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Over the Cliff? Acting Now to Avoid New Brunswick's Bankruptcy

Richard Saillant

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Over the Cliff? is the debut publication from the Institute for Research on Public Policy and Public Administration's premiere collection called the Roméo LeBlanc Series on public policy. In it, Saillant illustrates the many challenges facing New Brunswick, long-term historical reasons for why the province is in its current state, and provides recommendations for moving forward and avoiding the cliff. Saillant is clear about whom he expects his readers to be: everyone who hopes to create a better New Brunswick. In an effort to honour provincial bilingualism and his own Acadian roots, the book has been published in both French and English. He avoids laying blame on certain politicians, policy makers or external factors and instead delivers a poignant yet easy-to-read introduction to finances, federalism and public policy. He does not fail to explain concepts that are not widely known about, such as Canada's division of powers and the nature of transfer payments, among others.

This work is sectioned into six relatively short chapters, not including Saillant's introduction or the preface by Donald Savoie. The first chapter is focused on fiscal sustainability, which is essentially the foundation for Saillant's thesis, that it is the culmination of a demographic decline and lack of revenues, among other things, that have contributed to New Brunswick's fiscal *unsustainability*. These are the subject of later chapters, including demography, federal transfers, public spending and economic growth. Saillant returns to his main thesis often, which is that the status quo in New Brunswick is *not* sustainable and is foreshadowing events that will most surely take place in other provinces in the coming years. Saillant does not fail to shock the reader; his writing is very persuasive and clear and he effectively uses statistics to show how truly in trouble the province is. Among many other statistics, after showing that New Brunswick has aged 40 per cent faster than the rest of Canada in 40 years and only managed 0.2 per cent annual growth since 2008, it becomes increasingly clear how the province has fared, and foreshadows what the future could be like (27, 117).

In the final chapter dedicated to steering away from the proverbial cliff, Saillant entertains the notion of a constitutional case for equalization, and details his own plan for fixing the economy: raising taxes and cutting program spending. *Over the Cliff* concludes by calling New Brunswickers to action: to change our expectations, stop rewarding politicians who promise us the moon and seriously begin to debate how we can grow revenues and foster growth as a province, namely, by seriously considering natural gas exploration.

While *Over the Cliff* has plenty of benefits and strengths, it is not without weaknesses. Saillant writes clearly though with a certain bias, primarily marked by the previously mentioned concluding statement: "[the province must begin to] seriously [debate] the issue of natural gas exploration" (151). The subject is contentious and the issue is a delicate and dividing one within the province. While he urges the public to consider it, he simply states his opinion and concludes the book. This leads into another weakness within *Over the Cliff*: there is very little critical analysis. The text is incredibly rich with statistics, history and information; however, it does not give explanations or give details as to what went wrong, why or potential alternatives to fixing these problems other than raising taxes which, alone, could very well cripple the already poor population. With more critical analysis, perhaps more qualitative

research or more explanation beyond statistics, Saillant could have produced a richer text. On the other hand, the purpose of this book is to be accessible, and including more critical analysis might have kept it from being as concise. While Saillant is quick to advocate for natural gas exploration, he does not delve into any other divisive topics among New Brunswickers, like bilingualism. The book could have provided an opportunity to make a strong case for or against bilingualism; however Saillant dismisses it as an economic driver, not a burden, and continues on.

In short, *Over the Cliff* is Richard Saillant's pragmatic take on where the province is heading if serious changes are not made to fiscal and economic policy. The book does exactly what it sets out to do: it is a short, easy to read and accessible to all New Brunswickers. Using past decades and plenty of statistics to show how we got to be a "failing province," Saillant outlines past changes to healthcare policy, federalism and equalization reforms. He paints a bleak picture—albeit one that is arguably true. *Over the Cliff* is a must-read for public servants, politicians, and citizens not only in New Brunswick but abroad. Let it be a reminder to recognize smoke signals and act.

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La communication politique, 3^e édition

Jacques Gerstlé et Christophe Piar

Armand Colin,

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Les ouvrages d'introduction à la communication politique en langue française ne sont pas nombreux. Aux côtés de la *Sociologie de la communication politique* de Philippe Riutort (collection « Repères », La Découverte, 2007) et de *La Communication politique : état des savoirs, enjeux et perspectives* dirigé par Anne-Marie Gingras (Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2003), *La Communication politique* de Jacques Gerstlé couvre une plus grande partie de ce champ interdisciplinaire et, à cet égard, tient lieu de manuel pouvant être utilisé dans le cadre de cours de premier cycle universitaire. Les lecteurs familiers avec les versions précédentes publiées aux Presses universitaires de France en 1992, puis chez Armand Colin en 2004 et 2008, ne seront pas déçus avec cette nouvelle édition, cosignée par Christophe Piar.

La première partie – le livre en compte deux – a une portée essentiellement conceptuelle et théorique. Le premier chapitre contraste des définitions de la communication politique inspirées par diverses approches (comportementaliste, structuro-fonctionnaliste, interactionniste et dialogique) et met en relief les dimensions symbolique, pragmatique et structurelle du champ. Le chapitre 2 expose la notion d'espace public et sa modernisation sous l'effet de la médiatisation, de la rationalisation de la compétition (avec le marketing politique et les enquêtes d'opinion, en particulier) et de la publicité politiques. Le troisième chapitre introduit le lecteur aux principaux paradigmes qui marquent l'étude des effets persuasifs de la communication politique au niveau micro (les effets direct, d'amorçage et de cadrage) et macro (par exemple, les thèses du média-malaise et du cercle vertueux).

La deuxième partie est consacrée aux pratiques de communication politique. Elle repose en bonne partie sur des études empiriques, le propos étant illustré par de nombreux exemples et tableaux de données. Le chapitre 4 est consacré à la conquête du pouvoir. On y expose la typologie, maintenant classique, des campagnes prémodernes, modernes et postmodernes. Les campagnes électorales y sont présentées comme des affrontements symboliques marqués par « l'interaction d'interprétations stratégiquement orientées de la situation politique » (119). Le chapitre 5 porte sur l'exercice du pouvoir qui prolonge en une campagne permanente les efforts communicationnels déployés avant les élections.