

**Alex Marland and Matthew Kerby, editors. *First among Unequals: The Premier, Politics, and Policy in Newfoundland and Labrador.***

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of wider processes, as a not-so-unique Atlantic fishery and naval base, while also appreciating the myriad ways in which life there was so very special. Ryan's excellent book gets us very close to that understanding.

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Alex Marland and Matthew Kerby, editors. *First among Unequals: The Premier, Politics, and Policy in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014. ISBN (hard cover) 978-0773543447

Since 2005 there has been a resurgence of academic interest in Newfoundland and Labrador politics, reflected in a noticeable increase in the number of journal articles about local politics. This resurgence of interest has followed a period of about 20 years in which political scientists and historians wrote very little about policy and politics in the province unless it was in the context of a wider study of similar issues in Canada as a whole.

Not surprisingly, two academics who have been at the forefront of the resurgence, Alex Marland and Matthew Kerby, are the editors of a new collection of original essays. *First among Unequals* consists of 12 chapters, with an introduction and conclusion by Marland. The chapters cover major policy topics (education, health care, the fishery, the economy, and energy), the provincial political culture (nationalism, political branding, and party politics), and the structure and operation of government (the public service, cabinet management, and the judicialization of policy development). The chapters that comprise the bulk of the book are structured along similar lines. They begin with a discussion of comparative theory, provide some background, proceed to a case study, and then offer a short comment on political decision-making. Marland's introductory essay is on executive authority and public policy development; his concluding chapter is on leadership and public policy. There is an extensive bibliography that alone is worth the price of the book.

The 12 essays that comprise the heart of the book are well-written summaries on their chosen topics. Generally, they cover policy developments in their respective subjects for considerably longer than the period between

2003 and 2010, the term of Danny Williams's premiership. Marland worked for a time as a communications director in the Williams administration, and his chapter on political branding is different from the others. The focus is exclusively on the Williams administration and is largely descriptive, although Marland uses examples from other jurisdictions to draw comparisons. Matthew Kerby's chapter provides a local parallel to his study of changes to federal cabinets. Kerby examines cabinet changes during Williams's premiership and compares them to other ministries in the province since Confederation. In that sense, Kerby's chapter stands apart because it is the only one based on original research.

*First among Unequals* adds considerably to the literature on politics in Newfoundland and Labrador. Academics and the general public alike will buy the book, and well they should. It is the first collection of essays on the subject and, significantly, brings together authors from different disciplines. The authors are also from different parts of Canada, which militates against interpretations based on the curse of provincial exceptionalism that too often influences both popular and academic views of Newfoundland and Labrador.

This does not mean that the book is not without some structural problems. Marland includes a preface in addition to his book-end chapters. This seems excessive. The preface gives a "general conclusion" for the book "that a modern premier cannot possibly have as much power over public policy as is publicly perceived" (xix). This is fundamentally at odds with the view of John Crosbie, who has written a laudatory introduction. Crosbie says that the book provides "excellent research on the concentration of power in the office of the premier" (xi). He says that the authors conclude — and he agrees — that "Newfoundland's political system does not tend to provide enough checks and balances on the premier" (xiii). Marland's statement of the general conclusion is also at odds with the chapter on health care, for example. Maria Matthews describes the Cameron inquiry into hormone receptor testing at the province's largest regional health authority and notes that Williams was able to usurp ministerial authority to make decisions in health care. She cites Marland's own work in the process.

Marland's book-ends and the preface appear to be grafted onto the other chapters to give the core of the book a focus it does not have. The dozen main chapters apparently were finished some time in 2010 or 2011. Marland's additional work appears to have been written later, during the lengthy time this book spent with the publisher. The core chapters do not explore aspects of a central proposition about policy-making and the role of the Premier using actual case studies, as Marland's comments suggest. Rather, they are broad

surveys of the subject that do not plumb the depths of any topic.

Christopher Dunn's chapter on the public service, for example, is an excellent survey from 30,000 feet, but there is no detailed discussion of specific events, such as the House of Assembly scandal or the breast cancer scandal during Williams's tenure, to illustrate how Williams dealt with the public service. A chapter that updates Dunn's excellent earlier studies of cabinet management would have been helpful in exploring the relative power of the Premier within the cabinet and any changes Williams brought to the entire government system.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, there is none of that.

Then there are the omissions. In an exploration of the factors affecting a Premier's power and influence, the book offers nothing on federal-provincial relations. The chapter by John Peters, Angela Carter, and Sean Cadigan on the labour force and political economy includes lots of charts and graphs but seems to rely on theoretical models as both the explanation and the evidence, rather than allowing a specific, detailed example or two to illustrate the point. As a result, their conclusion that Williams's shift from austerity to spending came within specific economic conditions (that is, an abundance of public cash from oil revenue) becomes nothing more than a penetrating insight into the obvious. They cannot explain why the shift occurred, though, beyond citing a theoretical model.

That said, this is a worthwhile book. The survey chapters are useful as an introduction to politics in Newfoundland and Labrador generally. Marland's and Kerby's individual chapters add to the literature on local politics. As for a detailed exploration of Danny Williams's term as Premier, that will have to wait for another book.

#### NOTE

1. See Christopher Dunn, "The Persistence of the Institutionalized Cabinet: The Central Executive in Newfoundland and Labrador," in Luc Bernier, Keith Brownsey, and Michael Howlett, eds., *Executive Styles in Canada: Cabinet Structures and Leadership Practices in Canadian Government* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

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