

precinct. Segger recognizes that there would be interest in such discussion and provides two pages that give a very brief overview of legislative history and of the organization of the assembly itself. He is, however, a bit too concerned with the coat-of-arms and the provincial flag and not enough concerned with the actual processes of government. Moreover, he commits an unfortunate error when he suggests that the Lieutenant-Governor is appointed on the advice of the provincial administration. This is true for the Australian states, but in Canada Lieutenant-Governors are appointed by the Governor-General, who acts, in effect, on the advice of the federal cabinet. The provincial cabinet has no official say in the appointment and often, in the history of the province, has not even been consulted.

But not very many will notice this small error, and no doubt a great many will be relieved not to have a civics lecture dished up with architectural description and explanation. The book clearly serves the purpose for which it was intended, and it has been, quite deservedly, a commercial success. At \$6.95 it is a genuine bargain.

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Fighting Joe Martin Founder of the Liberal Party in the West: A Blow by Blow Account, by Peter Brock. Toronto and Vancouver: The National Press, 1981. Pp. 418.

Fighting Joe Martin held a number of positions in four parliaments, but none for long. After being a school teacher in Ontario, he moved west to establish a law practice in Portage la Prairie and was elected to the Manitoba legislature in 1883. When the Liberals came to power in Manitoba in 1886 Martin became Attorney-General in the Greenway cabinet. He resigned his provincial seat to run unsuccessfully for a federal one in 1891. He went to Ottawa after a by-election in Winnipeg in 1893 only to be defeated in 1896. Moving to British Columbia, he served as a Member of the Legislative Assembly from 1898 to 1903, including a brief period as Premier in 1900. In 1909 he was elected as a Liberal member of the British House of Commons. Joseph Martin had, to say the least, a chequered political career.

Martin's inability to retain an elected position for any length of time was in large part the consequence of his abrasive personality and apparent inability to co-operate with others. Biographies of unpleasant individ-

uals have been written before, but the author of this one also faced a second, more important, problem: a lack of sources. There are virtually no Martin papers. The author acknowledges this deficiency and recognizes that Martin's "story must be pieced together from fragmentary documents and a great deal of guesswork," but he has written the biography anyway because "an insubstantial study seemed preferable to no study at all" (p. 19). Whether or not one agrees with that point, it is still disturbing to see so many crucial conclusions based on inference. Brock claims, for instance, that Martin became Premier of British Columbia partly as a result of a pre-arranged and secret agreement with Lieutenant-Governor McInnes that if he were able to defeat Charles Semlin in the Legislature Martin would then be called upon to form an administration. But Brock has no hard evidence for the claim. It is based, as the author admits in a footnote, on "an inference" (p. 231, fn. 14). The paucity of evidence also leads to other problems that the author reveals but does not acknowledge.

The lack of documentation makes possible all sorts of *ex cathedra* generalizations that are either dubious or, sometimes, simply ridiculous. The biography begins with the assertion that "Fighting Joe Martin was probably the most powerful and successful rebel the Canadian West has ever had" (p. 4). The reader has scarcely had time to assimilate that claim before being told that Martin was also part of "a continuous line of radicalism" in the west from Louis Riel to J. S. Woodworth (p. 13). This assertion is not just tossed out as a throwaway comment but is said to give rise "to an intriguing theoretical framework from which one can derive new insights into the character of the west." The author obviously takes the point seriously, but there would seem to be a problem of definition. By whatever stretch of the imagination one might turn Riel into a radical, nowhere in this biography is the nature of Martin's radicalism described with any precision. Indicative of the problem is the fact that the words "radical," "rebel" and "reformer" are all used interchangeably. To the extent that Martin espoused laissez-faire liberalism, and particularly the idea of free trade, he was hardly radical at all. Indeed, one might even suggest that there is some contradiction between the claim that Martin was both a radical and the founder of the Liberal party in the west — except that, in truth, he was neither. In British Columbia it could very well be argued that Martin did much to facilitate the coming to power of McBride's Conservatives in 1903, and that his ambition to be Premier along with his inconsistency and inability to work with others actually retarded the development of the Liberal party in the

province. If one were looking for line of continuity within the narrower context of the Liberal party in British Columbia it would be significant to note that, towards the end of his life, Fighting Joe Martin practised law in partnership with Gerald McGeer.

This biography is very confusing, and that may inadvertently reflect something of the nature of Martin's career. The author, in his effort to portray Martin as an idealist, does not seem to want to consider the possibility that he was really an opportunist who blew with the prevailing winds of political expedience. Martin's personal loyalties in politics were always shifting, he accepted the support of different railway interests at different times, and, in order to attract voters, he took an anti-French line during the separate schools controversy in Manitoba and an anti-Oriental position in British Columbia. The author is constantly having to strain the reader's credibility in an attempt to explain Martin's apparently erratic career according to a consistent set of principles. While perhaps distasteful to a biographer, it would have been easier and probably more accurate to concede that Martin was a fractious individual with no overriding philosophy and little consistency. The lack of clarity in the broad strokes is only exacerbated by the sloppiness of the fine brush work of the portrait. Thus the adult Martin was both short (p. 4) and not short (p. 232) and, although he was born in Milton, Ontario, towards the end of the book the west has become "his native region" (p. 304).

In his preface, Peter Brock writes that one of the problems of Canadian historiography is that "academic critiques tend to be excessively harsh on the minutiae of learned works" (p. 2). Lest he feel that this review suffers from that failing, it should be made clear that his book not only contains minor inaccuracies but also, in my view at least, the entire interpretation of Martin's career is wrong-headed. Having cut away the pretension and confusion from this biography, all we are really left with, rather than a leading western Canadian radical, is a scrappy little railway politician who all too often represented the worst of the west's prejudices.

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