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Review of *Elijah: No Ordinary Hero* By Pauline Comeau

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Elijah: No Ordinary Hero. By Pauline Comeau. Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1993. Photographs, sources, index. xi + 224 pp. \$16.95 paper.

A quiet "No" from the only Native member of Manitoba's legislature brought a dramatic halt to Canada's Meech Lake Accord in 1990. Designed as another attempt to establish an acceptable, functional governing agreement among the nation's provinces, Meech Lake was derailed over its slighting of the First Peoples of Canada. Forcing the role of aboriginals into the constitutional debate, Elijah Harper assumed a position of national prominence. For a man from the remote northern Ojibwa-Cree reserve of Red Sucker Lake, and for all of Canada, this was a startling moment. Pauline Comeau, a legislative reporter in 1990, traces Harper's journey to this moment, asserting that he was neither a pawn of white advisors nor a prophet for his own people.

Comeau's discussion of Harper's childhood reveals a broader picture of the lives of Canada's Native Peoples. Without explanation government health officials sent the young boy away from the reservation—an all too common occurrence—to hospital for six months where he had no parental contact. Harper's political activism, begun as a student at the University of Manitoba, led to his becoming chief of his home reserve, and then to venturing into provincial politics. Elected to the Manitoba legislature, he worked his way into the cabinet.

Comeau chronicles the events leading up to Harper's blocking the Meech Lake Accord, demonstrating how officials in Quebec, as well as in the Federal government, disregarded the First Nations. Through his skillful use of parliamentary procedure and the astute advice of white legal experts, Harper succeeded in shattering Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's grand design. Comeau is especially revealing in her account of the enormous pressure exerted by the Federal government as the deadline for provincial consent approached, drawing on personal interviews with Harper and others involved in the demise of Meech Lake.

Elijah: No Ordinary Hero offers a concise and solid account of this recent episode in the history of Canadian federalism and the man most responsible for its outcome. (The inclusion of maps showing the reserves and Harper's Manitoba riding would have been helpful.) Harper's forward appeals for unity among the First Peoples, a unity that existed in their opposition to Meech Lake and crystallized in Harper's famous "No."

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