical sense used here, I mean by factionalism something rather different.

In this special sense factionalism is one of several types of conflict, but the reference is to a condition of a sociocultural system rather than to a special interest group. Indeed, as we shall see, in cases of prolonged factional conflict such as among the Prairie Potawatomi, it may be extremely difficult even to specify the boundaries or membership of the conflicting groupings, which proliferate and interlock in quite complex ways. Factionalism thus is characterized as a type of overt conflict within a given social system, a type of conflict which persists long enough so that traditional control mechanisms can be brought to bear. Factionalism differs from other types of conflict in that these control mechanisms fail, so that the dispute continues unresolved and unregulated. Moreover, although initially such conflicts operate on a single structural level (for example, within the political arena, the conflict may be restricted to a council of local leaders), as they persist their effects may be diffused, felt and acted out on other levels or in other parts of the total social system.² Finally, factional conditions are defined as one sort of consequence of the stresses of culture contact situations, for the kinds of issues and disputes which lead to persistent unregulated conflicts seem to be especially frequent at the intersection of different cultures, particularly when the representatives of one attempt to manipulate and modify the nature of the other. In brief, the view taken here of factional conflicts holds that they are overt, unregulated disputes resulting from the stresses of acculturation situations.³

This kind of a model neatly fits the Prairie Potawatomi and most other reservation Indian communities, where factional disputes are often an endemic problem. In the instance of the Potawatomi, as far back as adequate ethnohistorical materials take us, there has been multiple acculturative stress, considerable conflict, innovative responses to these situations

and sociocultural change. In summarizing this history of the Prairie Band of Potawatomi we must necessarily over-simplify, but let us examine the last one hundred and thirty years of Potawatomi reactions to the press of American civilization.

I

The modern Prairie Potawatomi are no longer a single, homogeneous cultural population; they occupy no common territory, for the total membership is widely dispersed, although a cluster of approximately six hundred of the total of twenty-one hundred members lives on or about the old reservation in Kansas; their common language is English; and they are marked by great diversity in habits, values and beliefs. They are not, in any technical sense of the terms, a single geographic community, a nation, a tribe or a band. Rather, they constitute a federal membership corporation under the terms of a constitution granted them by the Department of the Interior. As we will note, there are several nodes of sociocultural homogeneity included within this membership corporation, and there is included as well a local community, but diversity and dispersal of population are the rule. It is this membership corporation within which the factional conflict currently operates.⁴

This modern Prairie Potawatomi corporation includes within its membership as one node of cultural homogeneity the ideological successors of the staunchly conservative and nativistic elements of the old United Band of Chippewa, Ottawa and Potawatomi who were shipped out of the Chicago region in 1833.⁵ But as I will show, the membership corporation also includes several other elements with diverse antecedents, while at the same time exhibiting the results of the acculturation and assimilation of many members into the larger white society. The movement of the old United Band from Chicago in 1833 was the consequence of the removal policy, which was aimed at clearing eastern lands for white settlement. One feature of this removal policy is of special interest, for it included the notion that scattered segments of linguistic or cultural groups should be brought together in one place, where the "Nation" could be united. Thus the United Band moved first to the Platte Purchase in Missouri, and then in 1837 to a reserve near what is now Council Bluffs, Iowa. In the same years the other major Potawatomi group in the East, a group made up of Indiana and Michigan elements and called the Mission Band, was moved to a reserve on the Osage River in Kansas. Eleven years later the United Band -- now known as the Bluffs or sometimes the Prairie Band -- and the Mission Band were persuaded by government officials to leave their separate reserves and come together in Kansas on the old Kaw River reservation, where they were, according to the plan of the removal policy, to be a single nation.

For predictable and obvious reasons, this experiment in nationhood was foredoomed to failure. To begin with, although they shared communal-

ities of culture, ecological adaptation and social structure, these several bands of the Potawatomi, during the years when they lived in the east, had no tradition of or experience with joint occupation of a common territory, and little experience of large-scale organization for collective enterprises. In addition, their experiences with European and American contact agents had been quite different: the Chicago (or Bluffs) Band was highly conservative and resistant to cultural change, while the Mission Band was living up to its name by attaining a semblance of literacy and some mastery of agricultural skills. It included an increasing number of Christianized persons in its membership. Moreover, during the period when the Mission Band was located on the Osage River reserve, the Bluffs Band was adapting itself to large-scale hunting of the plains buffalo and the techniques of plains warfare. Understandably, the leaders of the Mission Band were none too pleased with the prospect of too close an association with their wild cousins from Iowa. The two local groups were very different in terms of the degree of acculturation of their members. Thus the Potawatomi Nation was an artificial construction, a product of the imperatives of the American frontier. It would probably have collapsed even if left in isolation, much less while being overrun by streams of immigrant trains, or caught up in the free state fracas, the Civil War and a deluge of land-hungry sod-busters and railway promoters.

