

CANADA

Date of Elections: June 25, 1968

Characteristics of Parliament:

The Canadian Federal Parliament comprises two Chambers:

- the Senate, whose 102 members are appointed for life by the Governor-General;
- the House of Commons, henceforth composed of 264 members elected by universal suffrage.

On June 25, Canadian citizens went to the polls to choose their representatives to the Lower Chamber after the XXVIIth Legislature, which had been elected on November 8, 1965, was dissolved on April 23, 1968.

Under the British North America Act, the duration of a Parliament is limited to a maximum of five years. In practice, however, if there is no reason for the Governor-General to dissolve it prematurely, the House of Commons is generally renewed after four years, which is considered as a normal term of office.

Electoral System:

Members of the Lower Chamber are elected in single-member constituencies by a simple majority, one-round method of voting. As a result of the redistribution of seats, based on the 1961 decennial census and completed in 1966, the number of constituencies was reduced from 265 to 264. There was therefore one less seat in the House of Commons.

It should also be noted that the ballot lists only the names and occupations of candidates, with no mention of their party affiliations.

All Canadian citizens, as well as British subjects resident in Canada for twelve months, both male and female and aged 21 and over, are eligible to vote in the constituency in which they ordinarily reside. Electoral lists are revised for this purpose in the weeks preceding the election.

Veterans and active members of the Canadian armed forces, both men and women, who have not yet reached the age of 21 on polling day are also eligible to vote. However, the mentally ill, persons who have lost their civil and political rights, judges appointed by the Governor-General, the Chief Electoral Officer and his Assistant, and the Returning Officer in each electoral district are disqualified from voting. In the event of a tied result, however, the Returning Officer exercises a casting vote.

Finally, all Canadian citizens or British subjects, entitled to vote and at least 21 years of age, are eligible for election to the House of Commons, with certain exceptions provided by law. The latter in fact provides, among other things, that members of a provincial Legislature, State entrepreneurs, and persons employed by the State and appointed by the Crown or Government cannot become candidates.

General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections:

Only three days after he had been sworn in as Prime Minister, Mr. Pierre Elliott Trudeau called upon the Governor-General of Canada to dissolve the House of Commons which had been elected on November 8, 1965. On April 23, 1968, Mr. Roland Michener complied with this request and new general elections were fixed for June 25. As will be seen, the result of this bold decision was a crowning success for Mr. Trudeau, who had just assumed the leadership of the Liberal Party following Mr. Lester Pearson's resignation.

The other major Canadian party also had a new leader in the person of Mr. Robert L. Stanfield who, on September 9, 1967, replaced Mr. J.G. Diefenbaker at the head of the Progressive Conservative

Party. Under their new leadership, the two parties conducted a campaign which was to be the test of their relative strength.

The other political groups contesting the election were the New Democratic Party which, like those mentioned above, ran 263 candidates for the 264 vacant seats, the *Ralliement des Creditistes*, represented by 71 candidates, including 70 in the Province of Quebec, the Social Credit Party with 31 candidates and the Communist Party of Canada with 14.

One outstanding feature was the decision of the Speaker of the previous House, Mr. Lucien Lamoureux, to run as an Independent with the support of all the national parties. Further details on this interesting step towards establishing a permanent Speaker in Canada are given in the first part of this brochure.

The principal issue in the electoral campaign was the question of national unity. The Quebec-born leader of the Liberal Party emphasized the need for a united Canada, with a federal Government able to follow a valid policy for the entire country and to bring about the economic and social integration of the French Canadians. On the other hand, Mr. Stanfield and his Quebec lieutenant, Mr. Faribault, advocated the granting of a degree of autonomy for the province in question, particularly in such areas as education and welfare. Above all, they felt that the Province of Quebec should be given greater independence in its dealings with international organizations like Unesco.

The views of the New Democratic Party came close to those of Mr. Stanfield on this point. On the other hand, it sided with the Liberals in their controversy with the Conservatives over the matter of a universal medical-care plan. On the grounds that this involved an area ordinarily within provincial jurisdiction, the leaders of the Progressive Conservative Party insisted that the decision to implement this plan on a nation-wide scale from June 1, 1968, be renegotiated.

Various conflicting positions were also adopted on other economic problems, but these were largely overshadowed by the dispute over national unity.

The vote of June 25 confirmed the hopes of Mr. Trudeau whose party, as will be seen from the figures below, gained 23 seats, thereby obtaining a majority in the House of Commons after many years of minority rule.

Statistics:

Number of registered electors.	10,943,463
Valid votes.	7,966,876*

Political Group	Votes obtained	%	Number of Seats in the House Commons	Number of Seats in the Previous House
Liberal Party.	3,620,768	45.5	154	131
Progressive Conservative Party.	2,502,974	31.4	72	97
New Democratic Party . . .	1,362,370	17.1	23	21
<i>Ralliement des Creditistes</i> . .	348,229	4.4	14	B
Social Credit Party	60,543	0.8	0	5
Others **	71,992	0.9	1	2
			264"	265

* Provisional figures, pending the publication of the Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on July 25.

** Including the Speaker.

*** New number of seats following a redistribution of constituencies.