

## CANADA

**Date of Elections:** 22 May 1979

### **Purpose** of Elections

Elections were held for all the members of the House of Commons following the dissolution of Parliament in March 1979. Previous general elections had taken place in July 1974.

### **Characteristics** of Parliament

The bicameral Parliament of Canada consists of the House of Commons and the Senate. The House of Commons is constituted on the principle of representation according to population, the Senate according to territorial divisions.

Under the British North America Acts, which are the basis of the Constitution, the representation of each of Canada's 10 provinces in the House of Commons is to be readjusted after each decennial census. A province is always, however, entitled to a number of Commons members not less than the number of its Senators. The present House of Commons is composed of 282 members, 18 more than the previous Commons as a result of the creation of new districts. Of this current total, 95 members come from Ontario. 75 from Quebec, 28 from British Columbia, 21 from Alberta, 14 each from Manitoba and Saskatchewan, 11 from Nova Scotia, 10 from New Brunswick, 7 from Newfoundland, 4 from Prince Edward Island, 2 from the Northwest Territories, and 1 from the Yukon.

The number of Senators may not exceed 112, and at present stands at 104\*. All Senators are appointed by the Governor-General on the advice of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. A total of 24 come from each one of Canada's 4 regions (Ontario, Quebec, the Maritime Provinces—Nova Scotia (10 Senators), New Brunswick (10) and Prince Edward Island (4)—and the Western Provinces—British Columbia (6), Alberta (6), Saskatchewan (6) and Manitoba (6)) while 6 Senators come from Newfoundland, 1 from the Northwest Territories, and 1 from the Yukon. A Senator holding office prior to 2 June 1965 is entitled to hold this post for life; if appointed after this date he must retire at the age of 75.

According to the Constitution, the duration of Parliament is limited to a maximum of 5 years. In practice, however, unless there is a more premature dissolution, the House of Commons is generally renewed after 4 years, which is considered as the normal term of a legislature.

### **Electoral System**

All Canadian citizens who have attained the age of 18 years are entitled to vote. The franchise also extends to members of the armed forces under the age of 18. Disqualified,

\* See *Chronicle of Parliamentary Elections A* (1975-1976), p. 12.

however, are persons convicted of certain electoral offences, inmates of penal institutions and the insane. Also unable to vote are the Chief and Assistant Chief Electoral Officer, the returning officer for each district, and every judge appointed by the Governor in Council.

All qualified electors may have their names entered on the register of electors for the polling division in which they ordinarily reside. These registers are revised on the district level starting 49 days before election day. Voting is not compulsory. Advance polls are open on the ninth and seventh days before the ordinary polling day for certain categories of people. The following persons who have reason to believe that they will be unable to vote on any of the scheduled polling days may appoint proxy voters from their own polling division: fishermen, mariners and prospectors, if absent in the course of their employment; the ill or physically handicapped; and full-time students registered at a Canadian educational institution.

All qualified electors may be candidates for the House of Commons. Ineligible for varying time periods, however, are persons convicted of electoral fraud or of a corrupt practice (seven years) or illegal practice (five years) connected with elections; certain public officers; members of provincial legislatures; and persons party to certain contracts and agreements having a connection with the Government.

All citizens at least 30 years old who are resident in the province for which appointed, who own land free of encumbrances to the value of C\$ 4,000 within that same province, and whose real and personal property together have a net worth of C\$ 4,000 are qualified to become Senators. In Quebec, where Senators represent districts of the province rather than the province as a whole, the residence requirement and property qualifications are considered at the district level.

In addition to the constitutional requirements of regional representation, age and property qualification, there are several criteria of selection of Senators; these are especially party patronage, interest or community group representation, and distinguished service to the nation.

For the House of Commons, a minimum of 25 electors may nominate a candidate for each electoral district 21 to 28 days before an election. The mandatory deposit of C\$ 200 accompanying the nomination paper is returned when the candidate is elected or obtains at least one-half of the votes polled by the successful candidate; party candidates are reimbursed only if their duly registered political group has nominated at least 50 candidates in the general election\*.

Campaign expenses of a candidate are limited according to the number of voters in his constituency (e.g. C\$ 1.00 may be spent for each of the first 15,000 names appearing on the preliminary lists of electors for the electoral districts).

Members of the House of Commons are elected by simple majority in single-member constituencies.

\* See *Chronicle of Parliamentary Elections and Developments XII (1977-1978)*, p. 15.

By-elections are held to fill vacancies in the House of Commons which arise between general elections. Vacancies in the Senate are filled by the Governor-General.

#### General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

On 26 March 1979, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau dissolved Parliament and announced that general elections would take place on 22 May.

On 27 March, leaders of Canada's three major national parties—Mr. Trudeau of the Liberal Party, Mr. Joseph Clark of the Progressive Conservative Party and Mr. Edward Broadbent of the socialist New Democratic Party—began campaigning. The Prime Minister stressed issues connected with national unity and energy, noting that a strong federal Government was required in both cases—to provide a guarantee against separatism on the part of the Quebec province and to administer a centralized energy policy in the face of an increase in world oil prices. His opponents focused to a great extent on economic problems (inflation, unemployment, budget policy, control of Canadian resources, etc.), Mr. Clark proposing, *inter alia*, a short-term budget deficit to stimulate the Canadian economy. Mr. Broadbent said that a New Democratic government would draw up three-year and five-year economic plans in co-operation with the provinces and leading corporations. All three leaders confronted each other during a televised debate.

On polling day, voter turnout was heavy and the Progressive Conservatives emerged as the strongest party as they captured a large majority in the Western provinces and won 57 seats in the key province of Ontario. The Conservatives thus ended 16 years of Liberal rule, the last 11 under Mr. Trudeau. Mr. Clark, 39, became Prime Minister; his new-minority Progressive Conservative Cabinet was sworn in on 4 June.

## Statistics

*1. Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats  
in the House of Commons*

Number of registered electors. . . . . 14,500,000 (approx.)  
 Voters. . . . . (70%) (approx.)

Political Group	Number of Seats	Number of Seats held at Dissolution	Number of Seats won at Previous Elections
Progressive Conservative Party	135	98	95
Liberal Party. . . . .	115	133	141
New Democratic Party . . . .	26	17	16
Social Credit Party. . . . .	<b>6</b>	9	11
Independents . . . . .		5	1
	<b>282*</b>	<b>262*</b>	<b>264</b>

\* 18 seats added since last elections.

\*\* Plus two vacancies.