



The Parliament Building,
Ottawa, showing the Peace Tower

THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

European experience and North American geography both have influenced the manner in which Canada is governed. Like Great Britain, Canada has a parliamentary form of government. One of the major documents giving legal expression to the Canadian form of government is the British North America Act of 1867. Canada has followed the British pattern inasmuch as this Act is supplemented by a wide variety of other statutes together with many long-established usages and conventions of government, all of which properly form part of the constitutional system. The federal structure of the state, however, owes something to the example and experience of its southern neighbour. The British North America Act is not as specific as the United States Constitution (it makes no mention for instance of Canada's cabinet system of government) but it does lay out in general terms the functions of, and the distribution of legislative authority between, the central parliament and the provincial legislatures. In case of doubt, the courts decide. Thus, matters concerning the country as a whole, such as defence, trade and commerce, banking and transportation, are handled by the Federal Government. But the Provinces are responsible for such local matters as property and civil rights, health, education and municipal institutions.

The Sovereign is the head of state and is personally represented by the Governor General, who is appointed,

usually for a five-year term, on the advice of the Canadian Government. In each province there is a Lieutenant-Governor appointed by the Federal Government.

The Canadian Parliament is composed of the Queen, the appointed Senate, and the elected House of Commons. The members of the House of Commons are elected (from 265 constituencies in 1957) for a maximum term of five years. The House can, of course, be dissolved at any time if the Prime Minister so "advises the Governor General". Dissolution and an election also occur if the government loses the "confidence"—in other words, the majority support—of the House on a major issue.

Almost all members, except the occasional independent, belong to one of four national political parties. One or the other of the two older parties, Conservative (now Progressive Conservative) and Liberal, has been in power almost continuously since Confederation. These parties take their names and many of their traditions from British political parties, but the resemblance is not exact. Two newer parties also compete for support from the electorate. The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) was founded in 1932 and corresponds, roughly, to the social democratic parties of Europe. The Social Credit party, initially a group of monetary reformers, came into prominence in 1932, when it won a victory in a provincial election.