

He enjoyed the friendship as well of Indians, Chinese and other non-white men — again, however, within stereotyped roles. This leads to a rather amusing passage in which he is burdened with a Chinese male housekeeper because his wife objects to his female housekeeper in the Tahsis camp quarters. He quickly sends the new servant home because while he could tolerate the rumours of a liaison with the woman, it was too much to entertain rumours regarding a Chinese man.

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*The House (Convention Centre, Stadium, Rapid Transit System, Etc.) That Jack Built: Mayor Jack Volrich and Vancouver Politics*, by Stan Persky. Vancouver and Toronto: New Star Books, 1980. Pp. 226, map and photographs, \$3.95.

While this book fits within the “developers-are-the-root-of-evil” genre of contemporary urban political criticism, it steers clear of the simplistic self-righteousness and narrow malice that so often mark the genre and rests instead upon wide-ranging narrative presented with modesty, wit and humour. Persky’s deftly candid introduction serves to ward off most potential criticism. He calls his work “an informal assessment of recent Vancouver politics,” and states that “readers might as well be forewarned that this saga tends neither towards the scandalous nor the scholarly.” He is moved to write the book not only by “the sheer fun” of doing so, but as well by his belief that better civic government depends upon a better-informed public and by his conviction that those who think seriously about civic issues ought “to spend more of their time and talents addressing the general public rather than just talking to each other.” Persky confesses to the motive of “lending history a helping hand in making judgements.” Since the book is entirely a free-enterprise product, he does not have to express “obsequious thanks to grant-dispensing government agencies, as authors are often required to do these days.” He does give thanks to Joachim Foikas, Vancouver’s federally funded Town Fool of the late sixties, for reintroducing him “to the rhymes of Mother Goose, which, if not exactly precise about the evils of capitalism, none the less speak to the human condition.” Persky mentions that his interest in civic government was furthered in his student days by his being jailed for loitering in the vicinity of the Vancouver Police Department’s riot squad while it was on active duty.

The book was intended to influence the outcome of the November 1980 Vancouver civic election. The cover bears photographs of Jack Volrich (looking grim), Harry Rankin (looking avuncular) and Mike Harcourt (looking forthright — and amazingly hirsute). Persky's actual recommendations, however, are almost restrained.

In suggesting that Mike Harcourt is the best choice among mayoral candidates, it hasn't been my intention to portray Jack Volrich as a notable example of evil. . . . It is not Volrich's sincerity which is questioned . . . but the appropriateness of his views. Nor, in recommending Mike Harcourt, is it suggested that he is without fault. (p. 209)

The book was sold by the Harcourt organization at campaign events and provided effective advertising for both Harcourt and COPE.

The book has three parts. The first, "The Wages of Sin and Other Inflationary Factors," deals with morality issues in the city, with Volrich's becoming mayor, and with Jack Poole and his Daon Development Corporation. The second, "Warding Off the Evils of Democracy," deals with the ward issue and the Downtown Eastside Residents Association. The third, "The Edifice Complex," deals with the developments listed in the book's title and also with such issues as Sunday closing and the response to gypsy moths in Kitsilano — the way in which the conflict over spraying the moths was resolved is seen by Persky as a model deserving wider application. Woven through the three parts is a political chronology of the 1976-1980 period. The style is lively, the humour is entertaining, and much factual information is presented.

Persky relies almost exclusively for his source material upon reports published from 1976 to 1980 in Vancouver's daily newspapers and local periodicals. While his ability and insight do allow him to transcend the day-to-day immediacy imposed upon working reporters and to attain the longer and larger view, several deficiencies remain. Each chapter has a detailed bibliography, but quotations and dialogue are not linked to sources, leaving the impression that Persky himself was doing such things as crouching beside Jack Poole's desk or hiding in Helen Boyce's kitchen cupboard. The major error in the book is one of omission. Persky devotes much attention to Poole — indeed Poole and Volrich are the main characters in the book — but nowhere does he directly connect Poole with Volrich. What Persky did not know, since he did not come across mention of it in the press, was that Poole worked closely and directly with Volrich in the latter's mayoral campaigns and served, in particular, as one of the principal campaign fund raisers. To devote so much of the

book to the two Jacks but to remain ignorant of their real relationship is no small blooper.

