**Question: Canada combines federalism with Westminster parliamentary government. What effects does each have on the other?**

Canada’s combination of federalism with the Westminster parliamentary system has a number of outcomes. It is difficult, in this manner, to suggest an overall direction to the way in which this relationship has evolved, but suffice it to say, that the relationship has been reciprocal, implicating the others. For the purposes of this essay, the question will be considered first by looking at some of the institutional considerations that federalism has played in the development of Westminster parliamentary conventions, and will then turn to how the evolution of this system to an increasingly executive-focused system has implicated the evolution of process federalism and the development of intergovernmental relations in Canada.

The Westminster parliamentary system has built into it conventions that complement the ideals of federalism. Within federal systems, regional interests are managed through two types of distribution in power. The first – *inter*state federalism – includes the distribution of powers and financial resources between the federal and provincial governments, as well as the relations between these two orders of governments. The second – *intra*state federalism – is the arrangements by which the interests of regional units (the government or citizens of this units), are channeled through and protected by the structures and operations of the central government (Smiley and Watts, 1985). In particular, intrastatefederalism is ensured through the regional representation in the Senate, as well as the convention of regional representation within the cabinet as appointed by the Prime Minister. Though this particular norm constrains the ability of the Prime Minister to appoint without consideration of regional (as well as other representational) interests, there are significant doubts regarding the ability of ministers to act in a way that reflects the regional interests of their constituencies. The evolution of intrastate federalism, as a result of evolutions of the Westminster parliamentary system, and new understandings of how the system works within Canadian politics, has resulted in a shift of power and influence *away* from intrastate federalism, and *toward* interstate federalism.

There are two trends in Westminster parliamentary politics that implicate this view. The first is what Savoie terms, the evolution of court government (a thesis that is not entirely divorced from his arguments with respect to *Governing from the Centre*). The Westminster parliamentary system is, by its very nature, characterized by the extensive concentration of power in the center of government (White, unpublished ms), yet as Savoie sees it, the evolution of court government allows for a strengthening of power in the hands of just a few key advisors and the Prime Minister. This model is characterized by a few key considerations: (1) first, court government allows for quick and unencumbered access to the levels of power that allow policy to happen quickly; (2) court government suits the Prime Minister and his/her courtiers because it enables them to manage more efficiently, see results, and control the news and media messages more easily; (3) within court government, not all ministers are created equally; and (4) court government centralizes power into the hands of a few important ministers and DMs.

These last two points are particularly important to implications as they relate to federalism. What began as an informal meeting of ministers (Weller 2003) has evolved into a highly politicized space, and one where few ministers have real influence (as Savoie would see it). Though cabinet government, as Weller notes, was never truly a case of *primus inter pares*, it has been argued by some that cabinet is no longer really a place for regional issues to come to the fore. Feeding into this argument, is our increasing understanding of how members of parliament, and ministers, act within the legislative system. Presumably, regional differences in the legislature underlie some key differences in policy opinion within a party (in power, or otherwise), so it would be reasonable to expect that regional differences implicate ideological differences. In this view, then, it is possible to apply some of Christopher Kam’s key findings regarding MP behaviour – and specifically, the implications of the LEADS model within the Westminster system, and how this may work to undermine the ability of MPs to dissent based on regionally-based ideological differences.

Kam’s model – Loyalty Elicited though Advancement, Discipline, and Socialization – suggests intraparty dissent may be hampered through leader’s taking advantage of MPs’ progressive ambitions. Unlike in other systems, within the Westminster system, leaders have monopoly control over who to appoint to cabinet (minus, as noted before, some constraints with respect to representation – of region, gender, ethnicity, etc). Under this model, part of an individual MP’s calculation to dissent is based on a utility curve that considers regional factors (i.e. likelihood of re-election versus the issue at hand), but also considers such issues as personal advancement within the party. Naturally, their advancement in the party depends on their ability to remain an elected representative of their constituency, but that is by no means the primary consideration on any one vote. Thus, this view of MP activities implicates that MPs do not (by any means) always act in a regionally-considered manner.

Finally, the Senate poses some issues with regional representation as well. Though constitutional convention requires regional representation (which has its own issues due to significant changes in the patterns of the Canadian population), Canada has a very weak intrastate federal institution in its Senate. Unlike Senates of Australia or the US, which provide direct representation of citizens of the various constituent units, the Canadian Senate offers no such representation. Moreover, the institution is further weakened by strict party adherence/control in decisions and actions within the chamber of sober second thought (Gibbins, 1997).

While these views are not necessarily shared by all (i.e. Herman Bakvis, in his book *Regional Ministers*, argued that the role of regional ministers has been undervalued; while Soroka et al., 2009, point to the fact that constituencies may in fact have a greater influence on MP behaviour in Parliament than previously suggested in the literature) these three considerations – evolution of court government, MP behaviour that may undermine constituency-based decision-making, and issues of representation within the Senate – together have impacted how federalism has evolved in Canada. Smiley and Watts (1985) argued that effective intrastate federalism will ultimately depend on the degree to which cabinet and Westminster institutions are able to embody and express intrastate federalism in its composition, its decision making processes, and its political and administrative roles. However, the evidence suggests that this is less and less the case. With limited opportunity for formal representation of provincial interests in federal policymaking institutions, and with some decline of the force of regional concerns in traditional mechanisms within the Westminster parliamentary system, *inter*state federalism has emerged as an increasingly important avenue through which to discuss and consider regional concerns. As such, provincial premiers and their governments have been increasingly implicated as important political figures in meting out regional concerns in politics.

It would be a gross mischaracterization to suggest that the changing nature of federal-provincial relations is due entirely (or even largely) to the implications of a weakening intrastate federalism in the Westminster system. Executive federalism, or federal-provincial diplomacy, has long been a defining feature of Canadian intergovernmental relations (Cameron and Simeon, 2002). Whether viewed in the lens of the influences of province-building, or under the above considerations of changing forces in Ottawa’s Westminster system, the face of Canadian intergovernmental relations have changed. Moving from a period of consultative federalism – where the exclusive decision making powers rest with one level (the federal) of government (Smiley, 1964), to cooperative federalism (Ottawa-led, and provincially-followed), to one of collaborative federalism (there are a few other federalisms that could be thrown in here, but will not be for the sake of brevity). This new form of federalism, as Simeon and Cameron see it, can take one of two forms. The first has federal, provincial, and territorial governments working together in a balance, while the second form has provinces and territories acting together, with Ottawa at the sidelines. With the increased relative power of premiers, both in relation to Ottawa, and more generally, the second form is more and more frequently taking place (i.e. such as the National Energy Strategy being proposed by Alberta Premier Allison Redford). Intergovernmental relations have moved from a top-down relationship between federal government and provinces, to a much more equal playing field, due in part to the inability of the Westminster parliamentary system to appropriately respond to regional considerations within its institutions.

It is also important to quickly note that similar trends within provincial cabinets – especially with respect to the increasing centralization of decision-making power in the Premier, and the similar behavioural considerations of Members of Provincial Parliament – complement this move to a stronger type of executive federalism that is playing itself out in our modified system of collaborative federalism. Increased power in the centre at both the federal and provincial levels makes it easier justify and undertake federal-provincial relations in some respects, as it is increasingly efficient to do political business in this way. This only acts to reinforce some the trends of the last 40 years in both the Westminster parliamentary system, and Canadian federalism more generally.