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Regions of Canada* by James N. McCrorie and Martha L.
MacDonald**

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The Constitutional Future of the Prairie and Atlantic Regions of Canada.
James N. McCrorie and Martha L. MacDonald, eds. Regina, Saskatchewan:
Canadian Plains Research Center, 1992. xi + 346 pp. \$26.00 paper.

The Canadian Plains Research Center has published eighteen papers which were presented at the November 1991 conference. The conference sought to identify common interests and strategies for two of Canada's peripheral regions and their seven provinces in the country's ongoing constitutional reform process. These provinces, the Atlantic region of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick, and the prairie provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, share a long history of grievances over perceived domination of national policymaking by the populous central provinces of Ontario and Quebec.

Most of the book's essays are supplied by academics who write about their own region and direct little attention to the other. Many papers resemble a literature review, with extensive and useful references to existing work on their subject. The format does have its shortcomings. There is much repetition as the same territory is explored again and again. Contributors are identified only by their place of employment. We learn nothing about their backgrounds, academic disciplines, or fields of specialization. The editors present no essay to summarize the perspectives and arguments of the conference participants.

A few common themes emerge. The province-building phenomenon of the past three decades, in which provincial governments have secured greatly enhanced capability to shape their provinces' destinies, stimulates provincial but not regional identities. As a result, prospects for close interprovincial cooperation within regions are weakened. Provincial governments benefit politically by exaggerating each province's distinctiveness and undermining federal authority over their territory. Many contributors agree that certain institutional arrangements especially Canada's Senate and tightly disciplined political parties should be restructured to increase peripheral regions' involvement in Ottawa policymaking. However, they reach no consensus on specific proposals for institutional reform.

Certain essays warrant special attention. Margaret Conrad and especially Wade MacLauchlan assess the Atlantic provinces' situation at this juncture. They observe that these "have-not" provinces, long dependent on federal assistance, must define for themselves a role which the region can play in a future certain to bring reduced federal transfers. Ottawa is determined to limit spending, encourage competitiveness, and move closer to the United States. Because these priorities work against Atlantic Canada, the region must accommodate itself to unfavorable new realities.

Leon Theriault's essay on the French-speaking Acadians of New Brunswick relates how his unique community, with one-third of its province's population, has gained linguistic security and a share of political power since the 1960s. This success story underlines the sharp interprovincial cultural differences in Atlantic Canada. It refutes the perception, common outside the region, of Atlantic homogeneity on constitutional and other issues.

Therese Arsenault, in the essay which most closely compares the two regions, observes that Alberta's oil and natural gas-generated wealth decisively alienates the province from its poorer prairie neighbors on economic and related political and constitutional issues. Indeed, Manitoba and Saskatchewan economically resemble the Atlantic provinces more than they resemble Alberta. Even so, all seven provinces can cooperate to reform national institutions to end perceived Central Canadian domination. They have little else in common, but they can pursue a narrow joint mandate in constitutional talks.

In summary, these papers make helpful contributions to our separate appreciation of each region's current situation in Canada's federal system and its interest in constitutional reform. Most usefully, they identify obstacles which impede the efforts of each province and region to influence Canada's constitutional restructuring. **Howard Cody**, *Department of Political Science, University of Maine, Orono*.