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February 1992

Review of "The Government and Politics of the Alberta Metis Settlements" by T. C. Pocklington

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Binda, K. P., "Review of "The Government and Politics of the Alberta Metis Settlements" by T. C. Pocklington" (1992). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 64.
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The Government and Politics of the Alberta Métis Settlements. T. C. Pocklington. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 1991. xv + 162 pp. Selected bibliography \$26.00 paper (ISBN 0-88977-060-3).

With the emergence of native issues such as land claims and self-government in the Canadian constitutional debate, Pocklington's non-technical, informative, and exploratory book as emerged at a timely moment.

A void of scholarship about the Métis has been observed by historians such as Frideres and Friesen. Pocklington has attempted to fill that void, but acknowledges the complexity of his study since the "government and politics . . . as they function in small communities like the settlements is intimidating [as] it is difficult to identify the various players, much less to discover how they interact" (p. xiii).

Pocklington began with a review of Métis historiography and debunks the "convention view" and interpretation of Métis history as a brief "colourful episode in Canadian history" (p. 2). Rather, contemporary Métis history has

a “continuing tradition” (p. 4) with earlier Métis history. A map showing the historical-spatial dispersion of the Métis and their settlements would have enhanced the discussion.

The legal status of the settlements and their problems are highlighted. An interesting management concept the “informal code of conduct” (p. 24) is introduced, but not fully explored. This concept, referred to in organizational theory as “loophole management,” involves extra bureaucratic manoeuvres necessary for organizational success, particularly in innovative environments, not unlike the Métis settlement.

Chapter three provides a broad descriptive overview of organizations, institutions, and their interrelationships as they function within the context of the settlements. Illustrations showing administrative structures would have been helpful in following the discussion.

The next three chapters contain in-depth analyses and phenomenological insights into the internal workings of the Métis settlements, their organizations and their residents. The socio-political reality of the settlements is presented from an ethnomethodological perspective as vibrant living organisms politically constructed but socially sustained.

Similarly, the other two chapters examine the political attitudes, opinions and activities of “ordinary folks.” The final two chapters bring the reader directly into the current constitutional debate on the issues of Métism, land rights and self-government. Of three philosophical approaches to the issue of native self-government, the “legal,” the “rights-based” and the “well-being” approach, the last is favored because of its less “combative tone” and its promotion of “dialogue, negotiation and compromise” (p. 127). This approach led to the first historic 1989 agreement on land claims between Métis organizations and the Alberta government.

Pocklington ends his analysis by giving credit to the Métis “commitment to principle and political finesse” (p. 153) and the government’s “willingness to retreat” (p. 153) to a more flexible posture. He cautions about potential future problems as all Métis rights have not been fully settled and will therefore resurface again.

The book is conceptually and pedagogically well organized with a good methodological approach. It is a welcome addition in the arena of politics,

government, sociology, and native issues filling a void in the current Canadian constitutional debate. It should be a major library acquisition. **K. P. Binda**, *Geography and Education, Brandon University, Manitoba.*