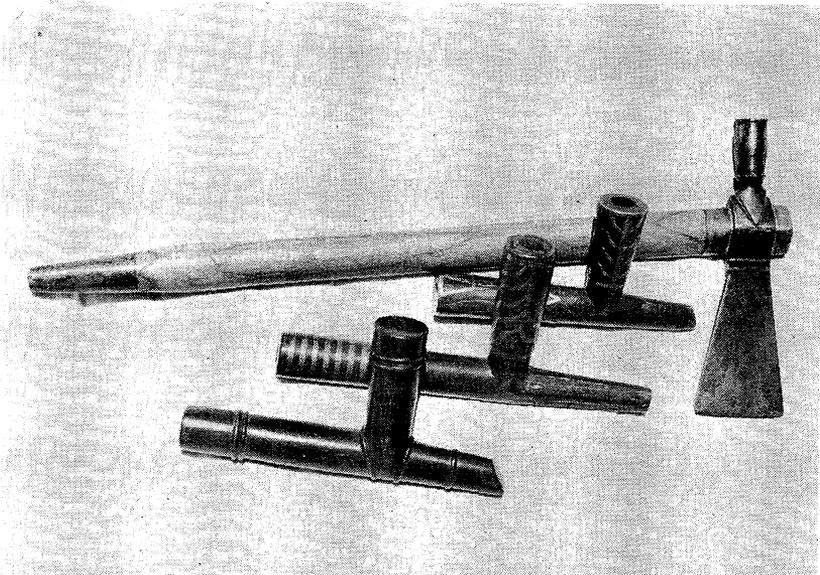
The experiment failed in 1861 when the major portion of the old Kaw reservation was parcelled out in individual allotments to descendents of the Mission Band. In the years just preceding 1861 the pressure to accept allotments had been intense, and although this change was couched in terms of promoting the civilization of the Potawatomi, the important motivation was to free more Indian land for white settlement. The leadership of the Bluffs Band -- now becoming known as the Prairie Band -- was adamant in their rejection of the program for sectionalizing their communally-owned lands. In the end, they were successful in obtaining a compromise, and managed to retain a diminished eleven-mile square of the old reservation as undivided corporate property. A few members of the Mission Band joined forces with the conservative Bluffs Band-Prairie Band, but the great majority of these more acculturated Indians elected to accept individual allotments of land. The remainder of the former reservation was homesteaded or otherwise acquired by Americans. Thus a conflict engendered by the demands of whites was resolved by a cleavage of the young "nation" into the Prairie and Citizen's Bands.⁶ This is a clear instance of schismatic factionalism, and although the split did not neatly divide the descendents of the old United-Council Bluffs Band from those of the Mission Band, it very nearly followed those lines.

The resolution of this conflict over allotments and assimilation has implications which go beyond the predictable division into conservative and acculturated components. One of these implications is the fact that fourteen

LEFT: Wakwabushkuk (Roily Water), a leader of the conservative faction in the 1890's. Wakwabushkuk led the opposition to implementation of the Dawes allotment act and fomented several trips to Washington to meet with the Great White Father, seeking relief. These Washington trips were a favored device for avoiding the authority of the local Indian agent. He was rewarded by imprisonment in the military stockade at Fort Leavenworth. (Photo by De Lancy Gill, courtesy of the Bureau of American Ethnology)



BELOW: Now valued heirlooms in the possession of Mrs. Charles Harrison, these pipes were once the property of a progressive Potawatomi chief.



years of additional acculturation and co-residence had produced a small group of dissident Prairie Band members who allied themselves with the assimilationist faction. Similarly, there were a few Mission Band members who elected the nativistic style of life. The point is that even though a strong core of conservatism marked the majority of Prairie Band members, the band was regularly producing a minority of white-oriented members. The second point of significance is the use of schismatic split and emigration as a way of resolving conflict. It was a favored solution, and it still is one which conservatives today generously recommend to the contemporary white-oriented faction in the Prairie Potawatomi corporation. But free lands have long since been very limited and, as we will indicate, there are several other factors which now prevent a schismatic division and out-migration.

With the Citizen Potawatomi out of their system,⁷ the Prairie Band since 1861 has made constant attempts to maintain something approximating a conservative way of life in the face of vastly increased acculturative contacts and persistent efforts by contact agents to discourage or eradicate conservatism and to encourage assimilation. Pressure from local white settlers and from the government to allot or sectionalize the Prairie Band reservation never really ceased, but came to a head with the passage of the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887. The form of Potawatomi resistance to -- and the methods used by Indian agents to secure -- acceptance of allotments are instructive, for they exemplify the nature of Indian resistance to forced change and the selective rewards and punishments of acculturative stress. Under very able leadership, the conservative elements of the Prairie Band bitterly and successfully resisted allotment of their lands until nearly the turn of the century.⁸ After repeated inducements, threats of force and imprisonment of conservative leaders, the Indian agent finally hit upon a solution to his problem of securing acceptance of allotments. The agent offered a double allotment to each member of any family who would accept one. The response came, of course, from disaffected Prairie Band members, those most highly acculturated, but included in this group of acceptors were a number of persons with quite dubious claims to the status of Prairie Potawatomi, or for that matter Potawatomi Indian. Some of the earliest allottees were probably not even Indians, including a number of persons who claimed to have been adopted into the tribe. An undetermined number of others seem to have been drawn from wandering fragments of other populations, a misplaced Munsee or an itinerant Sauk, for example. Whether or not they were Potawatomi, or even Indians, these early allottees were understandably cooperative when offered double portions of the choicest pieces of Prairie Band real estate. It is difficult to read the intentions of deceased representatives of the Office of Indian Affairs, and the correspondence of this period is vague on the rationale of this procedure, but if we may perhaps gauge purpose from effect, the agent was applying

significant pressure on the conservatives, by punishing them for resistance and rewarding their opponents for cooperation.

The conservatives drew appropriate conclusions, capitulated and hastened to secure their own allotments. But the enmity aroused by this action and the effects of the forced-adoption of non-Prairie Band persons persist to this day as major ingredients of the current factional conflict. It is of critical importance to this modern conflict because of the possibility that the Bureau of Indian Affairs may approve the distribution of Potawatomi land settlement or claims case funds to the descendents of all persons who received allotments on the reservation, and because a large part of the leadership of the current assimilated faction seems to have some difficulty in tracing their ancestry prior to the period of allotments.

