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Governance Dilemmas in Canada, North America, and Beyond: A Tribute to Stephen Clarkson

Edited by

**Michèle Rioux · Alejandro Angel
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ISSN 2523-7187
Canada and International Affairs

ISBN 978-3-030-81972-9

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-81973-6>

ISSN 2523-7195 (electronic)

ISBN 978-3-030-81973-6 (eBook)

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Nature Switzerland AG 2021

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This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

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Stephen Clarkson: Political Economist with a Global Vision (1937–2016)

*Marjorie Griffin Cohen, Michèle Rioux, Daniel Drache,
and Alejandro Angel*

Abstract Stephen Clarkson made a difference in the ways Canadians understand both this country and its relationship to the US, Mexico, and Europe. As a Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto

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Switzerland AG 2021

M. Rioux et al., *Governance Dilemmas in Canada,
North America, and Beyond: A Tribute to Stephen Clarkson*,
Canada and International Affairs,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-81973-6_1

he devoted a great deal of energy in teaching and guiding students. He was awarded the Order of Canada in part because of his teaching but also for his research and writing on political economy. His biography of Pierre Elliot Trudeau co-written with Christina Newman won the Governor General's Award. He was a leading expert in Canada-US relations, and was particularly prescient in understanding how the Canada US Free Trade Agreement initiated constitutional type control in Canada. As well, he was one of Canada's leading experts on the Canada/US relationship and devoted much of his talented research ability to analysing the complex and contradictory tendencies of North American integration and the erosion of national sovereignty.

Keywords Canadian political economy · North American integration · Canadian public policy · Canada US Mexico free trade · Canadian foreign policy · Neoliberalism

Stephen Clarkson died early in 2016 in Freiburg. Stephen was a Professor in Political Science at the University of Toronto and his many books and articles over 40 years left an indelible mark on the development of Canadian political economy. Stephen contributed, in an extraordinary way, to the public understanding of Canada and North America, Europe in the twenty-first century, and the politics of globalization in the Western World. He was one of Canada's leading experts on the Canada/US relationship and devoted much of his talented research ability to analyzing the complex and contradictory tendencies of North American integration and the erosion of Canada's national sovereignty. In all, he authored 14 books, edited four others, and published in many leading academic journals throughout his lifetime.

He was a gifted linguist and fluent in French, Russian, Spanish, Italian, and German and he could present at scholarly meetings in each of these languages and deliver an academic paper or lecture without notes. He received many honours and awards, and was awarded the prestigious Order of Canada for his lifetime accomplishments as a scholar and public intellectual. Stephen was also a gifted teacher and loved that aspect of his life. He particularly enjoyed teaching undergraduates and often managed, through his charm and determination, to include undergraduates on

panels at conferences and seminars, even in the yearly gatherings of Canadian academics where undergraduates are often not encouraged to present papers.

He had an exceptionally productive career with a great many significant publications that influenced public policy discussions in Canada. *An Independent Foreign Policy for Canada* published in 1968 is one of his early books that reprise many of the themes that he would return to in subsequent publications. It is an edited collection, in which he also wrote a chapter that foreshadowed Trudeau's Third Option and began his life-long research on Canada's declining and complex role in the global economy. *Uncle Sam and Us: Globalization, Neoconservatism, and the Canadian State* (2002) provides a prescient study documenting the transformation of Canadian state policy post NAFTA, the rise of North American corporate power, and the increasingly toxic role of neoliberal ideology as a separate but commanding policy space. In *The Big Red Machine* (2005) Stephen investigated the disappointments, betrayals, and leadership battles of Canada's Liberal Party when, economically, Alberta emerged as a contending regional power.

Before this, his earlier publication, *Canada and the Reagan Challenge: Crisis in the Canadian-American Relationship* (1985) was highly regarded as one of the best contemporary studies of Canada/US relations from a critical Canadian perspective. It is one of the foundational works of the new political economy and is valued for its trenchant analysis of Canada's corporate power structure and the asymmetrical relationship between the two countries.

