

of a false majority is not worth the price to parliamentary democracy is well stated, and Russell offers well-thought-out solutions for how minority governments could be made more stable.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the secondary argument for electoral reform running through his text. While promoting electoral reform is not his primary objective, his arguments in favour of minority government effectively “serve to counter” the common refrain that, since electoral reform would produce more apparently unstable minority governments, it must be avoided (3–4). This argument is subtle and often left unstated but certainly serves as a leitmotif throughout the text. His utilization of New Zealand in chapter five is particularly well suited to this secondary argument, considering its status as a Westminster democracy with proportional representation.

One critique is Russell’s optimism toward confidence and supply agreements. He recommends these agreements to stabilize minority governments and notes that recent occurrences make them more likely going forward (144). More pessimism is perhaps merited. The Green–NDP accord in British Columbia, which he cites, serves as a lesson in why parties may avoid this form of stabilization in the future. Despite seeing some policy victories, the accord failed to prevent the NDP from calling an advantageous snap election and saw the Greens lose support compared to their previous electoral performance. Electorally, the lesson seems to be that minor parties should avoid these agreements as they may prove costly. Though Russell, of course, accepts that a key flaw with these accords at present may be an electorate that punishes compromise (156).

Regardless, *Two Cheers for Minority Government* is a powerful argument for minority governments. Its review of the record of these governments is useful for reference purposes, and I believe that the argument would be well suited to classes on Canadian politics, particularly as it challenges assumptions many Canadians have toward minority governments. I would recommend this book to any student or scholar of Canadian politics.

Building a Special Relationship: Canada-US Relations in the Eisenhower Era, 1953–61

Asa McKercher and Michael D. Stevenson. 2024. Vancouver: UBC Press, pp. 334.

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Until recently, some might have assumed that the historically close and largely amicable relationship between the United States and Canada was so natural as to be inevitable, such that it could not be otherwise. The second administration of President Donald Trump might well have shattered that illusion for the current moment, but Asa McKercher and Michael D. Stevenson’s recent book demonstrates that a close relationship was not a given in the mid-twentieth century, either.

In *Building a Special Relationship*, the two historians carefully examine how the two countries initially became so closely bound in the Eisenhower era, some seven decades ago. As their title suggests, the relationship did not merely develop naturally on its own; it was built, over time, by the hard work of American and Canadian politicians and public servants. The authors claim that other scholars have neglected “to provide an overarching interpretation of bilateral dealings during this period” (p. 9), a shortcoming that they aim to remedy.

For McKercher and Stevenson, Eisenhower was perhaps the primary actor in building the relationship, but he worked closely with two different Canadian Prime Ministers during his presidency: Louis St. Laurent and John Diefenbaker. And all three leaders relied on various aides

and “gifted diplomats” (p. 13), especially Lester B. Pearson and John Foster Dulles, but also Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs Howard Green. The book is divided into two parts (one for each PM), each consisting of three chapters.

Under St. Laurent, the authors examine differences between the US and Canada regarding economic co-operation, conflicts around the globe and nuclear arms. And under Diefenbaker, they analyze the countries’ different if converging economic interests, approaches to the Cold War in the developing world and continental defence. The authors contend that ultimately, “The Eisenhower era saw Canada drawn fully, if uneasily, under the American aegis” (p. 88).

This is not some throwback to the halcyon days of a bygone era, as the book demonstrates clearly that difficulties and unpleasanties in the relationship are not just contemporary phenomena. For example, in the economic realm, the book discusses tariffs and contentious trade restrictions on oats, barley, wheat, rye, fish, turkeys, lead, zinc and petroleum, as well as controversies over pipelines for oil and gas. As McKercher and Stevenson explain, “The very depth and breadth of the close economic relationship between Canada and the United States meant that there was ample room for conflict” (p. 51).


And in national security policy, despite a broad “consensus on the necessity of containing Soviet aggression” (p. 186), there were significant differences between the US and Canada over nuclear arms, defence production and military co-operation, at times against a background of rising Canadian nationalism and concern with maintaining sovereignty. The authors note Diefenbaker’s complaint that Americans tended to confer with Canada only when they wanted something, as he said to an aide, “to hell with them” (p. 184).

But those differences and difficulties are juxtaposed by descriptions of a “convergence of interests” (p. 7), “unity of purpose” (p. 173) and “tolerant accommodation” (p. 234). One gets the sense that considerations of good will and fair play also played a crucial role. Indeed, McKercher and Stevenson quote Eisenhower’s directions to a negotiator, “When you’re dealing with those Canadians . . . be so fair that you could move on their side of the table and feel comfortable” (p. 23). That sentiment might be in short supply in the Trump era, but it was a factor in establishing the relationship in the 1950s.

The book draws extensively on archival sources from both sides of the border, as well as academic literature, and it is quite detailed. But it is also very readable and accessible. As such, it is suited not just for a variety of scholars but also for a non-academic audience. Political scientists might desire more clarity about the relative importance of interests and individuals, ideas and institutions or leaders and subordinates, as well as the constraints of domestic politics on international co-operation. But the book resists a simplistic or monocausal account and suggests that it all mattered, that the “special relationship” created in the mid-twentieth century was the product of many people and forces. If in the future the US–Canada relationship needs to be rebuilt, this book is an outstanding guide for how it was done the first time.

The Consulting Trap: How Professional Service Firms Hook Governments and Undermine Democracy

Chris Hurl and Leah B. Werner. 2024. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, pp 196

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The pursuit of efficiency has been a central force in shaping human societies, influencing various developments from machinery to the organization of public institutions. This same