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Review of *The Institutionalized Cabinet: Governing the Western Provinces* by Christopher Dunn

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The Institutionalized Cabinet: Governing the Western Provinces. Christopher Dunn. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995. xiv+333 pp. Tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$C44.95 cloth (ISBN 07735-12883-7).

The Institutionalized Cabinet seeks to discover the forces behind the emergence and persistence of the major change in government cabinets in three of Canada's four western provinces: Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia (Alberta declined to participate). For Christopher Dunn, the change itself is quite clear: the traditional or unaided cabinet of the past has been transformed into the more complex institutionalized cabinet. Less evident, though, are the causes of this development. Attempts have been made to explain the appearance of the institutionalized cabinet in both Western Canada and elsewhere in the nation, but they have yielded few insights. There are significant gaps in our understanding of the modern cabinet, and Dunn's book tries to rectify this situation.

It largely succeeds in this endeavor, laying out nicely the main attributes of the unaided and the institutionalized cabinet. The unaided cabinet has few committees, minimal central staff, no real planning, and is in many cases dominated by the premier; the institutionalized cabinet thrives on cabinet committees, central agency officials, planning mechanisms, collegial decision-making, and a premier who is more ringmaster than boss. With this distinction in hand, Dunn demonstrates how cabinets in the three provinces have moved from one type to the other. In Saskatchewan, the transformation came early, with the emergence of socialist governments in the 1940s. Both Manitoba and British Columbia had to wait longer, but they, too, eventually adopted the trappings of the institutionalized cabinet. Equally important, the institutionalized cabinet, once embraced, became a mainstay in all three provinces.

Though the chapters on the respective provinces are good and quite rich in detail, the payoff for the reader is the conclusion. Here, Dunn illuminates the factors responsible for the initiation and persistence of the institutionalized cabinet in the three western provinces. Ideology (both left and right wing varieties), historical precedents, and simple pragmatism are counted among the most important sources of the modern cabinet structure. As for the forces explaining its persistence, the book emphasizes the desire for political and financial control, the failings of the unaided cabinet, the aim of premiers to remain influential, and sheer inertia. The final chapter also includes interesting observations about the effects of the institutionalized

cabinet on the major players in the executive and offers the intriguing suggestion that the institutionalized cabinet itself may one day be superseded in the western provinces.

Dunn's study does have its weaknesses. Much time is spent describing the structure of the institutionalized cabinet, but without offering a glimpse of the cabinet in action. Some causative factors appear ill-defined (such as pragmatism), while others get little attention (such as the increasing interdependence of government policies). A more serious concern is the effort to shove all contemporary cabinet structures into the single institutionalized mold. The relevant evidence suggests there is enough variation among cabinet structures to warrant a belief that the modern cabinet is a sophisticated entity that resists easy categorization.

Despite these concerns, the book contributes to an appreciation of the evolution of the cabinet in Canada. In a more limited sense, it also does the same for cabinets in other locales, for the institutionalized cabinet is not unique to Canada. In most modern democracies, including the United States, something similar to what has occurred to the government executive in Western Canada has taken place. Accordingly, *The Institutionalized Cabinet* speaks to a large audience. **Paul Barker**, *Brescia College, University of Western Ontario*.