Now we must abbreviate the events of thirty years. Following forced allotments came the mechanization of Kansas agriculture, the industrialization of nearby Topeka, World War I, the economic boom of the 1920's and finally the great depression of the thirties. During these decades dissident acculturated elements frequently married out and moved away from the reservation, converting their allotments into cash or rental properties. In this fashion some of the strains of cultural heterogeneity--produced by in-group variations in level of acculturation -- were partially relieved. But by the late 1920's the attractiveness of the local community was increased for many of those who might have moved away earlier. There was, for example, a stable group of successful, Christianized farmers living alongside the numerically dominant conservatives, and the members of this culturally progressive group were, so far as we have been able to determine, especially successful in cultivating good relations with the Indian agent and the Office of Indian Affairs. It was, for example, the progressive farmers who were most likely to be appointed to the Tribal Advisory Board, the chief functions of which were to validate agency decisions, to communicate these decisions to the membership and to report community reactions. This tame council was chosen in the same manner in which cooperative appointed chiefs had been selected in an earlier year. It certainly was not representative of the diverse interests of the reservation community, whose membership seems to have been dominated by conservative or nativistic elements, as is evident from the frequency and the extent of participation in the Drum (or Dream Dance) religion, the Peyote religion, clan ceremonials, sorcery and shamanistic practices.⁹

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We have fixed on this period of the early 1930's as the base-line for our study of the contemporary factional conflict, while accepting a certain arbitrariness in this date, for some of the antecedents of the conflict clearly have historical roots which go back much earlier. But it was in this period that the conservative faction got organized and emerged as a reform move-

ment. It was in this period that the conservative reformers, by obtaining the good offices of Superintendent Baldwin of Haskell Institute, secured and adopted a constitution, the so-called Baldwin Constitution, which established a temporarily viable and more representative elected Business Committee. It was then that these reformers concentrated conservative support behind a crude nativistic-political revival, campaigning on a program of absolute, unswerving opposition to agency rule, a program which they (perhaps too effectively) carried into effect. In brief, it was in this period that factional lines were clearly drawn, when a series of overt conflicts became prominent in reservation life, when repeated efforts at control were tried and failed and when the dispute began to ramify into various aspects of community life, disrupting collective activities and placing increased strain on the social fabric. Further, it was in this period that the Indian agent began calling one conservative leader the "Pendergast of the Potawatomi." Finally, it was in the early thirties that the conservatives accepted the idea of prosecuting a claims case, thus providing a central economic issue for later factional developments.

The course of all human events should, if possible, have a dated origin point, and we cannot allow the Potawatomi factional conflict to be an exception. Let us select the summer of 1932 for this purpose. At that time a group of conservatives were in Topeka at a country fair, beating on drums and generally acting like Indians so as to earn a little spending money. One day at the fair several of these young conservatives were approached by a man who claimed to be a Cherokee, but who at first looked suspiciously like an American Negro, a suspicion which declined appreciably as he became more helpful to the conservative cause. As closely as retrospective accounts of this event can make clear, this party said something like, "Take me to your chiefs. I have a message for the Potawatomi tribe." As nearly as we can determine, when he was later brought before an assembly of reservation conservatives, his message contained two themes and ran something like this: "You Indians have been badly mistreated by the U.S. government, your treaties have been violated, and you deserve justice." Apparently, the conservatives were quite willing to entertain this notion. The second part of his message may be reconstructed as follows: "There is a pot of gold in Washington which belongs to the Potawatomi, and I know how to get it for you." The conservatives seem to have found this idea equally appealing.

Viewed from the perspective of the conservative Potawatomi, this person was a godsend who could only have been improved on had he arrived in a vision. Seen through the eyes of the local Indian agent, he was patently a subversive agent and, in the spirit of the times, possibly a Wobbly. And even the more acculturated Potawatomi were at first attracted by the promise of a windfall, for times were hard on Kansas farms in 1932. Viewed from the perspective of social science, he loses something of his luster, but



LEFT: The late Curtis Pequano dressed up for the annual Prairie Potawatomi Pow Wow, a mon-eymaking secular event staged for the amusement of white visitors. The Pow Wow also functions as a "homecoming" for off-reservation Potawatomi.



RELIGION. LEFT: Curtis Pequano in his role as Pakokwanni (or Staffman) of the Drum Religion. The Pakokwanni symbolizes Christ, and the staff held by Mr. Pequano stands for the implement used by Christ to place magical power in the drum so as to provide relief for the Indian from white oppression. OPPOSITE: Mathew Matchie holding a photo illustrating the day he became a member of the Native American Church (or Peyote Religion).

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none of his interest, for he was in fact a very special sort of culture-contact agent, a self-made inter-cultural go-between, a technical specialist in the early Pan-Indian movement, a man immensely knowledgeable concerning Indians and Indian affairs and wise also in the ways of American culture. He had read Indian law, memorized every treaty and studied all available historical documents concerning the Potawatomi. In addition to his knowledge and obvious sympathy for the situation of the Prairie Band's conservatives, he began acting as an advocate for their case, pleading for them and arguing a course of action aimed at putting large sums of money at the conservatives' disposal. The conservatives immediately adopted him, accepted his counsel and assistance and started the long train of events leading to the successful prosecution of several substantial claims cases involving settlements for treaty violations and for inadequate payments for their former lands.

