

Prime ministers

The Prime Minister, as leader of the party which commands majority support in the House of Commons, is the Head of Government. He chooses the other ministers who administer the various departments of government. Collectively, the Cabinet (33 ministers at present) is responsible to the House of Commons, the elected lower house of Parliament. The upper house, the Senate, is appointed by the Government on a regional basis. Its members hold office until the age of 75. The Senate can reject any bill, though for many years it has very rarely done so. Its main functions are the revision of bills sent up from the Commons and committee investigation of important public issues.

If the Government is defeated in the Commons on a motion of censure or non-confidence, or on any question the Government considers vital, the Prime Minister may either resign (and the Leader of the Opposition takes office) or ask the Governor General for a general election, the latter being the more frequent choice.

The Liberal Party has formed the Government since 1963 when the Right Honourable Lester Bowles Pearson became Prime Minister and replaced the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker and his Progressive Conservative administration. Mr. Pearson, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, resigned from office in 1968 and was succeeded by the Right Honourable Pierre Elliott Trudeau.