

# Book Reviews

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The Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada, Collected Research Studies, vols. 38, 39, 58, University of Toronto Press, 1985.

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The Royal Commission on Canada's Economic Prospects was established in 1983 under the chairmanship of Donald Macdonald, a former Finance Minister in the cabinet of Pierre Elliott Trudeau. It was intended to be a modern dress version of Rowell-Sirois who, during the 1930s, examined the economic basis of Confederation and made recommendations which had a significant impact on policy-making for years thereafter.

The Macdonald Report is unlikely to be as influential, in part because our rapidly changing society has made economic analysis much more difficult. More important perhaps, the Conservative government of Brian Mulroney elected in 1984 has its own ideas about what to do about the economy. It has accepted certain recommendations such as freer trade with the United States, but is unlikely to use the report as a blueprint for future planning.

Aside from its report, the Macdonald Commission published 72 book-length studies in both official languages, English and French, on various political and economic subjects related to its mandate. The sheer quantity of material produced is a feather in the cap of the three research directors and the co-ordinators who authored or edited the studies, as well as the University of Toronto Press which did its usually competent job of publishing and promoting this bulk of information.

No single person could read all the studies, let alone try to review them. Therefore three volumes were selected that would seem to be of interest to students of political institutions. These were: #38 *Institutional Reforms for Representative Government*, #39 *Intrastate Federalism*, and #58 *The Courts and the Charter*.

Although they include studies by some of the brightest minds in Canada, the research lacks the originality, coherence and sense of purpose found in works produced by Rowell-Sirois or the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. Too much information is simply a reworking of old material. There is much duplication throughout the volumes and even within a single volume. Some can be attributed to pressure of time, but others remind one of the late Frank Underhill's observation about the intellectual life of Canadian journalists. He called it a monotonous process of taking in each others' laundry.

The essay by one of Canada's most respected political scientists, Vincent Lemieux, in volume 38, is particularly disappointing. "Referendum and Canadian Democracy" largely reproduces (with credit) previously published and easily accessible background information on referenda. He concludes, on the slimmest of evidence, that referenda are basically a good thing and should be used

In the same volume, a short piece by Peter Dobell makes the traditional case for party discipline in the parliamentary system. His argument is true as far as it goes, but is hardly more analytical than saying that the Speaker is essential to parliamentary government because no meeting can be held without one. Party discipline in Canada is not so much a product of the institution of Parliament as of the collective psyche or political culture of Canadians. The adoption of many proposals by the Special Committee on Reform of the House in February 1986 indicates that Members of Parliament are willing to be more adventurous than many experts in pursuit of reforms which could have the effect of reducing discipline.

In volume 39, professors Donald Smiley and Ronald Watts were asked to provide "a comprehensive overview of relations between our institutions of national government and the federal structure of our Canadian political system". They did. In fact it is probably something they do every year in their introductory courses on Canadian government. They set forth certain assumptions which appear to underlie many of the reform proposals floating around, including their own. They proceed to examine these assumptions and find, not surprisingly, that they are valid. They then propose several reforms including modified proportional representation for electing Members to the House of Commons, an elected Senate and greater provincial participation in the choice of Justices of the Supreme Court.

The question of reform of the Supreme Court is also examined in an article by Wayne Mackay and Richard Bauman in volume 62. They reject regional representation as a criterion for appointment and call for diversity and pluralism which is to be encouraged by establishment of a new appointing council. The council would not be an advisory body, but would enjoy the actual power of appointment. It would consist of thirteen members including at least seven women. This mix would not even make for a successful dinner party and little justification is provided for the privileged place accorded to sex in the appointment process aside from a footnote reference to an article in the *Dalhousie Law Journal* (1983).

One hesitates to tar every volume (or even certain other studies in these volumes) with the same brush, but the Macdonald Commission studies leave an overall impression of drift without mastery. Perhaps after all that is not a bad working definition of the Canadian economic and political system.

Gary Levy  
Editor  
*Canadian Parliamentary Review*