



The Peace Tower rises above the Parliament Buildings, Ottawa.

THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

Canada is a federal state with a parliamentary system of government. In so far as Canada has a written constitution, it is the British North America Act, and its subsequent amendments. The great part of Canadian constitutional practice is, however, unwritten, and stems from historical precedent.

The division of powers which determines the nature of the Canadian federal state is defined in the B.N.A. Act. Matters concerning the country as a whole, such as defence, trade and commerce, banking, transportation, external relations, are assigned to the jurisdiction of the federal government. Matters such as property and civil rights, health, education, municipal institutions, are assigned to the nine provinces.

The titular head of government in Canada is the King. His personal representative in Canada is the Governor General, appointed for a term of five years upon the advice of the Canadian Prime Minister. The Governor General is no longer in any sense the representative of the British Government. In each province there is a Lieutenant-Governor, nominated by the federal government.

Canada's Parliament is composed of the elected House of Commons and the appointed Senate. Members of the House are elected from 245 constituencies, with representation in proportion to population, for a

maximum term of five years. The House may, however, be dissolved at any time by the Governor General at the discretion of the Prime Minister. Constitutional practice also requires that the government resign if at any time it loses the "confidence", or majority support, of the House; and an election usually follows.

The majority of the members are representatives of one of the national political parties. Two parties, Liberals and Conservatives (now Progressive Conservatives), have alternated in power since Confederation. Two newer national parties are now also in the field: the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (C.C.F.) and the Social Credit party.

The government is formed by the party (or combination of parties) gaining the largest number of seats in the House of Commons. The leader of the majority party becomes the Prime Minister, and selects his executive, or Cabinet, from among his supporters in Parliament. The Prime Minister and the Cabinet, all members of Parliament, are individually responsible to the electors of their respective constituencies and collectively responsible to the House of Commons. Cabinet members are assigned the responsibility for the various departments of government. The staffs of these departments are permanent civil servants.

The Senate consists of ninety-six members, appointed for life by the Governor General in Council, (the formal term for the Cabinet of the day). Senate representation is determined on a regional basis; there are twenty-four senators from each of Canada's four principal territorial divisions—the Western Provinces, Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritimes. The chief functions of the Senate, termed "that sober second thought in legislation" by Sir John A. Macdonald, are the careful study and criticism of legislation passed in the House of Commons. The Senate may also initiate legislation, with the exception of money bills. Every bill must be passed by both chambers before becoming law. In practice, however, the Senate rarely utilizes its theoretical power of dissent.

The provincial legislatures, with the exception of Quebec, are made up of one elected chamber, which functions in a manner similar to the House of Commons. Quebec alone maintains an appointed Executive Council in addition to the elected Assembly. Municipal government in Canada is administered by city or town councils, headed by mayors or reeves.

The Library of Parliament dates from early in Queen Victoria's reign.