Many believe that his most significant and enduring contribution was his two-volume biography of Trudeau co-written with his partner Christina McCall-Newman, one of Canada's important journalists. Their two-volume magisterial study covered the career, personality, ideas, and exercise of power of Pierre Elliot Trudeau, arguably one of the most important prime ministers of Canada, during a two-decade long constitutional war with Québec. The vibrancy of their writing is captured in their unforgettable opening line of the first volume of their biography: "He haunts us still." Its impact also derived from the dozens of interviews of government elites and foreign policy experts in Ottawa, London, and Washington that told the story of Trudeau's exercise of power and how he was able to transform modern Canada linguistically, economically, and constitutionally. In the Clarkson/McCall tightly written account, we relive the nail-biting excitement of Canada's constitutional wars pitting

Trudeau's classic liberal defence of Canadian federalism against René Levesque's and later with Lucien Bouchard's *la grande stratégie pour l'indépendance*. Stephen and Christine won the Governor General's medal for the first volume.

As a political economist and a professional political scientist, Stephen was an outspoken public intellectual researching political behaviour and elite self-interest. It led him increasingly to examine neoliberal globalization as a tenacious, contradictory, polarizing force on people, markets, communities, and governments.

In the same way that the 1980s represented an inflection point for Canadian political economy, particularly with the end of the Trudeau era and the mounting challenges of a liberalized economy, those years also represented a turning point for Stephen's scholarly focus. His pivot would become even stronger with the advent of the Canada US Free Trade Agreement and subsequently, NAFTA. Building on his earlier research on Canadian political economy, he turned his attention to analyze the transformation of North America and the challenge of an integrated market between Canada and the United States and later the entire region with the inclusion of Mexico.

After examining the liberalism of the Trudeau years, Clarkson continued to focus on the exercise of power, ideology, and public policy during the Conservative years of Brian Mulroney and Stephen Harper. While working on issues related to both North American free trade agreements, he became fluent in Spanish, developed a close working relationship with many leading scholars in Mexico, and spent considerable time in Mexico teaching and undertaking research for publications.

One large-scale project resulted in a major publication, *Does North America Exist* (2008) consisting of over 500 pages. It is inventive analytically in that he examines the proposition of whether North America is becoming a cohesive economic and political unit akin to the European Union. The study, after careful examination, shows that because of the dominance of the United States it is wrong to regard North American integration as an embryonic form of European integration. Since there is no governance equivalent to Brussels with its powerful legal and political machinery to override members when conflicts arise between member states and the powerful bureaucracy, he concluded that the asymmetrical power system in North America only supported a weak form of regional governance between the "three amigos."

While in today's world the regional agreements Clarkson researched in different countries seem creatures of another age (the original NAFTA and the Pacific Alliance—Colombia, Chile, Mexico, and Peru—or MERCOSUR), his interest over the challenges of a fragmented world seem prescient today. With the ascent of populist leaders in recent years, combined with the economic crisis of the pandemic that started in early 2020, the globe has entered a dangerous time economically and politically.

In a book, Stephen co-authored with Matto Mildenberger, *Dependent America? How Canada and Mexico Construct U.S. Power* (2011), they turned the usual Canadian approach to the United States on its head by examining the impact of Canada and Mexico on the US policymaking process. This book contests the idea that US power is self-determined and a result of the autonomous actions of its own citizens' industriousness. They demonstrate the myriad ways that the United States benefits from Canadian and Mexican natural resources, labour, capital flows and even more significantly, explain how both countries are trapped by their self-inflicted dependent-country behaviour towards the United States. *Dependent America* is an example of ground-breaking scholarship that creates a framework to analyse the public policy dynamics of the entire continent and provides an analytical and grounded historical context of the triangular relationship between the North American partners. It also erects a framework to better understand NAFTA 2.0 and the highly volatile political relationships of the Trump presidency.

In all of Stephen Clarkson's work, his expertise does not lose sight of the knowledge that institutions are grounded in the lives of people and communities. Throughout his work he is acutely aware that the push-back of social movement actors in search of large-scale political change can acquire social agency, even when the institutional universe is heavily stacked against them. It comes as no surprise then, that for Clarkson, the scholar and researcher has a responsibility to discover the political space and social dynamics that exists between the fatalism of "there is no alternative" to the powerful and seemingly unstoppable forces of markets globally and the empowerment of citizens to act collectively and locally.

