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Historian Press, and similar books and pamphlets such as could be recommended by the Newberry Library's Center for the History of the American Indian.

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**The Government and Politics of the Alberta Métis Settlements.** By T. C. Pocklington. Regina, Saskatchewan: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1991. 162 pages. \$26.00 paper.

In northern Alberta, there are eight Métis settlements, which have a combined area of 1,250,000 acres. It is the only collective Métis land base in Canada. The settlements were established in the last years of the Great Depression of the 1930s by a provincial government that was not more enlightened or tolerant than others but wanted a practical solution to the Métis, or mixed-blood, "problem." By establishing these settlements, however, the government admitted the "uniqueness" of the Métis and provided them with "homelands." The land was held according to the principle of usufructuary rights or "beneficial use," which resulted in a certain uneasiness among the Métis on the issue of security of landholding. The principles and policies leading to the establishment of Métis colonies were outlined in the Ewing Commission report of 1936 and were implemented pursuant to the Métis Population Betterment Act of 1938. Right from the start, the law specified that the Métis settlers should be represented on the board that provided the local government for each settlement. In fact, in the early days, a local manager—an official of the Métis Development Branch of the provincial government—made all the decisions of any consequence. But in the past five decades, the varied political experience has resulted in many changes, one of the more important being increased self-government at the local level through the settlement councils.

The Métis political experience is not unique. There were and remain controlling cliques (mainly extended family networks) and divisions in the settlements. Favoritism is an ongoing concern. Conflicts have also emerged at the provincial association level. The Federation of Métis Settlements of Alberta (FMSA), which represents the settlements, and the Métis Association of Alberta (MAA), which represents the Métis throughout the province, have

a tenuous relationship. There is evidence of a conservative approach in the settlements, whereas the Métis at large generally adopt a more militant stance. There are important differences on the issue of sovereignty and self-government. According to respondents in the two settlements surveyed, "a prudent, gradual and limited movement in the direction of greater political self-determination would be favored" (p. 127).

Between 1984 and 1989, important discussions and negotiations were carried out between the FMSA and the Alberta government on the issues of identity or Métisism, land ownership, and self-government. They resulted in what has been described as a "made in Alberta approach," or agreement that entrenched settlement land rights, provided for comanagement of resources, local self-government, and financial compensation. The implementation of the agreement will be important for Alberta as well as for the other prairie provinces with Métis populations.

The Métis in western Canada have also won an important victory recently at the federal level—the right to be included in section 91(24) of the Constitution Act of 1867, which means they have aboriginal status as defined by the Indian Act. The Manitoba Métis are pursuing unresolved land claims relating to the violation of sections 31 and 32 of the Manitoba Act of 1870 and have won the right to trial in a recent Supreme Court ruling (*Dumont v. Attorney General of Canada and Manitoba*). The Alberta Settlements experience and agreement may well serve as a model for other Métis, although the nonsettlement and urban situation are dramatically different and potentially more complex.

This study examines contemporary settlement politics at all levels, providing important insights "from the inside" as well as the views of government officials. The historical overview (chapter 1) is rather sketchy. A more thorough historical background could have provided a clearer understanding of Métis political tradition and twentieth-century Métis political views and strategies. The author does raise the argument of a continuing political tradition since Cuthbert Grant, Louis Riel, and Joseph Dion. The "laws and regulations" drawn up by the council of St. Laurent de Grandin (Saskatchewan) in the early 1870s were an important precedent to subsequent political actions of the Métis at Batoche in the 1890s and early 1900s. A sustained political "resistance" is also in evidence in Manitoba during the same period.

The author argues that there are no deep divisions or distinctions between the French and English Métis (p. 3). As noted, the

work of Irene Spry supports this argument, although a recent publication by Frits Pannekoek (*A Snug Little Flock: The Social Origins of the Riel Resistance 1869–70*) argues the opposite. Historically, there were some important cultural distinctions and occupational differences between the Métis and the “half-breeds,” as they called themselves. It may also be important to distinguish between the southern and northern Métis or to note whether a specific political tradition emerged in the settlements of northern Alberta.

The author does provide the reader with good background to the Alberta “colonies,” as they were called in the 1930s, especially the work of the Métis Association and the recommendations of the Ewing Commission. The review of the Ewing Commission report is important to the understanding of subsequent developments. The analysis of the political processes in the settlements is based on personal testimony or oral history data, but one might question the validity of drawing conclusions on the basis of interviews conducted in two out of eight settlements. The author does not forget the ordinary people in the settlements and explains their concerns as well as those of councillors who do not always represent them.

The section dealing with a model or the criteria for self-government is particularly insightful. The author reviews the legal and moral rights and the well-being approach and convincingly argues for the latter. His epilogue or assessment of the situation in Alberta raises important questions, such as the unsatisfactory resolution of the issue of self-government. The Euro-Canadian municipal government model does not accommodate the cultural perspective and experience of the Métis.

This study is one in a number of recently published works exploring the themes of Métis identity, self-government, and land claims. A publication by the Manitoba Métis Federation—Samuel W. Corrigan and Lawrence J. Barkwell, eds., *The Struggle for Recognition: Canadian Justice and the Métis Nation*—may also be of particular interest to researchers in this area.

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