In describing the crucial Volrich-Harcourt contest for the TEAM mayoral nomination in 1976, Persky follows Allan Fotheringham and Sean Rossiter in depicting Harcourt as virtuously above-board and Volrich as underhandedly conniving. Such an interpretation is false. (I was vice-president of TEAM in 1976 and in close touch with both men and with their supporters as the events unfolded.) Persky states that "at least two or three" of the new recruits Harcourt brought into TEAM "were known social democrats, which was sufficient evidence for his rival to raise the alarm" (p. 24). In fact most of Harcourt's recruits were NDP members or supporters and NDP membership lists were used as the primary means of contacting his potential recruits. While such recruiting, as Persky would be quick to point out, was neither illegal nor undemocratic, it did subvert the principle that provincial party membership would be irrelevant within TEAM, and it did lend a rather hollow ring to Harcourt's charge (made after it was evident that his own takeover bid had failed) that Volrich was leading a right-wing takeover. Volrich had announced his candidacy at an early date and had made no move to recruit supporters into TEAM until after Harcourt's effort was underway. The irony is that Harcourt could have easily won the 1976 nomination (and then the election) had he announced his candidacy in good time and followed precedent within TEAM in not seeking to pack the nomination meeting.

It is easy to make too little or too much of the mayor in Vancouver politics. As far as formal legal powers are concerned the mayor of Vancouver has none of importance and is weaker than every other mayor in British Columbia and weaker than the mayors of every other major Canadian city. Informally, because the mayor is accepted as the spokesman for the council and for the city (and perhaps because much of the public is ignorant about the actual weakness of the mayor), the position brings a good deal of local fame. Those who care more for power than fame have little reason to seek or keep the position; yet, since political fame requires at least the appearance of power, those who enjoy the fame must pretend they do have power — hence the heady promises, the inflated claims, and the quick and nimble jumping to avoid being tripped up by the two real (and equally unpredictable) holders of real power: the provincial government and the local voters. Often critics of mayors attribute failure or inconsistency to incompetence of the incumbent and fail to recognize the deficiencies of the position — thus these critics perpetuate

the myth of mayoral power in Vancouver. Persky avoids this pitfall. He notes, in referring to both Mother Goose's Jack and Mayor Jack, "Not everything is exactly as it seems. For instance, there is some question whether Jack actually did build the house attributed to him. . . . Finally, there is considerable dispute over whether this structure is a real home or merely a house of cards" (p. iii).

Persky has written an engaging and effective book. Let us hope that he writes another for Vancouver in 1984.

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*A Picture History of British Columbia*, by George Woodcock. Edmonton: Hurtig, 1980. Pp. 240, illus., \$18.95.

To someone who knows little of British Columbia this may be a pleasing introduction to the province's history. On the whole, Woodcock succeeds in writing a text that complements and supplements the approximately 400 illustrations that are the real *raison d'être* of this volume. It is unfortunate, however, that limitations of space within the book and the apparent absence of research and writing time prevented Woodcock from using his justly acclaimed literary talents to produce more than a very pedestrian history of British Columbia.

Woodcock's approach is basically chronological. Given his concentration on the physical development of the province and on its politics, it is appropriate that he begins with explorers and ends with comments on BCRIC and the present discontent with the federal Liberal government. Seldom does he venture into what can loosely be called social history. There is, for example, considerable attention to the organized unemployed of the 1930s but otherwise there is scant mention of labour, organized or not. Occasionally Woodcock breaks from chronology. "Recognizing the Landscape," a section on the artists who visited in the late nineteenth century, is the most successful of these; the text nicely explains why the artists came, the accompanying paintings show what they saw. "Duncan of Metlakatla and the Anglican Schism" [the Hills-Cridge affair] seems an eccentric choice to represent religion; it is virtually the only mention of religion in the volume. A third topical section, "Facing the Yellow Peril!" demonstrates some of the problems that compression causes throughout the book. Though Woodcock mentions the Vancouver riot of 1907 and agreements with Japan to limit immigration, he implies