

gets a clear majority, the Cabinet that was in office before and during the election has two choices: it can resign, in which case the governor general or lieutenant-governor will call on the leader of the largest opposition party to form a Cabinet; or the Cabinet already in office can choose to stay in office and meet the newly elected House — which, however, it must do promptly. In either case, it is the people's representatives in the newly elected House who will decide whether the "minority" government (one whose own party has less than half the seats) shall stay in office or be thrown out.

If a Cabinet is defeated in the House of Commons on a motion of censure or want of confidence, the Cabinet must either resign (the governor general will then ask the leader of the Opposition to form a new Cabinet) or ask for a dissolution of Parliament and a fresh election.

In very exceptional circumstances, the governor general could refuse a request for a fresh election. For instance, if an election gave no party a clear majority and the prime minister asked for a fresh election without even allowing the new Parliament to meet, the governor general would have to say no. If "parliamentary government" is to mean anything, a newly elected Parliament must at least be allowed to meet and see whether it can transact public business. Also, if a minority Cabinet is defeated on a motion of want of confidence very early in the first session of a new Parliament and there is a reasonable possibility that a government of another party can be formed and get the support of the House of Commons, then the governor general could refuse the request for a fresh election. The same is true for the lieutenant-governors of the provinces.

No elected person in Canada above the rank of mayor has a "term." Members of Parliament or of a provincial legislature are normally elected for not more than five years, but there can be, and have been, parliaments and legislatures that have lasted less than a year. The prime minister can ask for a fresh election at any time but, as we have just noted, there may be circumstances in which he would not get it. The Cabinet has no "term." Every Cabinet lasts from the moment the prime minister is sworn in till he resigns or dies. For example, Sir John A. Macdonald was prime minister from 1878 until he died in 1891, right through the elections of 1882, 1887 and 1891, all of which he won. Sir Wilfrid Laurier was prime minister from 1896 until 1911, right through the elections of 1900, 1904 and 1908, all of which he won. He resigned after being defeated in the election of 1911. The same thing has happened in several provinces. An American president or state governor, re-elected, has to be sworn in all over again.* A Canadian prime minister or premier does not.

* The United States is a republic where the head of state (the president) and the head of government are one and the same. In Canada, a constitutional monarchy, the Queen (represented by the governor general) is head of state and the prime minister is head of government.