The reasons for selecting this date as an origin point are three. Although the conservatives had already begun marshalling their opposition to the appointed tame council, they had no focal issue around which to rally their forces. The possibility of securing a claims settlement gave them just such an issue. At the same time the status of Prairie Potawatomi immediately increased in importance for all concerned, whether progressive, conservative or indifferent. I believe that without the promise of a cash settlement, many dissident progressives, especially those settled at remote parts of the country, would simply have continued their drift away from an identification with the Prairie Band community. But given the promise and possibility of a cash windfall, they could not afford to do so. The third reason, therefore, is that the conservatives' action contributed to the maintenance of the Potawatomi group as one social system, within which the factional conflict developed further, and within which it now prevails. Thus while serving the conservatives as a rallying point, the claims issue also reinforced the importance of remaining Potawatomi in the thought of assimilated persons. The resurgence of interest in community affairs on the part of absentees, in turn, intensified the factional conflict, which, as we shall see, grew to such proportions that although claims cases have been won and the funds appropriated and placed in the federal treasury, they have never been paid out. These monies have not been paid out because of the effects of the continued conflict situation.

While they were developing the claims case issue, the conservatives were also successful in obtaining considerable freedom from agency domination, and simultaneously they began ignoring the demands of progressives for a hand in Potawatomi community government. The history of this aspect of community life during the 1930's and 1940's is a series of victorious jousts with their agent and with other representatives of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. For a long time, the conservatives' principal adversary was a man who served them first as chief clerk of the agency, and then as

superintendent of the local Indian office. This superintendent was himself an assimilated Indian and a man firmly raised in and devoted to the old Indian service policy of total paternalism. He was convinced of and always acted on the premise that the business committee elected under the Baldwin Constitution was no more than a powerless board of advisors, while the committeemen were at least partially convinced that they represented continuity with an ancient line of Potawatomi chiefs. When the idealistic ferment and the fervent humanism of the Roosevelt administration's Office of Indian Affairs in 1934 produced the Indian Reorganization Act, an action manifestly intended to function as a means for promoting community self-government and economic uplift, the Potawatomi's local superintendent interpreted that legislation as an instrument of assimilation, and began a series of maneuvers designed to secure acceptance of the IRA at all costs.¹⁰

Thus it developed that the Prairie Band never adopted an Indian Reorganization Act constitution, although following systematic research into community conditions by Indian Service personnel several tentative ones were drawn up, constitutions which would have put the weight of power into the hands of the residents of the reservation. Part of the reason for the conservatives' rejection of this social-structural novelty lay in the character and actions of the local advocate of change, their superintendent. Another part was a considerable suspicion of anything unrequested coming out of Washington, in which instance the Indian Reorganization Act was interpreted as a further instrument of assimilation and was identified with the Dawes Act of 47 years earlier. Yet other conclusions were drawn by the conservatives: that the IRA would largely benefit the Catholic, farmer element, and that it was a threat to their own power. But their rejection was firmly decided when they became convinced that the costs of the Indian Reorganization Act -- if applied to the Prairie Band reservation -- would be deducted from any future claims case judgments. By the mid-1930's, the conservatives were apparently convinced that if they could avoid reorganization and secure a substantial judgment against the government, they could then obtain unrestricted control over such funds and parlay this into a device for limiting the influence and rewards going to the more highly acculturated Potawatomi.¹¹

Because of the parallel they afford with the means of securing adoption of the earlier Dawes Act, and because they further illustrate the selective rewards and punishments applied by white contact agents, a few examples of the superintendent's efforts to secure Prairie Band acceptance of the IRA are in order. Never an ingenuous man, after direct persuasion and negotiation had failed him, this superintendent called a meeting of all tribes under his jurisdiction -- the Iowa, the Kansas Sauk and Fox, the Kickapoo and the Prairie Potawatomi -- for the purpose of voting on the reorganization legislation. The trick here was that the other three tribes were highly

and heavily in favor of reorganization, and their votes combined with those of the dissident Prairie Band progressives could easily have carried the day, especially if the superintendent's proposal, that the votes of all present be applied to all participating tribes, were accepted. In a stormy public revolt in which threats of overt violence against the body and person of the superintendent were prominent, the conservative Potawatomi leadership upset this move.

On another occasion the superintendent, exercising powers he did not enjoy, simply fired the conservative business committee. A protest telegram from the conservatives to Washington pointed out the illegality of this action, and brought a reversal from the Commissioner's office. Shortly thereafter, the agent stage-managed a meeting in an off-reservation setting which he publicly and pointedly announced was not concerned with the IRA issue at all.¹² This meeting was well attended by the progressive farmer Potawatomi and technically boycotted by the conservatives.¹³ After a brief opening speech the superintendent was surprised to find the meeting developing into a spontaneous demonstration against the conservatives. A motion to throw out the conservative council was made and seconded. The motion was made by one of the men the superintendent had earlier appointed to the committee after firing the conservatives; it was seconded by another such; and when it passed the meeting promptly elected the same progressive council which had just been deposed by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Again a protest from the conservatives to Washington caused a reversal, this time on the basis of a technical foul -- the agent had not given the requisite 30-day constitutional notice for a special business committee election.¹⁴ These were only a few of the devices open to the superintendent, for on other occasions he attempted to have the children of conservative leaders separated from their parents and placed in boarding schools on the grounds that they were insanely fanatic in their political activities. He also tried to make political use of the rewards he had at his disposal. But conservative opposition was unceasing, and thereafter the superintendent gave up the battle. When the country entered World War II, the reservation was largely, if temporarily, depopulated, and with men away in service and families off at defense jobs, the factional fight simmered down.

