

Canada has a system of universal suffrage and Parliament is democratically elected. All Canadians above the age of 18 are eligible to vote in federal elections. The electoral system has been modified several times and a recent change was the addition of political parties to the ballots. Another feature of the system: advance polls and proxy voting for individuals not able to vote at their local polling stations on election day.

Political parties have developed over time as the political power of legislatures grew and there was a need to establish some stability in government. Canada has a multi-party system and there is no restriction on the number of political parties that may contest federal elections. Those political parties wishing to endorse candidates for an election must register with the office of the chief electoral officer. A new political party wishing to be identified on the ballot paper must have candidates officially nominated in at least 50 electoral districts by the 30th day before polling day.

At various times a number of parties representing a wide spectrum of viewpoints have presented candidates and elected members to Parliament. Following the September 4, 1984 general election four parties were represented in the House of Commons: the Progressive Conservatives, who form the government; the Liberals, who are the official opposition; the New Democratic Party; and one Independent. Political parties are not all organized in the same fashion and their methods of operations have evolved over time in accordance with the wishes of their members. Every political party has a leader who speaks on behalf of the party both within and outside the House of Commons.

The prime minister and the cabinet are generally members of the House of Commons, although some may be senators. They are, formally speaking, the Queen's advisers. In fact virtually no significant actions can be taken by the Queen or her representative in Canada, the Governor General, without cabinet advice. The prime minister and the cabinet determine executive policies and are responsible for them to the House of Commons. The Queen and the Governor General have the traditional rights to be consulted, to encourage and to warn the government.

The needs and wishes of citizens are conveyed primarily to members of Parliament or directly or indirectly to cabinet ministers. Requests for government action may originate from individuals, political parties or pressure groups; members of Parliament, cabinet ministers and public servants may take the initiative in suggesting the adoption of policies and programs in the public interest.

Determination of public policy rests with the cabinet but begins generally with the formulation of policy by individual ministers. Working in cooperation with public servants, a minister formu-

lates policy proposals for consideration by his colleagues in the cabinet. The cabinet chooses those policies it wishes to implement, may itself formulate policies, or may select a policy from among the alternatives submitted.

Rule of law. Conforming with the principle of the rule of law, all executive acts must be authorized by law, and laws are enacted by Parliament. Executive acts may be carried out under a statute which specifies how a policy is to be implemented, or by means of an order-in-council under a statute which authorizes the Governor-in-Council (i.e., the Governor General acting on advice from cabinet) to undertake specific acts. Much of the activity of the public service is authorized through yearly appropriation acts approving the expenditure of public funds for specific purposes. Apart from the appropriation of funds, Parliament is concerned with discussion and authorization of policy submitted for its approval by the government. Approval of policies is mainly through the enactment of legislation. The rules of procedure are included in the standing orders of the House of Commons.

A significant feature of the parliamentary process is that cabinet ministers have seats in Parliament and thus share in the exercise of legislative power. The majority of legislation enacted by Parliament is submitted by the government; the constitution provides that all financial measures must originate in the Commons.

The judiciary applies the laws enacted by Parliament. Because Parliament is supreme in the Canadian government, the judiciary must apply the law as Parliament has enacted it, unless a law is declared to be unconstitutional, or not within the legislative jurisdiction of Parliament or of the legislature that enacted it.

Government administration. Administration of legislation and of government policies is carried out through a public service comprising employees organized in departments and ministries of government and special boards, commissions, Crown corporations and other agencies. Legislation and tradition have developed a non-partisan public service; employee tenure is unaffected by changes in government. The only direct contact public servants have with Parliament occurs when they are called as witnesses before parliamentary committees; they do not, by convention, express opinions on public policy but usually appear as experts and to explain existing policy. Public servants who head agencies such as the Public Service Commission, the office of the auditor general, the office of the commissioner of official languages, the Library of Parliament or the office of the chief electoral officer are responsible directly to Parliament. They are not subject to direction by the government on matters of policy and may appear before parliamentary committees to explain the policies of their agencies.