

## RECENSIONS

cent developments in his thinking clearly portend the end of critical theory'' (p. 226).

This collection of essays contains a good deal of interesting material, touching a wide variety of issues in and relating to critical theory. Yet to the extent that the increasing availability of the relevant texts has tended to create a readership for critical theory, it has also, I think, diminished the overall utility of introductory compilations. Thus, while this volume is adequate as an introduction, I hope that theorists will move beyond introductions and into the sort of sustained theoretical inquiry that the literature invites.

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James Mallory, *Social Credit and the Federal Power in Canada*. University of Toronto Press, 1977, second edition, pp. xviii, 204, \$5.95 paper.

The immediate national preoccupation amongst Canadians about the nation's future has brought into the open more divisive factions than we normally care to acknowledge. Although the conflicts can be analyzed from numerous perspectives, sooner or later attention is focussed on the federal government. Can it respond to problems of regionalism, poverty, multiculturalism, bilingualism, energy and economic expansion? If so, what is the most appropriate response?

Since Canadian academics have long been preoccupied with both the constitution and the Québec question, there is no shortage of books and articles on these subjects. If anything, intellectuals within English Canada have been overly concerned with the stability of the Canadian national system, applauding any move by the federal government to strengthen its position within Confederation. They have argued that Canada's existence depended largely on a strong central government. One such book, *Social Credit and the Federal Power in Canada* has recently been re-issued in paperback, twenty-two years after the original edition.

This is not an age in which it is popular to support the federal government. First, and perhaps most foremost, the national Liberal Party has lost its public appeal. It is aging and while it is still capable of partisan manipulation that knows no decency, there are no new leaders emerging from the ranks. Luckily for them, the other three parties are in equally desperate straits so that voters are being forced to support governments that would otherwise be unattractive.

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Secondly, the Liberals are becoming less a force at the provincial level and might soon disappear altogether from that level of government. As political scientist John Wilson has argued, if we develop into a British-style two-party system, there will be no place for Liberals. At present, Liberals govern two small provinces, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, which have little influence on national politics. As a consequence, when federal-provincial negotiations take place, Liberals face an array of provincial politicians who would dearly love to see them out of office.

The third factor is that the important issues of today are more often than not provincial problems as defined by the B.N.A. Act. The financial troubles of our cities, urban transit, housing, education and social welfare are provincial responsibilities whereas other areas such as regional disparity, resource development and conservation, transportation and communications are spheres that are either shared or disputed in the courts. In other words, if the federal government wants to remain visible, it finds itself constantly fighting with provincial governments to share political credit. Incentive programs are the primary leverage as the federal government offers a share of its wealth if programs are carried out on its criteria. Needless to say, provinces resent this coercion and do everything within their power to minimize the federal presence.

Fourthly, the mood of the times is distinctly conservative insofar as citizens are rejecting the concept of a large and aggressive government. Instead there is retrenchment away from reform, away from new programs, away from state intervention. The desire for decentralization is not only evident in the Canadian system but also in the U.S. and in Britain. Decentralization is a response to facilitate local control of institutions viewed as irresponsible and out of touch with political demands.

The crisis brought on by the election of the Parti Québécois comes at the most inopportune time for the national government. Outside of Trudeau, whose strength and determination is still widely admired, Ottawa has no moral or political basis for responding to Quebec. The life and vigour of the best and brightest Québécois are on the side of Levesque. His supporters have gained power at a time when most people do not like Liberals, the federal government, its method of operating nor its size. People just want to be left alone. The magical, subliminal message of the Parti Québécois appeals to this impulse, to create an enclave and to be left alone.

Notwithstanding this fatalistic scenario, the federal government can react to the crisis with confidence that history is on its side. Mallory reflects this positive, optimistic approach. "There is nothing inevitable about the survival of Canada as a political entity. It will not be easy to adjust to the present difficulties. But then it never was." (p. XVIII) The withdrawal of Québec from Canada would quickly destroy the Liberal Party, a fact clearly understood by all concerned. Hence it is fighting for its survival as with all the cunning strategy

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its masters can muster. Given its history for pulling off the most contrived stunts, this situation is not insurmountable.

