

Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989, by Paul Tennant. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990. Pp. xvi, 305. \$39.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

After a century and a half of bluster, obfuscation, subterfuge, and outright bullying, the British Columbia government seems finally prepared to sit at the table and discuss the province's oldest and most intractable dispute: aboriginal land claims. The appearance of Paul Tennant's *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics* would be an important publishing event irrespective of the circumstances, but at this critical juncture in the history of Confederation's spoilt brat, it is doubly welcome. Tennant's purpose is "to describe the history of the land question in British Columbia and to reveal something of the remarkable achievements of the Indian peoples in their steadfast pursuit of their land rights through peaceful political means." In this he succeeds.

The first part of the book traverses terrain that has been diligently explored by other writers: the Douglas treaties, the reserve commissions, the McKenna-McBride business, the Nisga'a petition and the parliamentary inquiry of 1927. But Tennant brings fresh insights to these old controversies.

He questions — and I think on very good grounds — James Douglas's reputation as a man willing to give Indians all the land they wanted for their reserves and committed to the recognition of aboriginal title as a matter of principle. And he offers the first coherent account of the extension of Treaty 8 into the northeastern corner of the province and its implications for the recognition of aboriginal title. The analysis of the parliamentary hearings of 1927 is the best to date. Tennant shows up the crude unfairness of federal government tactics during these deliberations and the blatant contradictions of the committee's report.

After 1927 and an amendment to the Indian Act which more or less suppressed native political activity, agitation over the land issue went dormant. Tennant follows the story through the 1930s and 1940s, looking at the work of native organizations in those decades of ambiguity. There were other grievances that needed redress — education, economic rights, and so forth — but the question of aboriginal title was never lost sight of. In the less repressive climate of the 1950s and 1960s, the agitation surfaced once more, and Tennant leads us skilfully through the bewildering array of new native organizations that appeared and the attempt at finding a common voice — so important in being taken seriously in Ottawa. The book's greatest strength is its clear and concise analysis of the arguments put forward for and against aboriginal title in British Columbia.

Tennant correctly identifies a number of critical court cases which were instrumental in forcing serious soul-searching on the part of the federal and provincial governments. The White and Bob case of 1963 appeared to accept the application of the Royal Proclamation of 1763 to British Columbia, and this lent credence to a long-standing native historical argument. In 1973 the Supreme Court of Canada recognized that the Nisga'a had once had aboriginal title but couldn't decide if it still existed or not. This was enough, however, to bring the Trudeau government to the negotiating table. And in 1984 a land dispute involving the Musqueam band was decided in court with the judges accepting the principle of aboriginal title. More recently the British Columbia courts have shown a willingness to grant injunctions against resource companies wishing to exploit land claimed by the Indians. With the companies unhappy, the Social Credit government was willing to talk.

This is not a book for the general reader. It assumes a great deal of knowledge of British Columbia history, and the broader context of many events is often given but a passing nod. I have no problem with the facts and interpretations as such. Apart from a few minor slips (the spelling of "anomie" on p. 72 and the use of "alternate" instead of "alternative" on p. 147) it is a piece of work that is professionally and competently executed.

The native voice is heard throughout, and this, I believe, is a significant accomplishment. But many of the native personalities, with the exception of George Manuel, are a little flat and lifeless. We don't really come to know them on the page — they remain as faceless names. Perhaps this is due to prose that is itself often flat, but never, mercifully, bogged down in academic jargon.

Paul Tennant's *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics* will prove an invaluable source on native land claims and politics in British Columbia for many years.

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Three Men and a Forester, by Ian Mahood and Ken Drushka. Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 1990. Pp. 240. \$26.95 cloth.

Ken Drushka's *Stumped*, published in 1985, has helped countless British Columbians make sense of the forces shaping exploitation of the province's forests. Those hoping that the collaboration between Drushka and Ian Mahood would update and broaden the analysis and prescriptions offered