

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

drive for efficiency was the underlying motive in the New Public Management (NPM) model, which aimed to make governments more pragmatic, business-like and market-oriented. NPM marked a shift away from the traditional model of civil service delivery toward public-private partnerships and the privatization of various services. This transformation gave rise to the “contract state,” increasing dependence on consultants within the public sector (p. 55). This evolution has not only raised questions about the quality of services and accountability but also sparked concerns about the democratic process itself, leaving us to ask: who is actually making the decisions?

The Consulting Trap by Chris Hurl and Leah B. Werner answers this question by offering a compelling analysis of how transnational professional service firms (TPSFs) have entrenched themselves within government structures under the guise of efficiency. The authors provide a detailed narrative demonstrating how TPSFs established deep roots and extracted significant profits while remaining shielded from accountability under the cloak of “commercial sensitivity” (p. 23). This lack of transparency continues to allow them to operate with minimal oversight, thereby compromising democratic governance and public sector integrity. The power of these firms creates a vicious cycle that erodes democratic decision-making and accountability over time (p. 10).

The book further highlights how TPSFs, despite skepticism from both inside and outside traditional public service circles, have managed to expand in scale and influence, fundamentally reshaping the public sector. Positioned as standard setters (p. 41), they wield immense power, not only advising on policy but also shaping regulations that favour their interests. The TPSFs act as architects of tax avoidance strategies (p. 61) for their wealthy clients while simultaneously drafting the rules that govern both their clients and themselves, creating a scenario where their influence primarily serves their own benefit, often at the cost of the public sector.

Hurl and Werner effectively argue that these firms have created a self-perpetuating cycle of dependency (p. 111). As public agencies increasingly rely on TPSFs, they lose their capacity to deliver essential services. This erosion of internal expertise makes public institutions more vulnerable, further entrenching TPSFs as indispensable actors in the administration of governments (p. 84). These firms leverage their vast networks and access to information across various domains and regions, amplifying their control over public service delivery.

What sets *The Consulting Trap* apart is its dual focus: not only does it critique the systemic flaws and undue power of TPSFs, but it also empowers readers by highlighting the potential for local resistance and citizen activism. The authors illustrate how communities and local governments can challenge the authority of these firms and strive for a reassertion of democratic values in public service provision. The book serves as a practical guide for citizens and activists who seek to resist the commodification of public administration and reclaim decision-making power.

One of the book’s most compelling examples comes from Toronto, where city councillors, public workers and residents successfully pushed back against KPMG’s recommendations to slash essential services. By means of a 25-hour deputation process, they demonstrated that community members often possess more relevant and nuanced insights into their own needs than high-paid consultants.

Furthermore, Hurl and Werner uncover the “professional” conundrum of TPSFs by highlighting the contradictory nature of being assumed to be experts without having secured professional accreditation. While other occupations such as medicine or law require accreditation, the TPSFs have managed to get by without fulfilling that requirement, leading to the authors critiquing them as “slippery” (p. 13).

While recognizing the significance of professional accreditation (pp. 13, 140), the book falls short of articulating best practices or advancing policy recommendations for governmental adoption. Although it elucidates various policy programs that have been implemented (p. 140),

an exploration of best practices could have edified the public not merely on methods of resistance, but also offered insights into the policies required for systemic transformation. For instance, a compelling argument could have been advanced for the self-regulation of the consulting profession via third-party intermediaries, which would serve to enhance the regulatory framework for consultants in the public sector. By integrating comprehensive policy recommendations, the book could have substantially augmented the public's understanding of how consultants might be regulated more effectively by governmental bodies. Resistance, in this context, should be perceived as a means to an end; the ultimate objective must be the comprehensive transformation of the prevailing system itself.

The Consulting Trap offers a powerful critique of the influence TPSFs wield over governments and the dangers this poses to democracy. The book is essential reading for anyone concerned about the future of public services and the capacity of governments to maintain independence and accountability. By urging citizens to challenge the dominance and supposed expertise of TPSFs, Hurl and Werner provide a blueprint for reclaiming democratic processes and rebuilding a transparent and accountable public sector.

History Has Made Us Friends: Reassessing the Special Relationship between Canada and the United States.

Donald E. Abelson and Stephen Brooks, eds., Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2024, pp. 338

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As Abelson and Brooks emphasize in the Introduction to their edited book, the concept of the special relationship “that originated many decades ago, in circumstances very different from those that exist today, continues to have a serious hold on the Canadian imagination. It remains, at least implicitly, the yardstick against which the condition of the Canada–US relationship is measured” (5). The book seeks to offer a fresh and more nuanced perspective on the dynamics and nature of the special relationship by tackling an old and familiar concept, for many rather slippery and politically contested, and recasting it in ways that are more fluid and manageable.

The argument is that the special relationship has been understood too narrowly by those who, in recent decades, have dismissed it as a relic of times past or indeed as something that never truly existed except at the level of political rhetoric. In the Introduction, the editors begin by examining the origins and history of the idea of the special relationship, its various meanings and how it has been conceptualized. They recall Charles Doran for whom the Canada–US relationship has few parallels in terms of scope or amity. For Doran, the special relationship operates on two rails, one structural and the other involving politics and policy. At the structural level, the Canadian–American relationship continues to be unique or special as no other pair of countries can demonstrate the combination of close governmental interaction, institutional ties and buffers, pacific conflict resolution and extensiveness of cross-border bureaucratic and private sector activity. The policy level, however, has not exhibited the same consistency, as it has had its ups and downs along various contexts, leaders and administrations. Yet, the special relationship has never depended on personal relations at the top, although these have sometimes made an important difference, owing to the structural characteristics undergirding Canadian–American relations. In the subsequent chapters, the recent state and likely future trajectory of Canada–US relations are assessed to determine whether the concept of the special relationship