Book Reviews

Conflict over the Columbia: The Canadian Background to an Historic Treaty, by Neil A. Swainson. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979.

For close to twenty years engineers, diplomats and politicians from Canada and the United States wrestled with various schemes to dam the upper Columbia River. Pressure for development of the Canadian portion of the river came primarily from electric utilities and river management authorities in the United States. The American downstream section of the river had been dammed, machined and regulated to its limit by the early 1950s. Henceforth all hydro-electric storage and flood control works would have to be built in Canada or on tributaries of the Columbia flowing into Canada — thus the need for some form of international agreement. By the end of the fifties the International Joint Commission arrived at the conclusion that power production and stream flow regulation should be maximized over the entire Columbia River system irrespective of the international boundary on the grounds that comprehensive development of the river would be of greater benefit to both parties than separate pursuit of the best domestic alternatives. Moreover, the IJC also decided that the benefits of flood control and greater hydro-electric generation as a result of upstream storage should be equally shared by the two countries.

In 1961 the Canadian and American governments, with the qualified support of the government of British Columbia, signed a specific treaty governing hydraulic development of the upper Columbia on the basis of the general principles previously arrived at by the IJC. By the terms of this treaty Canada bound itself to build three storage reservoirs on its portion of the river and to operate them for sixty years in such a way as to optimize power production at existing hydro-electric facilities downstream in the United States. In return Canada would receive a cash payment representing the American half of the flood control benefit and would be entitled to take delivery of 50 per cent of the additional power produced in the

United States as a result of the smoothing out of stream flow by the Canadian storage reservoirs. Besides the security of a more thoroughly regulated river and greatly enhanced power generation capability, the treaty also gave the United States permission to build a storage dam on its portion of the Kootenay River which would flood part of a Canadian valley. Both countries contracted to pay for the treaty projects in their respective jurisdictions. At the insistence of the British Columbia government the Columbia River Treaty was modified slightly by a protocol signed three years later which allowed American utilities to purchase the Canadian downstream power entitlement on a long-term basis for a lump sum. In a nutshell, that was the Columbia River Treaty.

But agreement was not easily arrived at or fully achieved on the Canadian side of the border, as the title of the book under review would suggest. Indeed, there has been little but bitterness and recrimination since its signing. People who were flooded out could never reconcile themselves to the treaty, its manner of implementation, or the insensitivity of both levels of government to their pleas. Mr. Bennett blamed the bad bargain on the impatience of his Conservative rivals at Ottawa and the hauteur of the "university men" in the federal civil service. Conservatives and Liberals at Ottawa have insisted that Mr. Bennett got the treaty he wanted and accuse him of reneging on an agreement in order to barge ahead with his reckless two rivers development scheme. Critics of the treaty called it one of Canada's greatest natural resource giveaways. Not only did Canada waive forever its right to build efficient hydro-electric generating projects on one of its own rivers (choosing instead to build storage dams for American plants downstream), but also Canadian negotiators literally sold out the cheap energy provided by the downstream hydro-electric entitlement. It has been frequently suggested that the Columbia River Treaty represented yet another case of sharp Yankee negotiators pulling the wool over the eyes of their naive, eager-to-please country cousins. Nationalists have identified the villains of the piece as wily, resource-grabbing American corporations always one step ahead of Canadian rubes and compliant, development-at-any-price provincial politicians. That, more or less, has been the level on which debate over the treaty has been conducted.

Neil Swainson, in this magisterial study of Canadian decision-making during the treaty negotiation process, attempts and admirably succeeds in rising above this sort of partisanship. He is not concerned with laying blame for or assessing the merits of the treaty. Indeed, in a long book he indulges in only two tantalizing sentences of judgment. His focus is the

question of how Canadian decision-makers determined what kind of treaty they wanted and to what extent they were successful in achieving their goals. After setting out initially the geographical and technical background to Columbia River development he follows the complex four-party (British Columbia, Canada, the IJC and United States) diplomacy step by step, report by report, meeting by meeting, almost memo by memo. This dispassionate and entirely commendable section of the book should stand as the definitive treatment of the subject for some time to come. In a concluding pair of chapters Swainson then reviews the narrative, applying Charles Lindblom's hierarchical-synoptic/bargaining-incremental paradigm to reveal the underlying pattern of behaviour.

