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- Parliament dissolves as federal parties make ready for general election, 1
- Praise for peace participants, 4
- Japan helps B.C. fishermen, 4
- Tanker salvaged, 4
- Study analyzes energy situation, 4
- Five appointments to Senate, 5
- New rules for parolees, 5
- Special telephone switching system, 5
- Six named to Business Hall of Fame, 6
- Grains and oilseeds outlook, 6
- News of the arts — exhibition, awards, theatre, TV, 7
- News briefs, 8

Parliament dissolves as federal parties make ready for general election

Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau announced on March 26 that he had asked Governor-General Edward Schreyer to dissolve Parliament in order that the next federal general election, the first to be called in nearly five years, could be held on May 22.

Among the issues expected to dominate the campaign are inflation, unemployment, future energy supplies, national unity and federal-provincial relations — with special reference to the aspirations of Quebec.

At dissolution, party standings in the 264-seat House were: Liberals 133, Progressive Conservatives 98, New Democrats 17, Social Credits nine, Independents five, vacancies two.

Under redistribution, Ontario will gain seven seats, British Columbia five, Alberta two, and Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories one each.

General elections in Canada

Canadians choose their Federal Governments through general elections for the House of Commons, the leading law-making body in the country.

The Canadian Constitution requires the election of a new House of Commons at least once every five years. This is called a federal general election to distinguish it from the many other elections held in Canada.

At the next federal general election, 282 legislators, representing the same number of constituencies, will be chosen to sit in the House of Commons.

Under Canadian law, representation in the House of Commons must be reviewed at ten-year intervals, after each decennial census. The review usually results in the redrawing of a number of electoral boundaries.

The voting populations of electoral districts vary from one to another, and average 52,000.

Role of Cabinet

The Prime Minister chooses 25 or more

individuals from his party to serve with him as Ministers in the Cabinet. Though one or two may be Members of the non-elective Upper House, the Senate, all usually are Members of the House of Commons or are elected to that House after their appointment.

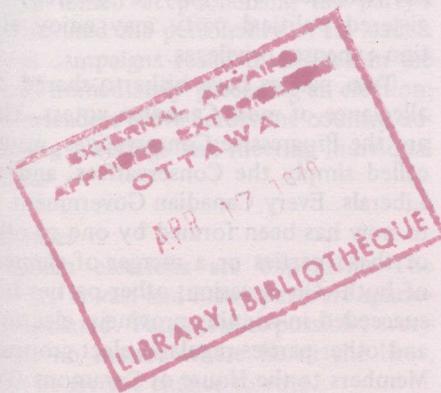
The Cabinet, consisting of the Prime Minister and the other Ministers, discharges the executive functions of Government. Individual members administer different government departments such as Finance, Agriculture, External Affairs, Justice. In addition, there are sometimes one or more Cabinet members known as Ministers without Portfolio, who are not in charge of departments but who may be assigned by the Prime Minister to carry out specific executive functions within departments.

Collectively, the Cabinet provides leadership and initiative in the determination of national policy and the appointment of other chief officers of state, including lieutenant-governors of the provinces, judges and ambassadors. The Cabinet is at all times responsible to the House of Commons.

A federal general election is only one of many occasions on which Canadian citizens record their will concerning the conduct of public affairs. Each of the ten provinces in the Canadian federation has its own elected legislature. Each province has its own system of local government under which elected councils direct the affairs of cities, towns, villages, rural municipalities and school districts.

The federal Parliament, however, is the only body that makes laws for and speaks for Canada as a nation. It consists of the Queen, represented in Canada by her viceroy the Governor General, the appointed Senate and the elected House of Commons.

Nominally important, the Queen's powers — exercised through the Governor General — are used only on the advice of the Cabinet, in respect to executive decisions, and of the two Houses of Parlia-



Twenty years ago yesterday...

Canada's first privately-owned and operated nuclear research reactor officially opened at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario.

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