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**Review of Prairie Politics and Society: Regionalism in Decline By
Roger Gibbins and The Making of the Modern West: Western
Canada Since 1945 Edited by A. W. Rasporich**

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Prairie Politics and Society: Regionalism in Decline. By Roger Gibbins. Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 1980. \$12.95.

The Making of the Modern West: Western Canada Since 1945. Edited by A. W. Rasporich. Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 1984. \$12.95.

Both of these books address regionalism in Western Canada. *Prairie Politics and Society*, written by a political scientist from the University of Calgary, emphasizes the socio-economic development of the prairie provinces, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, providing an integrated examination of prairie politics throughout the twentieth century. *The Making of the Modern West*, with its mid-century focus, provides a collection of varied descriptive and analytic essays about all aspects of economic, social, and political life in the prairie provinces. Both books are well worth reading.

Canadian readers will benefit from the scholarly attention that details the realities of those vital provinces. Statesiders will be even more rewarded as readers, although their interests may not be as keen as those of their Canadian counterparts, because reading about another political system, especially that of a nation so close to the United States in culture and location, brings one's own into relief. These books implicitly bring forth similarities and differences between Canadian and United States prairie/plains. For example, agriculture is troubled in both countries but the abundance of oil in the prairies changes the economic meaning and the political responses to this trouble in Canada. After reading these books, an American can better understand the much discussed and current Canadian self-description of their "branch plant economic status" relative to the U.S., at least for Western Canada. Finally, for all those North Americans grappling with the methodological difficulties of defining or operating regional entities, these two books become required reading.

Gibbins finds that regionalism in the prairie has lost much of its earlier political meaning. Progress, modernization, and especially the emergence of agribusiness from small farms have permanently diminished the differences between this region and the rest of Canada. With an impressive array of data, Gibbins shows western Canadians are politically integrated into national society through economics, culture, and lifestyle. Prairie populism and its radical features are "in retreat." Political cooperation with other provinces is on the increase as the prairie province governments increase their own strength and bargaining power vis-a-vis the remainder of Canada.

As reviewers, we based our judgments of these books on three criteria. Were they informative and welcome additions to the literature? Were they researched? Were they well-written, well-organized, and well conceived? On each count, the Gibbins book rates high. There are several minor quibbles. A

political scientist might like to see a more sophisticated analysis of political behavior even though the one here nicely serves its purpose. Several unsubstantiated value judgments find their way into the book. For instance, on pages 58-59, the author contends, without explanation, that third party politics are less effective than two party politics. Readers also, in several cases, need more information. Social Credit, for example, is dealt with extensively in terms of its political influence and relationships, but the reader is left to wonder about its basic ideology. None of these criticisms lessen Gibbins's contribution, however. Our only serious disagreement is with the initial discussion of regionalism. Much of that seems artificial and contrived, and the author never does convince us that the three provinces really comprise a distinct region. Perhaps the author should have contended that, on several political grounds, these provinces often behaved and were perceived as a separate political entity that gained a regional label. Such a conclusion might aid further research into North American political regionalism.

The Making of the Modern West, a product of the Western Canadian Studies Conference of 1981, offers seventeen essays focusing on far-ranging structural trends and changes in Western Canada after World War II. Although the papers do not share any common integrative theoretical or analytical framework, they do use two approaches, the analysis of basic changes underlying the economic development and "modernization" of the region and the description of the myriad consequences and responses to such changes.

Economic development in the postwar era is consistent with the Canadian prairie's history of "periods of euphoric expansion and traumatic retrenchment" in the face of vagaries in markets for energy and commodities (B. Barr). Impersonal forces and events, external to the region, distort economic development, giving rise to new trends. For example, technological changes undermine the family farm; improved markets for energy along with more

effective ways of recovering oil and gas accelerate development accompanied by rapid urbanization. In perhaps the best article in the book, Norrie analyzes modernization in conjunction with the activist political responses of "province-building" provincial governments. He concludes that Western Canada's "hinterland economy" often prevents regional elites from determining their own destiny. Market prices and financial and governmental decisions made outside Western Canada undermine the capacity for local control. Similarly, Hardwick discusses the uncontrollable onslaught of urbanization and the rise of a "post industrial" service sector which is rapidly shifting population away from traditional resource and agricultural sectors.

Many of the same changes are discussed by J. Barr, Wright, and Foran with specific reference to Alberta. All are concerned with the dynamics of the "oil era" and what will happen as the boom subsides. J. Barr sees hope in the development of heavy oil and oil sands. Wright argues that Albertan prosperity has been a fortuitous result of a temporary energy shortage. The province, and by implication the region, must reorient itself realistically for a post oil era. Foran personalizes the growth period of Alberta's energy boom. Paradoxically, his emphasis on the development of technology and the role of unique entrepreneurs tends to underscore that what happened in Alberta can happen only once.

The pace, scope, and depth of change have strained the fabric of Western Canadian life. Gibbins, Elton, and Blake deal with "Western alienation." Although the authors differ somewhat on the nature and importance of alienation, all tend to see it as stemming from the region's marginal status in the national political system, its role as economic hinterland, and its small, potentially declining, population. Driedger contributes to the discussion of Western alienation by viewing the region as interacting with other parts of Canada and the United States along "regional axes" which contribute cultural uniqueness to the West and provide sources of conflict.

The rest of the articles deal with other changes. Smith and Card are concerned with the transition from "rural" to "urban." Smith focuses on urbanization data from the three prairie provinces while Card offers "micro-analysis" of the 1950s. Both writers show the loss of distinctive rural identity and culture (quite parallel to what has happened in the United States). Bessai and Varley summarize trends in theatre and art respectively with emphasis on the context of a changing, urbanizing Western Canada. Both point out the decline of a distinctive prairie culture in the face of penetration by national and international cultural forces. Finally, the Boan article, oriented toward administrators rather than historians, deals with current conflicts in the Canadian health care system.

Articles vary in quality but most are well researched, well organized, and well written. If there is a substantive flaw, it is a lack of emphasis on the responses of provincial governments to the myriad changes in the Canadian West in the post war era. The reader yearns for more specific analyses of the roles, policies, ideologies, and conduct of New Democratic and Social Credit governments, for example. Such would have enhanced the book considerably.

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