

Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen, June 29, 1926 — September 25, 1926
 Rt. Hon. William Lyon Mackenzie King, September 25, 1926 — August 6, 1930
 Rt. Hon. Richard Bedford Bennett, August 7, 1930 — October 23, 1935
 Rt. Hon. William Lyon Mackenzie King, October 23, 1935 — November 15, 1948
 Rt. Hon. Louis Stephen St-Laurent, November 15, 1948 — June 21, 1957
 Rt. Hon. John George Diefenbaker, June 21, 1957 — April 22, 1963
 Rt. Hon. Lester Bowles Pearson, April 22, 1963 — April 20, 1968
 Rt. Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau, April 20, 1968 — June 4, 1979
 Rt. Hon. Joe Clark, June 4, 1979 — March 3, 1980
 Rt. Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau, March 3, 1980 — June 30, 1984
 Rt. Hon. John Napier Turner, June 30, 1984 — September 17, 1984
 Rt. Hon. Martin Brian Mulroney, September 17, 1984 —

19.2.4 The cabinet

The cabinet's primary responsibility is to determine priorities among the demands expressed by the people and to define policies to meet those demands. The cabinet consists of all the ministers who are chosen by the prime minister, generally from among members of the House of Commons, although some cabinet ministers are usually chosen from the Senate including the leader of the government in the Senate. Ministers who are members of Parliament usually head government departments because the constitution provides that measures for appropriating public funds or imposing taxes must originate in the Commons. If a senator heads a department, another minister in the Commons has to speak on his behalf on its affairs.

Lists of members of the 22nd, 23rd and 24th ministries are published in Appendix 8, Political update.

Each cabinet minister usually assumes responsibility for one of the departments of government, although a minister may hold more than one portfolio at the same time or he may hold one or more portfolios and one or more acting portfolios. A minister without portfolio may be invited to join the cabinet because the prime minister wishes to have him or her in the cabinet without the heavy duties of running a department, or to provide a suitable balance of regional representation, or for any other reason that the prime minister sees fit. Because of Canada's cultural and geographical diversity, the prime minister gives close attention to geographic representation in the cabinet.

With the enactment of the Ministries and Ministers of State Act (Government Organization Act, 1970), five categories of ministers of the Crown may be identified: departmental ministers, ministers with special parliamentary responsibilities, ministers without portfolio, and three types of ministers of state. Ministers of state for designated purposes may head a ministry of state created by proclamation. They are charged with developing new and comprehensive policies in areas of particular urgency and importance and have a mandate determined by the Governor-in-Council. They may have powers, duties and functions and exercise supervision and control of elements of the public service, and may seek parliamentary appropriations to cover the cost of their staff and operations. Other ministers of state may be appointed to assist departmental ministers with their responsibilities. They may have powers, duties and functions delegated to them by the departmental minister, who retains ultimate legal responsibility. Ministers of state of a third group may be appointed under the act to be members of the ministry without being assigned to assist a particular minister. All ministers are appointed on the advice of the prime minister by commissions of office issued by the Governor General under the Great Seal of Canada, to serve and to be accountable to Parliament as members of the government and for any responsibility that might be assigned to them by law or otherwise.

In Canada, almost all executive acts of the government are carried out in the name of the Governor-in-Council. The cabinet, or a committee of ministers acting as a committee of the Privy Council, makes submissions for approval to the Governor General, who is bound by the constitution in nearly all circumstances to accept them. Although some are routine and require little discussion in cabinet, others are of major significance and require extensive deliberation, sometimes covering months of meetings of officials, cabinet committees and the full cabinet.

The cabinet must consider and approve the policy underlying each piece of proposed legislation. After proposed legislation is drafted it must be examined in detail. Between 40 and 60 bills are normally considered by cabinet during a parliamentary session. Proposals for reform of large areas of government organization or administration, and policy to be adopted in fundamental constitutional changes or at a major international conference are among the issues which, on occasion, demand this extensive and detailed consideration.

The cabinet committee system. The nature and large volume of policy issues to be decided on by cabinet do not lend themselves to discussion by 30 or more ministers. Growing demands on the executive have stimulated delegation of some cabinet functions to its committees.