Apart from these partisan interests, there is the question of the federal government's constitutional obligation to make sure that the nation continues and that it protects the public interest from internal and external disruptions. The stability of the state, and the responsiveness of federal institutions, has been a central theme in Canadian political science literature; thus, there have been several good treaties over the years on the problems now being faced. Professor Mallory's work lies within this tradition by investigating the effect of a regional political demand on the solidity of the federal system.

The setting in this study was the Aberhart government first elected in Alberta in 1935. At the time Social Credit was thought to be a radical political force, the leaders of which with their strange ideas about monetary policy would destroy the Canadian economic system. The book covers a lot of ground that is now essentially taken for granted. However, the author reviews a time during which the federal government had no qualms about exercising its authority. As Mallory points out, challenges to the federal government were systemic, indicating populist responses to the inequalities inherent in both political and economic structures.

Ottawa's authority has been challenged consistently by provincial governments because of contradictory partisan interests, policy objectives and class interests. Professor Mallory argues that more often than not the provinces have generated new political demands (p. 180) in almost every area of social and economic policy which have forced the federal government into the position of reacting against regional activities. Viewing themselves as sources of innovation and reform, the provinces have resisted federal intervention and fought for greater autonomy.

The power of disallowance was the sledge hammer used by the federal government whenever it needed to ensure the continuation of the national interest over provincial or regional interests. It was invoked primarily against the West (p. 169), a part of the country long recognized for its radical, if at times somewhat oddball, schemes. The best known case was the disallowance in 1937 of Alberta's effort to control its own fiscal policy. Ottawa's firm position was that this was clearly federal jurisdiction. While they were willing to bargain and to assist with the expanding depression era provincial debt, the federal cabinet resisted surrendering their jurisdictional dominance in economic and fiscal matters.

The federal cabinet, moreover, has never responded favourably to provincial legislation that in any manner threatened its own view of national stability. Perhaps they shared Mallory's viewpoint that:

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There are those who regard it as a happy feature of Canadian federalism that the provinces are laboratories of social experiment in which a part of the Canadian people are free to explore novel avenues of public policy. Laboratories in unskilled hands may lead to unheralded explosions. The power of disallowance, in conjunction with other conservative forces in the constitution, minimizes the possibility of such disasters. In liberal theory the desirability of a variety of human experience may be a self evident proposition, but the laboratory technicians in such experiments are too often cast in the image of William Aberhart. (p. 180)

Thus Mallory writing in the fifties shared the attitude common in Canadian political science that Ottawa was the senior government, wiser and more responsible than the provinces. He was, of course, a product of his times as few researchers were involved in original field work in the provinces. We still lack a great deal of scholarly investigation of provincial and municipal politics in the first half of the century mainly because academics considered them peripheral to events in Ottawa, in every sense the nation's capital.

Disallowances were very common in early federal provincial relations particularly in the first twenty years until Laurier's government in 1896. The federal cabinet exercised its power (under section 56 and 90 of the B.N.A. Act) to disallow 112 provincial acts. They justified their actions on four grounds: (a) that the legislation was *ultra vires*, (b) that the act was prejudicial to a particular group such as a racial minority, (c) that it was prejudicial to private interests or (d) it was contrary to the federal notion of sound and responsible government action. Since the provinces reacted strenuously to these interventions, many challenged the federal government in the courts. Many judicial decisions particularly in the late nineteenth century favoured the provinces and gradually these "lesser" governments established grounds for their demands for legislative independence to develop their own policies.

The Canadian federal system has operated differently since the thirties inasmuch as we are all probably more familiar with televised conference confrontation, federal-provincial agreements and all provincial gatherings than with arbitrary federal action. It is no longer feasible from a political perspective at any rate for the federal government to thwart a provincial program by exercising its power of disallowance. Richard Simeon's argument (in his *Federal-Provincial Diplomacy*) is that the bargaining strategy amongst civil servants accounts for the resolution of most inter-governmental disputes. If this is the case then disallowance is far too extreme a weapon where the objective is consensus,