Although a number of the case studies secured information by interviewing knowledgeable public servants, the information secured in this manner is discussed at a higher level. As in other studies, the person interviewed is a senior public servant—namely, someone authorized to speak publicly about the case. I would have liked to see working-level personnel interviewed as well, as they are usually the best informed, but this is often not permitted by public services.

This book would make a good text in a course exploring policy diffusion and transfer and in one dealing with the topics addressed by the case studies. Scholars could appropriately reference the book on those topics as well.

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The Rowell-Sirois Commission and the Remaking of Canadian Federalism

Robert Wardhaugh and Barry Ferguson, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021, pp. 350

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A cynical person might argue that royal commissions are mechanisms for governments to postpone action on a contentious issue until tempers have cooled and/or people have lost interest. Robert Wardhaugh and Barry Ferguson would disagree. Their book *The Rowell-Sirois Commission and the Remaking of Canadian Federalism* shows that analysis of these commissions reveals a wealth of information about debates and understandings of major political issues at a given point in history. Moreover, even when a commission allegedly fails to resolve an issue in the short term, its recommendations and approaches often have major impacts over a longer time span.

This book contributes to an important new wave in Canadian political history scholarship of the past decade focused on the history of the state, and with a particular emphasis on the history of taxation. It also builds on longer-standing arguments by Canadian historians about the importance of royal commissions as venues for analysis of key Canadian issues and turning points for policy development.

Historian Wardhaugh and political scientist Ferguson revisit the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations (the Rowell-Sirois Commission), a troubled commission

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borne out of the crises of Canadian federalism and the national economy of the 1930s. Their extremely detailed history analyzes its origins, activities and outcomes, arguing that the depth of the innovations of this commission and the issues it raised about Canadian federalism have not been fully appreciated. The Rowell-Sirois Commission grappled with the unprecedented new conditions of the modern state of the 1930s, when provinces had taken up the massive costs and responsibility for issues such as education, transportation, health and welfare, often without the resources to support them. It was shaped by a new role for social science in government. Political economists, economic historians and other academics played critical roles both in the federal and provincial bureaucracies and on the commission itself. Their conceptions led the Rowell-Sirois Commission to "articulat[e] a new role for the state in Canada and a new relationship between Ottawa and the provinces," which provided a blueprint to "reset" national policy. Although its recommendations were initially shelved, the authors argue it gained influence and shaped policy and constitutional debates for decades afterward.

The authors not only argue for the importance of the Rowell-Sirois Commission to Canada's political history but challenge interpretations of scholars from the 1970s and 1980s who saw its report as a force for centralization that legitimized federal government policies in that direction. This interpretation, they contend, does not reflect the deliberate balance between federal and provincial roles and responsibilities contained within its recommendations. The commissioners did call for a very different approach to the state and the nation's economy. Unconditional national adjustment grants would be given to provinces based on individual tax bases and fiscal needs to allow for delivery of a national minimum level of social services. In exchange, the federal government would get direct taxation powers. The commissioners called for more flexible and co-operative approaches to federalism and for a less legalistic—and increasingly unworkable—approach to the division of powers, but they did not want health, education and social welfare programs other than unemployment insurance to be transferred to Ottawa.

Wardhaugh and Ferguson's book is richly detailed, drawing on archival materials from governments, the commissioners and their staff, coupled with newspaper coverage. It is a truly pan-Canadian story. Provinces that often get short shrift in national studies sometimes assume centre stage. Manitoba, in particular, plays a central role both because it was one of two provinces whose near-insolvency was the proximate cause for the commission's creation (although the root causes ran even deeper) and because of the critical role of commissioner John Dafoe of the Winnipeg Free Press. The authors deftly tease out the personalities and ideologies of key figures, such as belligerent premiers, the quixotic prime minister Mackenzie King, and erratic members of the commission staff, as well as the fraught interpersonal dynamics that shaped the entire process. The book will be useful reading for people teaching about mid-twentieth-century Canadian history or Canadian federalism and for those with an interest in constitutional issues, equalization and federal fiscal policy.

The authors make a compelling case for how the commission's hearings captured a key moment of transition in Canadian thinking about and grappling with questions regarding the federation, the role of the state, and the national economy at the close of the "national policy" era. But their argument that its reports and recommendations were crucial to the decades that follow, while believable, is more asserted than demonstrated. The authors openly acknowledge that Canada's governments did not initially adopt its recommendations, except for those concerning unemployment insurance, and I would have liked to see more extensive discussion of how its ideas were picked up by new actors and/or implemented in the postwar decades. That said, decisions had to be made to keep the text readable. Three hundred pages of text, plus notes, is already a lot for those who are not die-hard students of federalism and fiscal policy. Wardhaugh and Ferguson's work provides a solid foundation for those who might wish to reinterpret the legacies of this foundational royal commission in the future.