Earlier I suggested that perhaps the conservatives were overly successful in their efforts to seize and hold the reins of power within the reservation community. While their short-run tactics were nearly impeccable, they committed strategic blunders which opened the way to a resurgence of culturally progressive, absentee and assimilated elements. What the conservatives accomplished by their rigid opposition to the Bureau of Indian Affairs was to isolate the Prairie Band community from the full benefit of many technical, financial and social services available through the Bureau. Particularly, by rejecting the Indian Reorganization Act, they effectively denied the progressives access to many services which the pro-

gressives wanted, although the conservatives did not. Consequently they encouraged an alliance between the progressives and the agency, and provided the more acculturated group with a ready-made set of issues around which its leadership could rally followers.

Having successfully warded off the efforts of their superintendent to promote adoption of the IRA, increasingly the conservative leadership insulated itself from meaningful contacts with Bureau officials. Through the years, they became more and more secretive about their activities and plans, arbitrary in their decisions, autocratic and imperious in their behavior and threatening in their posture towards all who gave evidence of opposing them. Then the conservative council appointed itself as a special claims committee (with life tenure) charged with the responsibility of handling the disposition of their land judgment cases against the government. In short order they forgot that there was a distinction between the appointed claims committee and the elected business committee, and ceased holding elections for the latter offices. This departure from the democratic process is evidence of how badly the conservatives misconstrued their position -- which was not as secure as it seemed to them then -- and it shows also that they were quite out of touch with the realities of their legal and administrative obligations to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. By abrogating their responsibilities to the many members of the Prairie Band community, by antagonizing the local, area and Washington offices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and, finally, by not devising and accepting some kind of constitutional instrument, the conservatives built into the dike surrounding them a serious structural flaw.

In the years immediately following World War II, when most of the membership had returned to the area, it seemed that the pot of gold promised in 1932 was soon to be made available. With the passage of the Indian Claims Commission Act a formal avenue for land claims litigation had been opened up, and the first Potawatomi cases were going well. Moreover, the reservation population was swelling with returned veterans and war-workers, not all of whom were so committed to the conservative cause as they had been during the earlier years. Thus the numbers of progressives increased, and they began organizing and demanding a hand in community affairs. The conservatives continued to ignore them, and the progressives struck at the weakness in the conservative position. Protesting the autocratic, arbitrary and unrepresentative nature of Prairie Band government, leaning heavily on agency and area office support, the progressives finally managed, after repeated failures, to secure the adoption of a constitution, which was approved by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The membership provisions of the constitution adopted in 1961 are of special interest. The earlier IRA constitutions prepared by the Bureau for the Prairie Band had restricted membership in the band (actually, the community) to persons of one-fourth or more Prairie Band descent, and had

restricted voting rights and the right of office to residents of the reservation proper. The provisions of the 1961 constitution, quite to the contrary, granted membership to all persons who had received Dawes Act allotments and their descendents regardless of their degree of "blood," and specifically excluded residence on the reservation as a qualification for voting or office holding. The constitution drawn for the Prairie Band in 1961 thus placed final and nearly irrevocable power into the hands of absentee, assimilated or progressive elements of the membership.¹⁵ It gave jural status to a membership corporation, and therefore reorganized the structure of the Prairie Potawatomi community. It effectively put the conservatives out of power. Or at least it would have if the conservatives had been willing to accept the rules set by the new constitution, which they were not. Instead, they began a set of legal moves through state and federal courts which have not yet ended, but which have allowed an injunction preventing the progressives from distributing claims case monies. In this way the factional conflict has denied the members access to what is perhaps the one most highly valued collective goal, per capita payments from the tribe's estate.

We should mention that there are now slightly more than 2100 enrolled Prairie Potawatomi, no more than 300 of whom may be counted as culturally conservative. Up through the 1940's the Bureau of Indian Affairs never counted more than about 700 Prairie Potawatomi. The great surge came after the settlement of the first claims cases, and as a consequence of the very permissive membership provisions of the 1961 constitution. This does not represent a natural increase from the population base as counted in the 1930's and 40's, but rather the addition of off-reservation absentee individuals and their descendents, persons many of whom had long since severed their connections with the community. The mechanism which defeated the conservatives should now be clear. Moreover, the arithmetic of the difference between five million claims case dollars divided by 2100 members, as against five million divided by 300 or so conservatives, is only a partial measure of the latter's sense of loss. More prominent in the attentions of the conservatives was (and is) their loss of control over the community life of the reservation population and the decline of their influence. In passing we should mention that a primary concern of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in recent years has been to see that the conservatives do not arbitrarily exclude persons from the benefits of the judgment cases who would otherwise be entitled to them, and that another concern has remained the development of some form of stable, constitutional government to administer corporate affairs and to act as an administrative buffer between the Bureau and the membership.

III

That this has been a description of a factional development, that the current dispute within the Potawatomi corporation constitutes a case of

overt, unresolved conflict within a social system, there is little doubt. I have tried to show how several modes of conflict resolution have been attempted and failed: the effort of a single sub-group to exert dominance and drive opponents out of the system is one such mode. Appeals to outside authorities have at best brought only temporary relief, while appeals to the courts have only prolonged the conflict and offer no hope of permanent solution. Other attempted modes of resolution include threats of violence, sorcery -- which seems to have been especially pronounced in the mid- and late 1930's¹⁶ -- avoidance, public shaming, boycotting and various other informal inter-personal control devices. It is notable that arbitration and compromise have never been seriously considered by any of the parties to the conflict, for factionalism is a phenomenon of extremes.

I would emphasize that while out-migration was a favored means of settling conflicts arising out of differences in acculturation up to the 1930's, when the social system involved was primarily that of a community, with the increased importance of the reservation as a fixed point of reference for maintaining the status of Potawatomi and with the imposition of a membership corporation structure in 1961, out-migration no longer could resolve such differences. The reason for this is that place of residence is no longer a criterion for membership in the corporation or for participation in corporate affairs. For example, none of the current members of the elected business committee are residents of the reservation.

