

BOOK REVIEWS

Reaching Just Settlements: Land Claims in British Columbia, edited by Frank Cassidy. Lantzville: Oolichan Books, 1991. xviii, 153 pp. \$14.95 paper.

In the last two years, the politics of aboriginal land rights in British Columbia have undergone a substantial transition. After decades of neglect by the provincial government, the issue suddenly moved to centre stage. The Social Credit administration of William Vander Zalm made the first tentative steps forward in this regard, offering to open negotiations on what the government referred to as land "claims" and what the First Nations described as land "rights." Shortly after its election, the New Democratic Party offered even more definitive statements as to its commitment to resolving the land issue. Since that time, the provincial administration, together with the federal government, has given substance to the early pledges, establishing a formal process for the negotiations.

Reaching Just Settlements, published in 1991 from the proceedings of a conference held in Victoria in 1990, has something of an historical air about it. Now, only a few years after the meeting, the scene has changed dramatically. At the time of its publication, the book made a significant contribution to the public policy debate, for its chapters represented a variety of aboriginal and non-aboriginal positions on the land claims issue, offered some scholarly analysis, and included several key policy statements and position papers from interested parties. While the volume does not capture the passion and intensity of debate on this issue, it provides a useful perspective on the range of perspectives within British Columbia.

At one level, the individual contributions to the book cover little new ground. There are the obligatory legal, historical and political pieces,

from contributors Jack Woodward and Paul Tennant; well-known aboriginal leaders, including Frank Calder, Miles Richardson, Don Ryan and Tom Sampson, likewise cover relatively routine territory. The volume also gives considerable space to less familiar participants in the land claims debate, including municipal politicians, labour leaders, and representatives of economic interest groups, like Jim Matkin of the Business Council of British Columbia and Tom Waterland of the Mining Association of British Columbia. For those who have followed the debates across the province, the opinions collected in the book are familiar; the book's value, then, rests more in assembling the different perspectives in a single place than in providing important new understandings to this complex public policy question.

If there is a major fault with the book, it is simply that here is a large contrast between the politely presented public positions of non-aboriginal politicians, aboriginal leaders, and representatives of various interests and the emotion-charged atmosphere that has long surrounded this issue across the province. *Reaching Just Settlements* gives reasonable voice to the public interests and perspectives which clash over the matter of aboriginal land rights; it does not — and probably could not, given the nature of the conference from which this book emerged — fully document the intense angers, fears, and frustrations that dominate the aboriginal land claims issue.

Across the province, the land debate is approached outside the context of legal precedent, constitutional obligations, and compromises between competing interests; instead, more visceral perspectives, tinged with racism and marked by very real non-aboriginal fears of the consequences of major land claims settlements, dominate the discussion. *Reaching Just Settlements* provides a valuable perspective on the first element of the contemporary discourse over this issue; it remains for analysts to prepare more in-depth studies of the broader social, culture, and economic apprehensions which provide the background for discussions of aboriginal land claims in British Columbia.

It is useful, finally, to reflect on the important transformations that have occurred since the 1990 meeting. Ed John, then a barrister and solicitor and now one of the most important aboriginal leaders in the province, offered a pessimistic outlook on the prospects for change: "I see changes in political leadership in this province, but not in the political agenda. There will be continued development in education, language, child care, and economic development, but not on the land question. You can bring out your crystal ball and I certainly hope that I'm wrong in my assessment that there will be nothing major happen-

ing in the next three years. Certainly unless there are drastic policy changes in the federal government's agenda, and unless there are drastic changes in the provincial government's agenda, nothing is going to change in this province" (p. 73).

On the surface, Ed John appears to be wrong. The New Democratic Party government has taken strong steps toward resolving the land issue, including recognizing the inherent right to self-government, establishing a land claims commission, and working with the federal government to establish a framework for formal negotiations. But Ed John may yet be proven right, if only because the basic transformations remain political and legal; there is little evidence that the province has yet to come to terms with the lingering uncertainty and, in some quarters, hostility to the idea of settling aboriginal land claims. Until such efforts are successfully made, John's unhappy forecast remains a salutary reminder that change on such fundamental issues comes slowly, if at all.

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The Struggle for Social Justice in British Columbia: Helena Gutteridge, The Unknown Reformer, by Irene Howard. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992. xvii, 352 pp. Illus. \$35.95 cloth.

Helena Gutteridge (1879-1960), known to specialists as a significant but somewhat enigmatic figure in the history of the provincial labour movement, is a challenging persona. She left no personal papers and her long career as a political activist seems to have generated but fragmentary biographical data. A more scholarly investigator than Irene Howard, a respected popular historian, would have quickly rejected Gutteridge as a candidate for a full-length biography. As the author candidly admits, "none of my research brought me close to Helena herself" (xv). That said, Howard's book is remarkably successful in teasing out a life on the left from a variety of scattered sources. On the slim shelf of working class biography in British Columbia, the *Unknown Reformer* compares very favourably with such classics as Dorothy Steeves' *The Compassionate Rebel: E. E. Winch and the Growth of Socialism in Western Canada* (1960).

Howard is refreshingly unapologetic in justifying the study of reformers or reform, noting that key issues for which Gutteridge