

A federal general election is only one of many occasions on which Canadian citizens record their will as to the conduct of public affairs. Canada is a federation of ten provinces, each with its own elected legislature. Quebec alone possesses an upper chamber as well. Each province has its own system of local government under which elected councils direct the affairs of cities, towns, villages, rural municipalities and school districts.

The Federal Parliament, however, is the only body which makes laws for and speaks for Canada as a nation. It consists of the Queen, the appointed Senate, and the elected House of Commons.

The Queen's powers are exercised through a Governor General. Nominally important, they are used only on the advice of the Cabinet in respect to executive decisions and of the two Houses of Parliament in respect to legislation. The powers of the Cabinet, too, are often exercised through the Governor General, by order-in-council.

The Senate's powers are subject to two important limitations. It may not initiate financial legislation. That means it has little more than a negative say on the taxes to be levied on the Canadian people and the use to which public funds may be put. Unlike the House of Commons, it has no control over the executive. It cannot unseat a Government.

The House of Commons derives its power from the fact that the Prime Minister and, usually, most members of the Cabinet are chosen from among its members and are responsible to it. They are called upon to explain their conduct and policies day by day while the House is in session. They owe their positions to the confidence of the House. If the House votes lack of confidence in them they must resign or bring on an immediate election. Through the latter device they can appeal the verdict of the House to the voters at large.

If five years pass without an election, Parliament is dissolved by "effluxion of time" and an election automatically becomes necessary. More often, before the end of this term, the Prime Minister fixes an election date that he considers convenient for his party or consistent with its interests and those of the nation.

Normally, however, an election takes place after an interval of between four and five years from the previous election. Governments do not like to appear too fearful of an election by deferring it for the full five-year term.

### Election Arrangements

However it occurs, the dissolution of Parliament sets the complicated election machinery in motion. Essentially, it consists of a board headed by the Chief Electoral Officer in Ottawa and of as many chief returning officers as there are constituencies. Each chief returning officer is responsible for conducting the election in his own constituency.

As insurance against being caught unprepared, the Chief Electoral Officer starts to get ready for a new election as soon as the latest one is over. The holding of a general election requires the production of several tons of printed material, such as background papers, manuals of instruction and forms of many kinds.