

## Book Reviews

*Canadian Confederation at the Crossroads. The search for a federal-provincial balance.* Edited by Michael Walker. Vancouver: The Fraser Institute, 1978. Pp. xx, 361.

The surface qualities of this paperback are inviting. The title is “trendy” and immediate. The cover is striking: the Peace Tower and Parliament in black against a shining red background. The jacket blurb conveys a sense of present crisis, and impending doom to be warded off: “From the factory floor to Parliament, from living rooms to boardrooms, the country’s future is a topic never far from the headlines. . . . Canada has arrived at an important and a critical crossroads.” The reader is promised — “a thoughtful and thought-provoking contribution on the most vital issues facing policy-makers and the public alike today. . . . required reading for all Canadians concerned with the future of their country.”

What follows is something less than that. There are nine essays, from different authors, on a number of only loosely related subjects: Equalisation payments; Uniformity of Law; the CBC; Law enforcement; Housing and Urban Development Policy; and so on. There is no common conceptual framework; no central, unifying, core essay that seeks to synthesize the main, empirically based conclusions of the individual authors and relate them, in a disciplined way, to the postulated crisis of Confederation. In what is, really, a series of disparate studies, the integrative factor is supplied by a series of “recommendations” for recasting of the constitutional system and so, presumably, for “saving Confederation.” These recommendations range from the low-level and narrowly technical and sometimes trivial to the high-level and general and sometimes trite or platitudinous. As example of the first category: “The Provinces should create a special agency to provide their governments with carefully researched and documented positions in their dealings with the federal government on matters of law enforcement.” As example of the second category: “The objectives of national unity and regional or provincial

autonomy are not opposites of which one must predominate. Rather, these objectives are *dualities* which must coexist and must be reckoned with as equally legitimate aspirations in any new constitution." Sometimes the wild card turns up, as in the recommendation that "the CBC should be privatised over a period of years." It is an interesting and no doubt (to some) stimulating suggestion, but its relevance to solving the postulated crisis of Confederation is not sufficiently established.

This collection of essays assembles a group of bright, talented and for the most part younger specialist scholars or administrators or businessmen. Strangely enough, for a volume so resolutely dedicated to the pursuit of a new constitution, there is not one specialist in constitutional law and government among them. They are mainly economists, and perhaps that is the reason why the recommendations oriented towards a new Confederation seem to fall so flat. Is the sum of their individual conclusions, in fact, that there isn't so very much wrong with the federal system today that the usual pragmatic adjustments and compromises, that we have grown accustomed to, over the years, will not correct? There is, in fact, nothing in this collection of essays that should startle or dismay any confirmed federalist, and that could not be taken care of by incremental constitutional change, within the existing constitutional rules of the game, if that were, in fact, our political consensus today. It is not necessary to agree or to disagree with the individual authors' conclusions in suggesting that the present volume might have made a far more stimulating and thought-provoking contribution to the current Confederation debate if — more nearly reflecting its quite sober and prosaic contents — it had been entitled "Canadian Confederation not at the Crossroads. Pragmatic adjustments, as usual."

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*Victoria: A Primer for Regional History in Architecture*, by Martin Segger and Douglas Franklin, Watkins Glen, N.Y.: The American Life Foundation and Study Institute, 1979. Pp. 377. \$15.00 (cloth). \$10.00 (paper).

*Rattenbury*, by Terry Reksten. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1978. Pp. 204. \$12.95.

Victoria, the gracious capital of British Columbia, has long been admired for its fine homes and public buildings as well as for its proverbial mild