

## Book Review

*From Treaty Peoples to Treaty Nation: A Road Map for All Canadians.*  
By Greg Poelzer and Ken S. Coates. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2015,  
337 pp including index. Reviewed by Georgina Martin.

Examining the political and social meaning of neo-liberal ideals in Canada consists of a focus on the market and the free movement of goods, while also considering how governments prefer to reduce spending on services such as education and health care. This book examines neo-liberal ideals and helps Canadians locate common ground within a neo-liberal discourse. Greg Poelzer and Ken Coates present a comprehensive overview of how Indigenous peoples can be considered in the restructuring of the political and economic landscape. *From Treaty Peoples to Treaty Nation: A Road Map for All Canadians* strongly lays out the debate to restructure Canada. Nonetheless, a central tenet of the discourse is the assumption that restructuring will ease the tensions between Treaty peoples and Canada, as a Treaty Nation, as a whole. I recommend that consideration from Indigenous perspectives will balance the debate.

The political, social, and educational considerations underpinning *From Treaty Peoples to Treaty Nation* is considering how the “debate over Aboriginal futures, if handled in a respectful and constructive manner, could build national awareness of the building blocks of Confederation and greater understanding of how a divisible Crown can operate” (278-9). In Part One, *Aboriginal Leaders and Scholars Point the Way*, the first chapter, “The Traditionalists,” is comprised of five authors who “emphasize a critique of the status quo, but none ... suggest how Aboriginal autonomy would work in practice” (45). That may be, but I admire the Indigenous scholarly views that are crucial for representing traditional practices drawn from lived experiences. The chapter “Treaty Federalism,” focuses on how “[t]reaty federalism represents an important constitutional and administrative option for Canada and could be the centrepiece of future efforts towards political reconciliation. The key to the concept is that Aboriginal peoples would be *consenting* to join Canada as full and respected partners in national federalism” (52). Much of this discussion offers alternatives and models for Aboriginal peoples to participate in

the Canadian federal political system by securing Aboriginal rights, yet I see no direct route to satisfy all Aboriginal communities. The chapter “Bridging the Solitudes” concludes the first section with a call to “create mutual understanding and to ensure respectful interaction between cultures in Canada” to find “the means to understand and accommodate Aboriginal people within society” (59). The ideas exposed in this chapter highlight the complex and controversial Aboriginal positions on legal, political, and constitutional entitlements as penned by Poelzer and Coates. As expected, the issues are intense and diverse, especially around the assertion of sovereignty.

Part Two considers *Non-Aboriginal Views on the Way Forward* in terms of “Legal Rights, Moral Rights, and Well-Being” and “Political and Institutional Approaches.” In expressing these views, Poelzer and Coates concur that “there is no single Aboriginal position on the issues at hand” and “there is no single non-Aboriginal perspective or line of argument” either (79). Continuing with “Legal Rights, Moral Rights, and Well-Being,” the strong debate separates into two camps—those who oppose special rights and arrangements for Indigenous peoples and those who support varying degrees of unfettered Indigenous autonomy. An addition to the discussion is that the “critique of Aboriginal self-government rests on firm commitment to the cultural survival of *Indians*” (101). This commitment appreciates the strengths of Aboriginal cultures as a refusal to being usurped by the priorities of the dominant society. The potential horror, according to Poelzer and Coates, would be replacing the non-Indigenous elite with an Indigenous ruling class.

In “Political and Institutional Approaches,” it is affirmed that “the answer to current issues lies in the exercise of institutionalized political power” (102). The scholars in this debate emphasize the need to reform political structures and extend Aboriginal governments and organizations the powers they need. I recognize that the positions and ideologies among the scholars are acutely polarized with an agreement that the current situation is not plausible, yet it seems that decisive actions are emerging.

In Part Three, *Coming at It from a Different Direction—Aboriginal Success Stories*, the first chapter, “Culture and Education,” begins by acknowledging the disparities and brings to the forefront the stark reality of Indigenous peoples’ erasure of their languages. There is hope—although Aboriginal students are underrepresented in education, the situation is continuously improving. A recent example is a class of anthropology students who uncovered rich history at a heritage site on the Red River in Manitoba. The find contributes to the importance of First Nations during

that era, especially in agriculture. This changes academic interpretation of the important role of First Nations as farmers.

The second chapter in this section, "Business and Entrepreneurship," conjures the growth of enterprises through Aboriginal entrepreneurship and industry partnerships. There is no shortage of models across the country, which show the growth of Aboriginal wealth both communally and individually. In "Governance and Civic Engagement," Poelzer and Coates recognize social capital as the ingredient to shape the determination of Aboriginal peoples. Robert Putnam describes social capital as, "those features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (155). The valued engagement with the rest of Canada is important. The approaches are key, especially for British Columbia, the most non-treaty province in the country. I see the path opening for repair and renewal.

Part Four focuses on *Steps towards Social, Political, and Economic Equality*. The first two chapters, "Global Lessons" and "Equality of Status" are straightforward: "Aboriginal people in Canada deserve ... full equality of opportunity with other Canadians" socially, politically, and economically in addition to the "recognition of their cultures, traditions, and Aboriginal treaty rights" (173). I recognize how positive plans could be forged based on international lessons and conventions, but multicultural models must be avoided. Multicultural models downgrade the significance of the "equality of status" of Indigenous peoples. Equality is described as "equal partners in the past, present, and future of Canada" (189) through meaningful participation. The chapter "Citizenship and a Commonwealth of Aboriginal Peoples" proposes to accommodate "fiscal and political realities, Aboriginal aspirations, non-Aboriginal expectations, and legislative and constitutional commitments" (213). The authors aim for all Indigenous groups in Canada to amalgamate under an arrangement of self-rule. Given the differences and diversity, I see this as a major challenge.

The last three chapters in this section, "Aboriginal Self-Government," "Community-Based Economic Well-Being," and "Finding Common Economic Ground" conclude Poelzer's and Coates's articulation of positive advances based on goodwill. Aboriginal self-government is seen to strengthen Canada's democracy, with the intent to sustain equal opportunity and promote Indigenous peoples' drive to achieve self-sufficiency. As we are in a new era of constitutional reform I expect that goodwill will be forged equally. There is a lot of work to be done with

Indigenous peoples to invite them into the relationship that Poelzer and Coates coin as a Treaty Nation.

The overarching question for me is how can divisive Canada, with historical discord and competing political and economic structures, accommodate the inclusion of Indigenous peoples? *From Treaty Peoples to Treaty Nation* fails to consider Aboriginal strategist Herb (Satsan) George and educator Dr. Dwayne Donald's sentiments that oppose neo-liberal restructuring. George recommends an inherent rights strategy, which means that Indigenous rights inherently pre-exist, and permission to exercise rights do not require external authority. His approach is based on five pillars: the people, land and territories, jurisdiction, governing institutions, and the resources to make it happen. He agrees that the battle for recognition has been accomplished and Aboriginal people will be responsible for themselves. Donald proposes repair and renewal. He asks, "What does it take to repair or renew the relationship?" His starting point is to return to the original spirit and intent of the partnership—the treaties. A deeper examination of Donald's question would defuse Canadians' refusal to engage and help them recognize their relations with the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.

#### References

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