Historians may say that it is too soon to attempt this sort of study. The public record cannot be trusted entirely. The private papers are not available and key public documents are locked up under the thirty-year rule, but it is remarkable how much material can be turned up by a resourceful scholar. Professor Swainson appears to have begun his study of decision-making when the ink was still wet on the treaty, judging by the interviews he refers to in the notes (not, however, listed in the bibliography). He seems to have talked to most of the principals at length, read the voluminous testimony and background papers presented at various parliamentary and congressional hearings, understood well enough to criticize the highly technical engineering reports commissioned by the governments and private utilities, and been given access on a confidential basis to a good deal of private correspondence. Swainson has met and overcome the two challenges of this sort of analysis: digesting the massive quantity of documentation readily available on the one hand, and on the other piecing together from interviews and the private papers at his disposal what went on behind the public veil in the cabinet rooms, offices and closed-door committees.

First off Professor Swainson dispels the notion that Canadians were hoodwinked. Canadian negotiators and governments (but not interested members of the public), he convincingly argues, were extraordinarily well informed, frequently better so than their U.S. counterparts. Canadian decision-makers went forward backed up by the most comprehensive research effort possible under the circumstances. Moreover, Canadians proved to be exceptionally shrewd bargainers when it came to negotiating the final treaty, a conclusion supported by John V. Krutilla's analysis of the agreement from an American point of view. But that does not mean that Canada got the treaty it wanted or that the one obtained maximized Canadian interests. After 367 pages of close analysis it comes as some-

thing of a surprise to learn that "in the short run Canada is not so well off, and in the long run she may be little if any better off, than she would have been had she simply accepted the 1954 offer of the Puget Sound Utilities Council to build and hand over to Canada the Mica Creek Dam, and had she negotiated, concerning the Libby project, a separate agreement with the United States, which, it is reasonable to assume, would have involved no direct costs for her." The upshot of all this seems to be that with the very best of intentions, the sharpest pencils, the keenest strategy and the most skilful negotiators we swindled ourselves. No treaty at all would have been preferable, it turns out, than the one obtained. How could that be?

The answer in a word is federalism, and in two words federalism and W. A. C. Bennett. In Canada power over the Columbia was genuinely shared. The province owned the hydraulic resources in question and the federal government possessed treaty-making authority. Each held something akin to veto power. As a result, the bargaining between governments in Canada was more protracted and certainly more heated than any that went on across the international border. The difficulty was twofold: the two governments wanted different things in the treaty, each having divergent perspectives on optimum development of the Columbia, and they also gave Columbia River development a different priority — it ranked higher in Ottawa than Victoria, curiously. Swainson concludes that in these intergovernmental exchanges the province gained more from the federal government than it conceded — an asymmetrical outcome, in his terminology. The treaty that emerged was largely the one the Social Credit government of British Columbia demanded and bruised federal politicians grudgingly set out to negotiate.

Between 1957 and 1959 (i.e., during the key phases of the treaty-making process) W. A. C. Bennett became convinced that Columbia development should not interfere with what he considered to be more important hydro-electric projects planned for the Peace River. Unfortunately, or perhaps shrewdly, he did not wholly reveal his intentions at that time. He confided in only two of his cabinet colleagues. Not even the officials in his own Water Resources Service believed he would really try to press simultaneous development of the Columbia and the Peace Rivers. No one believed him, but he *was* serious. In the absence of any federal offer to pay for its precious Columbia River projects, Bennett argued successfully that they should be self-financing — that is, one way or another the Americans ought to pay for them. Thus British Columbia's

