

As mentioned above, the prime minister chooses the members of the Cabinet. All of them must be or become members of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada. Privy councillors are appointed by the governor general on the advice of the prime minister and membership is for life unless a member is dismissed by the governor general on the same advice, which has never happened, or resigns. All Cabinet ministers and former Cabinet ministers, the chief justice of Canada and former chief justices and ex-speakers of both Houses are always members, and various other prominent citizens are made members simply as a mark of honour. The Privy Council as such meets only very rarely, on a few ceremonial occasions such as the accession of a new King or Queen. The Cabinet, "the Committee of the Privy Council," is the operative body.

By custom, almost all the members of the Cabinet must be members of the House of Commons or, if not already members, must win seats. Since Confederation, more than 70 people who were not members of either House have been appointed to the Cabinet but they had to get seats in the House or the Senate within a reasonable time or resign from the Cabinet. Senators can be members of the Cabinet: the first Cabinet of 13 members, had 5 senators. But since 1911, usually* there has been only one Cabinet minister in the Senate, and that one without portfolio, the leader of the government in the Senate. No senator can sit in the House of Commons and no member of the House of Commons can sit in the Senate. But a minister from the House of Commons may, by invitation of the Senate, come to that chamber and speak, though not vote.

By custom every province must, if possible, have at least one Cabinet minister. Of course, if a province does not elect any government supporters, this becomes difficult. But in that case, the prime minister may put a senator from that province into the Cabinet; or he may get some member from another province to resign his seat and then try to get a person from the "missing" province elected there. In 1921, the Liberals did not elect a single member from Alberta. The prime minister, Mr. King, solved the problem of Alberta representation in the Cabinet by appointing Hon. Charles Stewart, Liberal ex-premier of Alberta, and getting him elected for the Quebec constituency of Argenteuil. Whether Mr. King's ploy would work now is quite another question. The voters of today do not always look with favour upon outside candidates "parachuted" into their ridings. The smallest province, Prince Edward Island, has often gone unrepresented in the Cabinet for years at a stretch.

* Since the general election of 1979, there have been three or four senators in the Cabinet. The Conservatives, in 1979, elected very few MPs from Quebec, and the Liberals, in 1980, only two from the four Western provinces. So both parties had to eke out the necessary Cabinet representation for the respective provinces by appointing more senators to the Cabinet.