

In this short book, Mr Robertson examines the subject in terms of constitutional factors, financial factors and certain intangible factors which he lumps together under the heading "membership in the club".

On the constitutional side, he notes the territories have evolved by custom and practice from colonies governed by Ottawa to parliamentary democracies whose present form of government and administration bear little resemblance to that prescribed in the antiquated Yukon Act and Northwest Territories Act. Furthermore, unlike provinces, their present status is not protected in any constitutional sense since both depend entirely on federal legislation.

From the financial point of view, he notes that the percentage of grants received by the territories as a proportion of total revenues was over 50 per cent in 1984-85 compared to 28 per cent for the least wealthy province and considerably less for other provinces receiving equalization payments. More important, the very method of calculating is different. The tax yield in the territories is high relative to the national average, but low in relation to the cost of government. If the same formula were applied to the Territories as is used for the provinces neither the Yukon nor the Northwest Territories would be eligible for equalization payments!

Finally, Mr Robertson observes that while there is nothing preventing the creation of new provinces as long as eight of the present eleven members of the "federal-provincial club" agree, in fact the mathematics are carefully designed to entrench regionalism since the four Atlantic provinces or the four Western provinces now have an effective veto. Whether this is really of concern to the average politician, let alone the average Canadian, is another question; but as long as very influential members of federal and provincial bureaucracies continue to perceive things in this way it is probably best to give Mr Robertson's analysis the benefit of the doubt.

Indeed, one can easily imagine this book as a memorandum to cabinet and thereby appreciate the qualities that made Gordon Robertson such a force in Canadian politics. He takes multi-faceted and complicated issues, reduces them to their essentials, places them in a historical context, suggests a solution and anticipates objections. It is music to the ears of decision-makers.

His "solution" is the creation of "Autonomous Federal Territories" without provincial status. Essentially, he proposes to up-date present legislation to recognize the *de facto* situation and add a section to the constitution which would prevent the federal government from making unilateral changes to these acts in the future.

Canada is fortunate that Gordon Robertson continues to address himself to difficult public policy issues facing the country. It is even more fortunate that the Fathers of Confederation—whose imagination, foresight and courage pulled together into one nation antagonistic races spread thinly across a huge continent—did not have the benefit of some early version of Gordon Robertson telling them why it could not be done.

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Editor

Canadian Parliamentary Review

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NORTHERN PROVINCES: A MISTAKEN GOAL. By Gordon Robertson. The Institute for Research on Public Policy, Montreal, 1985.

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Gordon Robertson is well known as a former Clerk of the Privy Council and Cabinet Secretary from 1963 to 1975. Less well known is that he served previously for nearly a decade as Commissioner of the Northwest Territories and Deputy Minister of Northern Affairs. He is thus well qualified to speak on the contentious issue of whether Canada's two large but sparsely populated territories should be accorded provincial status in the near future.