

THE PARTIES

Each workday afternoon, the Prime Minister — the leader of the majority party and head of the Canadian executive — stands in the House of Commons and answers the questions of the Opposition. Questions are pointed (or are ruled out of order) and few current issues are avoided.

If this Parliamentary role has its hazards, it also provides the government — the ministers of the majority party — a solid legislative operating base since by definition this party controls the House. (On occasion the governing party is a minority one and at such times its control depends on the continued co-operation of at least one other party.) Under the rule of party discipline all party members vote with their party except on rare occasions when the party leader (in such matters of conscience as legislation on abortion) permits them to vote freely.

This makes the House of Commons profoundly different from the House of Representatives — the Government initiates most legislation. The power of the Government is not diffused by defections, temporary or permanent, within its own nominal ranks. The power of Parliament also tends to be directed in a straight line. Canada is now using committees more to expedite legislation, but there is no seniority system as in the American Congress which permits independently powerful committee chairmen to set their own tempo.

The fact of party discipline and parliamentary government make party strength and organization on a national level significant, but they also permit small Canadian parties — so-called third parties — to survive and grow strong. J. R.

Mallory says: "There are several characteristics of the Canadian system which gives a third party rather more of a fighting chance . . . there are only ten Provinces so that a party which captures one or more . . . has a better organizational base than a comparable party in the U.S. . . . there are deep political cleavages within our national life which justify a regional party as a necessary safety valve for pent-up local feeling; finally the nature of Cabinet Government gives a third party more leverage than does a Presidential system, for a third party which holds the balance of power is not excluded necessarily from a share of power."

The survival of third (or fourth and fifth) parties also reflects the independence and power of provincial governments. Distinctions can often be made between federal and provincial parties of the same name and differences of opinion can be more difficult to overcome than with opposition parties. Canada, it has been said, is richer in geography than in history — the western Provinces have been remote from the eastern ones and the farmers of the Prairies are the most prolific producers of third parties. Still, for generations Canada has been dominated by two parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives and both have tended to be centrists, neither left nor right. (The Conservatives merged with the Progressives to become the Progressive Conservatives in 1942.) Each has tended to hold within its ranks persons of the same wide range of attitudes.

Here are capsuled accounts of the most signifi-

How the Tax Dollar Is Spent

