

Why? Because Canadians want criticism, they want watchfulness and the possibility of an effective alternative government if they are displeased with the existing one. The party system reflects the waves of opinion as they rise and wash through the country. There is much froth, but deep swells move beneath them, and they set the course of the ship.

The prime minister

As already noted, the prime ministership (premiership), like the parties, is not created by law, though it is recognized by the law. The prime minister is normally a member of the House of Commons (there have been two in the Senate, in 1891-92 and 1894-96). A non-member could hold the office but would, by custom, have to get elected to a seat very soon. If the prime minister loses his seat in an election he can remain prime minister as long as his party keeps a majority in the House of Commons, though again, he must by custom win a seat very promptly. The traditional way of arranging this is to have a member of the majority party resign, thereby creating a vacancy which gives the defeated prime minister or non-member party leader the opportunity to run in a by-election.

The prime minister is appointed by the governor general. Ordinarily, the appointment is automatic. If the Opposition wins more than half the seats in an election or if the government is defeated in the House of Commons and resigns the governor general must call on the leader of the Opposition to form a new government.

The prime minister used to be described as "the first among equals" in the Cabinet or as "a moon among minor stars." This is no longer so. He is now incomparably more powerful than any of his colleagues. Not only does he choose them in the first place, but he can also ask any minister to resign, and if the minister refuses, the prime minister can advise the governor general to remove him and the advice would invariably be followed. Cabinet decisions do not necessarily go by majority vote. A strong prime minister, having listened to the opinions of all his colleagues, and finding most or even all opposed to his own view, may simply announce that his view is the policy of the government and, unless his dissenting colleagues are prepared to resign, they must bow to his decision.