This is not to imply that the value of membership in the Potawatomi corporation for the absentees can be measured only in cash benefits. This is not true, although access to corporate assets is an important consideration. Perhaps equally important is the fact that in terms of ethnic status, the Potawatomi (unlike other Americans except those of Negro descent, but like all other Indians), never quite become fully assimilated. While Polish immigrants become Polish-Americans and then, in a few generations, Americans, persons of some Potawatomi descent, no matter how small the blood-quantum, never add the hyphen. They remain Potawatomi. In part this has been the consequence of the inflated prestige attached to the status of Indian in American culture, in part the consequence of the many tangible benefits which are made available to persons of Indian descent. But the status of Indian is generally fixed in terms of enrollment in a specific tribal membership corporation, wherein membership is defined as an ascribed status, that is, in terms of descent. This fixed point of structural reference, a locus on which to hinge one's identity as Potawatomi, is what the progressives offered and the conservatives denied the absentee assimilated descendants of the Dawes Act allottees. The unique feature of the membership corporations, such as that now controlling Prairie Potawatomi affairs, is that, with the status of member fixed in terms of descent, the membership is under no further obligations and has no responsibilities. Hence the Potawatomi corporation harbors within its membership an extreme range of

variations in values and cultural orientations, and it is within the structure of this corporation that factional conflicts must be worked out. It should be clear, then, that the conflict has followed the traditional lines of strain within first the community and later the corporation.

Two further matters require discussion. The first is the question of limitations in the structural effects of and the personal responses to this conflict. The second is the importance of ambiguity as an antecedent to factionalism. In previous discussions of factionalism, much emphasis has been placed upon the lack of regulation and the disorganization resultant from unresolved conflicts of this nature. Such thinking seems to presume the spread of the conflict from one to many levels, and the increasing demoralization of the persons involved. I believe that this may be because most existing studies of factional disputes have been conducted in fairly compact, culturally homogeneous geographic communities. So far as I can see, something quite different is happening in the Potawatomi case. The effects of the conflict are largely compartmentalized and do not seem to have spread much beyond the political sphere. This is possible in the Potawatomi case because of the considerable dispersal of the population, the differences in occupation, interest, life-style and values which characterize the participants, and the favored techniques of avoidance and boycotting. Opponents are not forced through co-residence to treat with one another. Moreover, the participants -- at least the active leaders -- seem to relish the scheming, maneuvering, researching and other behavior associated with sustaining opposition and maintaining alliances. We have little evidence that this conflict itself has contributed much to the demoralization of persons or groups. The Prairie Band members still exhibit the considerable zest for living that earlier observers have commented on. Finally, there have been efforts to extend the range of the conflict, for example into the religious system. During the past two years several conservative leaders have repeatedly attempted to intrude features of the political dispute into collective religious observances. In all instances they were effectively opposed by equally conservative religious leaders who argued that the ritual setting was no place for politics.

Thus Potawatomi factionalism, although obviously persistent, does not seem to be pervasive in the sense offered by Siegel and Beals. It has not spread across many structural levels so as to interfere with many group activities, or so as to prevent cooperative effort. Prairie Band members simply avoid extensions by exercising caution in selecting persons with whom to cooperate, so that the result is a segmentation of group activities. Perhaps what all this adds up to is that the Potawatomi are not now and for many years have not been a homogeneous cultural group, that they have adapted to the persistent presence of the factional conflict, so that they are today a conflict-oriented as well as a stress-adapted ideological community.

Finally, I am concerned with the relationship between ambiguity and the origins and persistence of the factional conflict. Following David French's definition,¹⁷ I mean by ambiguity a relative lack of clarity, or definition or cognitive structuring with regard to appropriate normative behaviors. In the Potawatomi case there are many areas of social life not characterized by clearly stated, shared understandings. I will discuss just one, a matter that has been critical in the development of the conflict. In the Prairie Band case there is a striking lack of clarity as well as a lack of consensus surrounding the definition of member in the Potawatomi tribe, or reservation community or, more broadly, the reference group. This ambiguity lies behind those specific disputes over such issues as "Who shall be a member?" "Who may vote?" or, "Who will share in the corporate estate?"

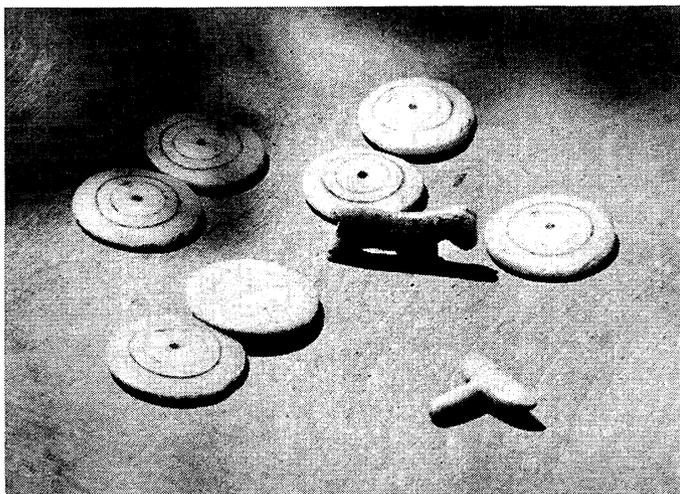
Nowhere within the local community, much less in the corporate membership at large, is there anything approaching consensus on the criteria for membership in the group. Although it is a matter continually discussed and argued, there is no consensus within either the progressive or the reservation groupings, or sub-factions thereof. I have met very few members -- and those usually uncommitted and indifferent -- who express commitment to a firm, unwavering set of definitional criteria, one unqualified by matters of friendship, the loyalty of henchmen, or affinal kinship. There are many definitions, at least a dozen, in vogue, and these consist of permutations and combinations of a limited number of component principles. Some of these criteria for membership status are: current fixed residence on the reservation proper, current full-ownership of an intact original allotment, bilateral descent from an original allottee or patrilineal descent from one, patrilineal descent from a member of the old Bluffs Band or bilateral descent from one, mastery of the Potawatomi language, the status of full-blood, or knowledge of and participation in nativistic customs and rituals, and so on and on.

