

General elections in Canada

The Canadian Constitution requires the election of a new House of Commons at least once every five years.

At each federal general election, 264 legislators, representing the same number of constituencies, are chosen to sit in the House of Commons. The leader of the party with the most seats becomes Prime Minister and forms a Government.

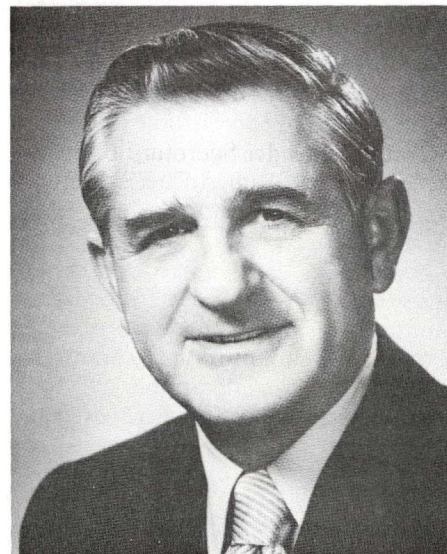
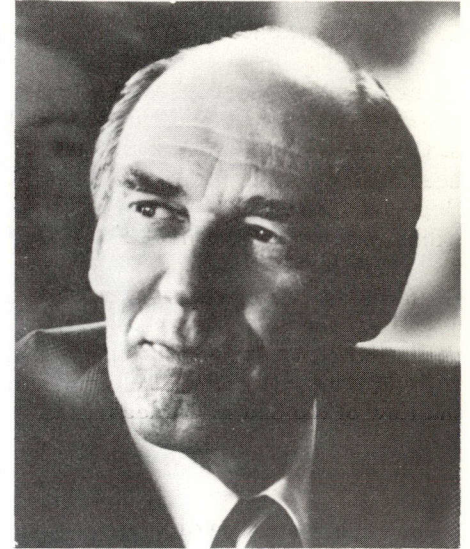
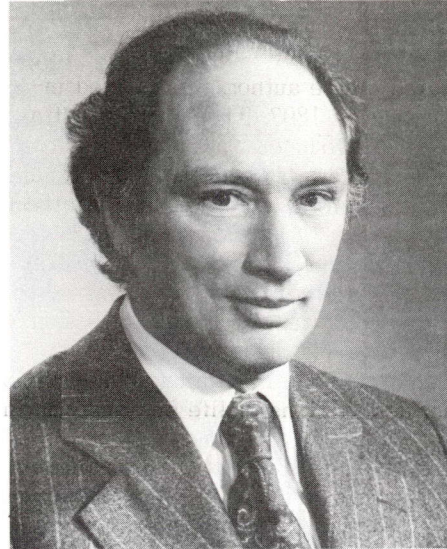
Under Canadian law, representation in the House of Commons must be reviewed at ten-year intervals, after each decennial census. The review normally results in the redrawing of a number of electoral boundaries. This work is carried out by an electoral redistribution commission in each of the ten provinces.

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 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



Everyone is free to form a political party and to join or support any party he or she chooses. Two parties have hitherto shared the allegiance of most Canadian voters. They are the Progressive Conservatives, usually called simply the Conservatives, and the Liberals. Every Canadian Government up to now has been formed by one or other of these parties or a merger of elements of both. On occasion, other parties have

succeeded in winning provincial elections, and other parties regularly elect groups of Members to the House of Commons. Two of the most prominent in this respect are the New Democratic and the Social Credit Parties.

Leaders of the main political parties: (upper left) Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Liberal, (upper right) Robert Stanfield, Conservative, (lower left) David Lewis, New Democrat, and Real Caouette, Social Credit.

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 Parliament, in respect to legislation. The powers of the Cabinet, too, are often exercised through the Governor General, by Orders-in-Council that he must sign.

The House of Commons derives its