Stephen Clarkson will be missed personally and also as an intellectual presence in Canada. This book is based on a collaborative work that took place in Toronto in 2017, a year after Stephen's death, at the annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences (CPSA). The many panels brought

together experts who work in the various areas related to Stephen's long career and the speakers focused on the way trade governance and domestic policies affect public policy in the *new* North America in a Clarksonian way. The point of the papers was not to critique of his work in the narrow sense of the term, but to trace his influence on the interdisciplinary evolution of Canadian political economy, relating to mega-trade deals, the machine politics of the political parties, corporate influence, North American integration, and the new issues arising for regional and world politics such as the WTO's dispute-settlement mechanism. While the origins of this volume include those presentations, additional chapters come from other scholars who have also joined our endeavour honouring Stephen's lasting legacy.

1.1 PLAN OF THE BOOK

The organization of the book contains four sections. The first section deals with the major *Themes* in Stephen's writing and begins with a chapter (Chapter 2) from Andrew F. Cooper, "A Critical Appreciation of Stephen Clarkson: Looking Back at his 'foundational text' on Canadian Foreign Policy," that analyzes his contribution to the study of Canadian foreign policy and political economy. It is an in-depth analysis of the many, often unresolvable challenges facing a middle power country such as Canada with limited resources and a declining presence globally. In the second chapter (Chapter 3), Michèle Rioux, in "A North American Quest for Progressive Policies in an Era of Global Structural Changes," examines the asymmetrical governance of North American political economy and the risks and costs for Canada and Mexico, the subordinate partners.

The second section deals with Stephen's scholarship regarding *Challenges for Canadian Political Economy* and contains three contributions that analyze how Canada needs to navigate an increasingly complex, unstable world economy with new policy challenges for political economists from a public policy perspective. In the first chapter (Chapter 4) of this section, Greg Inwood, "Boring? Never! Clarksonian Perspectives on Nationalism versus Continentalism," explores Stephen's examination of the stark choices facing Canada: whether to pursue an autonomous path, or to embrace the continental path that might bring some economic advantages but would reduce the country's autonomy. The second chapter in this section (Chapter 5), written by Robert

Finbow, “Constitutionalism by Stealth? CETA as an Exemplar of Clarkson’s Supra National Constitutionalism,” shows how free trade continues to change the nature of Canadian constitutionalism. The country is in one sense a rule-maker, thanks to its participation in supranational bodies, but, crucially, it does not have the weight of many of its partners, which leaves it a rule taker. The existence of broad provisions on dispute resolution within modern free trade agreements, many of which Canada has enthusiastically embraced, have had a major impact on the democratic governance of the country.

In the third chapter in this section (Chapter 6), “In the Public Interest and the Uncertain Future of the WTO: Stephen Clarkson, Political Economist,” Daniel Drache analyzes Stephen’s preferences for international bodies to organize trade between countries and addresses the ways that the World Trade Organization (WTO) currently affects Canadian public policy. In particular, he demonstrates empirically that the dispute resolution mechanism of the WTO has been highly advantageous for corporations enabling them to reach behind borders with respect to setting public health policy, the environment, and labour standards. In short, at a moment when the multilateral trade system is under siege, the careful analysis provided in this contribution explains the current deadlock in the WTO and the inability of this key multilateral institution to develop rules and practices that are fair and transparent.

The next section, *A New North America*, discusses a theme to which Stephen paid considerable attention, namely the transformation of North America into a new neoliberal entity. The political and economic processes leading to the constitutionalization of the North American market informed Stephen’s perspective on the consequences of the immense American economy on its next-door neighbours. The section begins (Chapter 7) with André Donneur’s “La critique radicale de Stephen Clarkson des rapports du Canada avec les États-Unis.” Using a Clarksonian perspective, he examines how Ottawa has conducted its relationship with the United States in the post-NAFTA era. Donneur makes the case that the successive concessions offered by different Canadian governments in trade, security, or migration do not amount to a mutual community-building project, but are due to an asymmetric relationship propelled by the powerful magnet of a shared geography, a frequent convergence in policy objectives, and in similar values. This asymmetric relationship was badly strained during Donald Trump’s administration, but it also calls for a need for Ottawa to re-evaluate its foreign policy orientation. In addition