insistence in the early stages of discussion upon a "grossing" rather than a "netting" approach to sharing costs and benefits, and later upon cash for the downstream entitlement instead of hydro-electric power. Mr. Bennett's cunning "incremental" bargaining style got him what he wanted; the problem arose from the fact that what he apparently hoped to achieve was incompatible from a technical point of view. But from a political standpoint big construction projects in two parts of the province were, to say the least, highly desirable. Two rivers development seemed so remote a possibility that neither Victoria nor Ottawa studied the two projects together until two years after the treaty had been signed! As things evolved, Peace River storage rendered the most expensive and controversial storage dam on the Columbia, High Arrow, technically redundant. When Mr. Bennett's bluff turned out to be a serious undertaking, Canada ended up with a treaty which was internally consistent but inappropriate in its new context, but by then it was too late to re-open negotiations without risking everything gained to that point, so everyone could agree it was a bad bargain and blame it on someone else.

It is one of the great merits of Professor Swainson's book that he not only raises the level of debate over the Columbia River Treaty but also begins by taking federalism seriously. For Swainson divided jurisdiction and differences of opinion are entirely legitimate and understandable, not problems to be lamented or reformed away. Given the fact that we live in a federal system, Swainson wants to make us more fully conscious of the ways in which governments interact and the impact these means have upon the policy outcome.

His book also rejects the conventional wisdom that there ought to have been one optimum plan for the Columbia, better than all of the others, that both governments should have recognized and fought co-operatively to implement. That kind of synoptic analysis and close co-ordination requires shared goals and hierarchical power structures, Swainson points out, neither of which is likely to be the case in a federal system of shared jurisdictions. Two governments will plan on justifiably different perceptions of public welfare. Who is to say which plan is superior? Nor does Swainson consider the characteristic bargaining between levels of government necessarily a second-best alternative to centralized decision-making. Intergovernmental negotiations and incremental decision-making raise and resolve differences between legitimately varied goals. Conflict, in a federal system, is natural and in Swainson's view entirely desirable. Swainson's openness towards the messy process of bargaining, his acceptance of

federalism as given and proper, and his equanimity in the face of conflict distinguish *Conflict over the Columbia* as a landmark in the literature of Canadian intergovernmental relations.

Nevertheless, Swainson has not written a particularly easy book to read. In fairness this is not entirely his fault. Some things are very complicated. To simplify them is to distort them. Swainson has chosen a technically complex problem, involving three governments and a host of agencies in prolix, sometimes aimless, multi-levelled discussions over two decades. To this formidable burden he has added the strain of explaining all of this in political science categories. The result is a scholar's reference book, not a reader's book. No one will pick up *Conflict over the Columbia* and become absorbed by it. You have to be *really* interested in the Columbia River Treaty to slog through it all. In his helpful way Swainson assists the reader with a chronology, a glossary of technical terms, a list of the key personalities involved, a dozen clear maps, a detailed table of contents, and an excellent index, but notwithstanding these trail markers there can be no denying that much of this is uphill work.

Professor Swainson has performed an unenviable but essential task. He has carefully sorted out the details of negotiations between the governments of Canada and British Columbia and between Canada and the United States over the Columbia River Treaty and he has classified the bargaining process in a useful way. The fine mesh of Mr. Lindblom's grid catches the more bureaucratic federal performers nicely, but "incrementalism" hardly does justice to W. A. C. Bennett's up-country horse trading style. Swainson tells us how Bennett went about getting what he wanted. The next step must surely be to find out how the government of British Columbia, more particularly W. A. C. Bennett, for it was clearly a one-man show, decided upon its goals. Perhaps Hugh Keenleyside and some of the others directly involved in the formulation of British Columbia policy can be induced to respond to what by implication appears to be a damning indictment. With that settled it might be possible to get on with a comprehensive re-assessment of the impact of the Columbia River Treaty now that it has been in operation for almost twenty years. Although Professor Swainson explicitly avoids making judgments and drawing lessons from the treaty-making experience, there is certainly a very good book waiting to be written on how we fared under the actual working of the Columbia River Treaty.

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Above the Sand Heads; Firsthand Accounts of Pioneering in the Area Which, in 1879, Became the Municipality of British Columbia, narrated by T. Ellis Ladner and prepared for publication by Edna G. Ladner. Burnaby: the author, 1979. Pp. 181, illus., $6.95.