It is obvious that, if applied, these several membership definitions would yield radically different kinds of groupings, varying widely in organization, and ranging in size from something like seventeen valid members to an estimated three thousand. Because there are numerous individual Potawatomi who have some passing commitment to one or another of these definitions, it is worth noting that my practice of contrasting on-reservation, culturally conservative elements to absentee, progressive elements oversimplifies the actual situation. In reality, at any one time there are only temporary alliances of several sub-groups of conservatives opposed to similar alliances of sub-groups of progressives, but these lines shift and change with the relative fortunes and success of one or another set of leaders, and with other changes in the community or corporate situation.

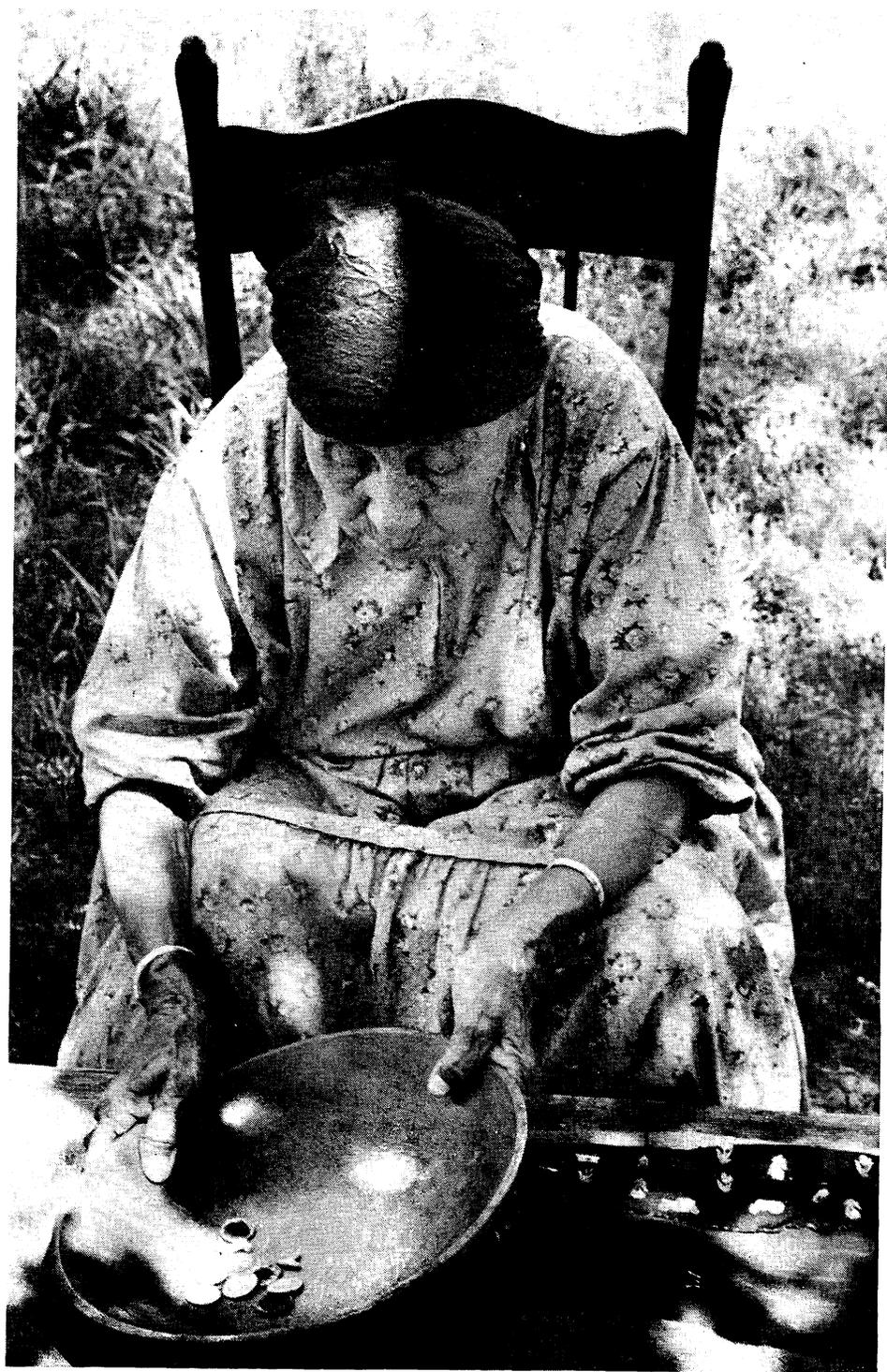
We might well ask after the source as well as the importance of this ambiguity concerning definition of membership. It came to be significant,

