

GOVERNMENT IN THE TRANSITION

On December 14, 1979, the 31st Canadian Parliament was dissolved and a federal election called for February 18, 1980. In the interval between Parliaments, the Prime Minister and his Cabinet retain the responsibility of government.

The Progressive Conservative government was defeated by a vote of 139-133 during the debate on the budget, which constituted an important matter of confidence. Without the support of a majority in the House of Commons, it could not continue in power. However, until a new government is formed after the election, the present administration (and more precisely, the Cabinet) continues to exercise executive responsibility.

Shortly after the defeat of his government, the Prime Minister, Mr. Joe Clark, formally asked the Governor General (the representative of the Crown in Canada) to dissolve Parliament and give orders that writs of election be issued. At dissolution, over

ing a vote of non-confidence, the administration has a greater responsibility to avoid measures having serious implications for government.

Among decisions that must await the outcome of the election is the purchase of a new fighter aircraft for Canada at an estimated cost of \$2.5 billion. The report of the auditor-general, the watchdog over government expenses, cannot now be tabled in the House of Commons. The government's promised foreign policy review, to have begun in earnest before Christmas with the tabling of discussion papers in the House, is also put in limbo.

Emergency and unforeseen expenditures which have not been provided for by Parliament may be made by governor general's warrant, a special authority issued under an order-in-council (directive of the Cabinet). Warrants cannot be issued if Parliament is in session, and their use is restricted by other statutory provisions. The expenditures are reviewed at the next session of Parliament. Warrants have been used on occasion to finance virtually all ordinary governmental expenditures for short periods. This was the case during and after the election in May 1979 when Parliament did not sit for more than six months.

And, in addition to the burden of government they must carry during the transition, Cabinet members must pay more than passing attention to their own re-election.

CANADIANS REALLY LIKE TO VOTE IN FEDERAL ELECTIONS

More than 15 million Canadians will be eligible to vote in this election, out of a total population of 23 million. In May 1979, 76 per cent of the Canadian electors voted (compared to 59 per cent in the United States presidential election of 1976). Prince Edward Island, with the smallest population of the provinces, had the highest rate of voter turnout — 81 per cent — while the other island province, Newfoundland, had the lowest at 60 per cent.

1979	Percentage voting	Population
Prince Edward Island	81	122,200
Saskatchewan	79	950,100
Ontario	78	8,466,300
Manitoba	77	1,030,700
Quebec	76	6,285,400
Nova Scotia	75	843,900
British Columbia	75	2,544,400
New Brunswick	74	697,600
Yukon	74	21,700
Northwest Territories	70	43,400
Alberta	68	1,971,600
Newfoundland	60	571,000



Ron Poling

Opening of Parliament, October 1979

100 government and private members' bills died on the order paper (the daily outline of Commons business). These included the measures contained in the defeated budget, such as an increase in the excise tax on gasoline. Though it continues to govern, the government would not in principle embark upon a major policy that would bind its successor. Opposition parties would expect to be consulted on any important appointments to be made in the interim. When dissolution takes place follow-