Above the Sand Heads, the reminiscences of T. Ellis Ladner (1871-1958), is refreshingly different from other publications dealing with pioneer memories. Pride in the family's role in the development of British Columbia and attention to the fine details of everyday social and economic life in an early Fraser River community make this book a valuable work for those studying the late nineteenth-century history of the province.

The book describes the life and labour of pioneer Fraser River settlers in the Delta area from the 1860s to 1900. Edna Ladner, who collected and edited these reminiscences, describes the emigration patterns of her father and other members of the family. They, like many other English, often came to British Columbia from other parts of North America and, after trying their luck in the 1858 gold rush, stayed to take up their traditional trades — farming, in the Ladners' case.

It is difficult to judge the academic merit of this book as it has no footnotes and very few of the specific dates cited can be verified. The inclusion of a good map of the Delta area would have been a great help for the reader as well. On the positive side it provides a rare first-hand account of the extent of pioneer fishing and farming technology in the lower Fraser region. Details about the economic advantage of unfouling a ship's bottom in the lower, intertidal part of the Fraser, using a potato to judge the salinity for salting salmon, sources of fishing supplies, and overall descriptions of early canning and farming procedures and the social life of the workforce indicate that Ladner was very closely related to and knowledgeable about these topics.

For students of social history this work provides much information on British Columbia's early native and oriental labour force. Bunkhouse life, the role of the barroom, the methods of hiring, and social conditions such as housing, food and entertainment are described and accompanied by Ladner's personal observations about the various non-European members of the community he lived in. The description of the social and economic conditions of the early Delta white settler is also well developed. In addition to the early farming and fishing techniques Ladner's account of the transportation system of the era shows that before and in part after the arrival of the CPR the Fraser River community depended on the traditional maritime transport on which its economy and trade patterns were

originally established. T. E. Ladner himself was part of this early community and looked upon "those who arived on the cushioned seats of railroad trains" with some disdain.

Above the Sand Heads is much better than most of British Columbia's local histories. Edna G. Ladner has done an excellent job in presenting her father's memoirs and deserves far more credit than she allows herself. The result is a local history which is essential reading for serious students of British Columbia's late nineteenth-century history and a thoroughly enjoyable work for the general reader.

Vancouver DUNCAN A. STACEY

Exile in the Wilderness: The Life of Chief Factor Archibald McDonald, 1790-1853, by Jean Murray Cole. Don Mills: Burns and MacEachern Ltd., 1979. Pp. xviii, 268, $15.95.

Jean Murray Cole's biography of her noteworthy ancestor, Chief Factor Archibald McDonald, is widely and exhaustively researched. It follows his career from his birth as the thirteenth and youngest child of a Highland Scot tacksman in Glencoe who, although an episcopalian, had fought as a youth with the Jacobites at Culloden in 1745, through McDonald's enlistment as "clerk and agent" in the Earl of Selkirk's service in 1811 at the age of twenty-one years, through his acceptance of a clerkship in the Hudson's Bay Company's service in the spring of 1820, to his retirement as Chief Factor at Fort Colvile on the Columbia River in 1844. McDonald settled at St. Andrews on the Ottawa River, sufficiently close to Montreal to enjoy the company of colleagues who had settled in the environs of the former metropolis of the fur trade. He lived the life of a gentleman farmer until his death in 1853. The author provides a short postscript, giving brief sketches of the lives of his children.

The experience of reading the biography can be likened to a new perception of an old and familiar painting. As the events of the Selkirk period and the later fur trade pass in review the author's focus on McDonald does not give rise to new and different interpretations. Rather, in allowing as much as possible the words of McDonald and his contemporaries to cast events and detail circumstances, Cole conveys a sense of previously unnoticed subtleties of texture and hue, eliciting insights that enlarge the understanding and appreciation of what had been considered as defined and complete. The movement of a party of settlers under McDonald's direction in the winter of 1813 from Churchill to York emerges as a noteworthy human accomplishment. The enervating effect of the Nor'Wester threat on the colonists in Red River is expressed nowhere else as graphic-