I think, because tribal membership was not a serious issue to the village-dwelling, hunting and horticultural Potawatomi of the early historic period, where birth, for example, placed a woman as a Bear clan member, and birth or adoption or migration identified men as residents of local communities. I think that the boundaries around clans, families and villages were firmly drawn, but that band or tribal membership was simply an unquestioned by-product of these fundamental identifications. Hence there was no ready-made, traditional solution to the problems which arose with changes in the culturally conditioned behaviors and beliefs of the membership, changes and heterogeneity arising from contacts with French, English and Americans. Thus drastic cultural changes have combined with ambiguity in the definition of membership to set the stage for later intra-group conflicts. The possibility of conflict over social boundaries was intensified, moreover, by the fact that although they accept and adapt to culture change, all concerned have insisted on the importance of insuring the structural continuity of the group. Therefore, this ambiguity over the issue of membership is significant because it encapsulates one hundred and thirty years of Potawatomi social history. But it is important also because it has been central to many features of the dispute in the last thirty years. It illustrates, as does other evidence, that the Potawatomi problem is not anomia, in the sociological sense of an absence of norms to which persons feel strongly committed. Rather it is a problem of too many norms, which they are unwilling to give up in the interest of peace and compromise.

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SQUAW DICE. LEFT: The counters used in playing Squaw Dice, one of the last few Indian games of chance played by old-timers on the Potawatomi Reservation. OPPOSITE: Pkuk-nokwe shown playing Squaw Dice. The dice are thrown in the wooden salad bowl and points are made according to the number of dark sides which come up.



Footnotes:

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¹ Bernard J. Siegel and Alan R. Beals offer a general theory of factionalism in their "Conflict and Factionalist Dispute," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, XC, Part 1 (1960), 107-117; and they go on to identify several sub-types of factional disputes in their "Pervasive Factionalism," American Anthropologist, LXII, 2 (June, 1960), 394-417. David French clarifies some problems of defining factionalism and describes certain important attributes of this variety of conflict in "Ambiguity and Irrelevancy in Factional Conflict," in Muzafer Sherif (ed.), Intergroup Relations and Leadership (New York, 1962).

² I accept French's emphasis on the importance of persistent lack of regulation as a defining criteria, which differs somewhat from that offered by Siegel and Beals (cf. "Pervasive Factionalism, 394).

³ I am indebted to Faye Clifton for insisting on this point: because most studies of factional conflicts are limited to cases of culture-contact, it is quite possible that factors internal to a single community, or a single social system, may also result in factional disputes.

⁴ Fuller descriptions and analyses of Potawatomi social organization and demography will be found in James A. Clifton and Barry Isaac, "The Kansas Prairie Potawatomi: On the Nature of a Contemporary Indian Community," Transactions of the Kansas Academy of Science, LXVII, 1 (January, 1964), 1-24. Ruth Landes discusses many of the elements of conservative Prairie Band culture in her "Potawatomi Medicine," Transactions of the Kansas Academy of Science, LXVI, 4 (December, 1963), 553-599.

⁵ The name of this band is misleading, for it was composed predominantly of Potawatomi from the Chicago area, with an admixture of a few Chippewa and Ottawa migrants.

⁶ Technically, the Citizens Band did not acquire a formal structure until a few years later, after the allottees had lost their free lands and when they acquired a new reservation in Oklahoma. The label "Citizens Band" comes from the fact that the members of the abortive nation were offered the choice of remaining Indian or becoming citizens of the United States.

⁷ Not entirely out of the system, however, for some of the Citizen Indians who lost or sold their allotted land returned to live on the Prairie Band reservation where, because of their "poor-white" habits, they were a thorn in the side of several Indian agents.

⁸ We must say "conservative elements," for in the years after 1867 a substantial number of dissident Prairie Potawatomi responded positively to the attractions of American culture. In 1887 the Prairie Band was not of one mind concerning the allotment issue.

⁹ Although aimed at recovering and describing the aboriginal Potawatomi culture, Alanson Skinner's "The Mascoutens or Prairie Potawatomi Indians," Bulletin of the Public Museum of the City of Milwaukee, VI (1924-25), offers a fair if piece-meal description of some aspects of community life in the early 1920's. But Ruth Landes' "Potawatomi Medicine" and her lengthy unpublished manuscript "Potawatomi Culture" present a far more comprehensive and systematic account of the culture of the mid-1930's.

¹⁰ It is highly probable that one latent function of the IRA governments, or membership corporation mode of organization, for reservation Indian communities has been to promote the continuity of Indian social systems and to increase their level of tolerance for internal cultural differentiation.

¹¹ By the late 1930's the category of non-Prairie Band members of the community had grown confused in the thinking of the conservative leaders. At first this category seems to have included primarily the returned Citizen Indians, other Indians and the whites who received Dawes Act allotments. Later it was expanded to include many absentees and most assimilated Potawatomi, whatever their ancestry, and on occasion has included individuals of unquestionable pedigree who were opposed to particular leaders.

¹² The conservatives were poor in transportation facilities and might have had difficulty getting to this place.

¹³ But the conservatives were there in force, although outside the hall, peering in its doors and windows.

¹⁴ It should be noted that by 1939 the conservatives were masters of the art of interpreting and using the scanty provisions of the Baldwin constitution, when and if it were to their advantage, but they later disavowed this constitution, claiming that it was invalid -- this on the occasion where the Baldwin constitution was used to unseat them.

¹⁵ Under the 1961 constitution the only recourse the total membership has against an irresponsible elected business committee member is via a recall petition signed by thirty per cent of the eligible voters. Yet since 1961 only about 10 per cent of those eligible have ever voted in elections, and it requires only about four per cent of the total eligible to elect a committeeman. In practice, therefore, a small minority elects the committee, and the membership has no control over their corporate affairs. This is very nearly the same situation as when the conservatives were in power.

¹⁶ See Landes, "Potawatomi Medicine" (fn. 5).

¹⁷ See French, "Ambiguity" (fn. 2).