

strong military. The ultimate goal of a fascist state was an imperial war of conquest. In such a war the fascist state would conquer another country and then enslave the people to benefit the conquerors. Largely, it was this aspect of fascism that led to the Second World War in Europe.

It is important to note that the type of fascist government found in Italy and Germany in the 1930s no longer exists. You may encounter the term, however, in reference to governments that maintain strict control over intellectual and economic life, and emphasize the development of strong militaries.

## II. THE CANADIAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The primary function of government is to ensure the well-being of its nation and citizens. It is important to note that laws and regulations alone cannot accomplish this feat. Although most people think of government primarily as a system of rules, its role is actually quite complex. In Canada, the government does maintain order in society through laws and policing services; but it also provides us with services such as health care, education, welfare, employment insurance, and pension plans. In addition, it maintains our rights and freedoms, such as the right to speak freely, the right to an education (in English or in French) and the right to a certain standard of living. You will find out more about these rights and others in the section on Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. First, let's look at some of the basic terms that will help you to understand how the Canadian government functions:

### A. DEFINITION OF TERMS

#### 1. GOVERNOR GENERAL

In Canada, the monarch (King or Queen of England) is represented by the **Governor General**. The Governor General is chosen by the Prime Minister, and appointed by the Queen. He/she "governs" for a term of approximately five years. Although the Governor General announces many government decisions, he/she acts almost entirely on the advice of the Cabinet Ministers in the House of Commons. That is, the Governor General only very rarely makes decisions. He/she usually makes formal announcements of decisions that have already been made by others in government.

#### 2. HEAD OF STATE

In Canada the **head of state** is the nation's supreme representative, but has no political powers. In Canada, the Governor General is the head of state. As mentioned above, in Canada, this is largely a symbolic position.

#### 3. HEAD OF GOVERNMENT

The **head of government** in Canada is the **Prime Minister**—the political leader of the government of Canada. The Prime Minister is the head of a political party and has the responsibility of governing the country. Because the Prime Minister controls the Cabinet and thereby the House of Commons he/she has much power in the Canadian political system.

#### 4. PARLIAMENT

**Parliament** is the name given to the group of representatives who govern the country. Parliament is the branch of government that makes laws. A **Member of Parliament (MP)** is elected for each **riding** (an area containing approximately 100,000 people). Other terms used in place of riding are constituency, electoral district, or seat. The Prime Minister is the top executive of parliament. Below

the Prime Minister is the Cabinet (see p.9). Below the Prime Minister and Cabinet is the collection of regular MPs who are often referred to as backbenchers. The Governor General and the Senate are also part of parliament, although they do not have the real powers that the MPs have.

## 5. HOUSE OF COMMONS

The group of all **Members of Parliament**, including the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, is called the House of Commons. MPs are elected by the citizens of Canada for a five-year term. Each member represents a riding. This means that there are 308 MPs in Canada because there are currently 308 ridings. MPs spend most of their time debating and passing legislation. Individual MPs also look after the needs of their constituents (the people who elected them).

The House of Commons is the focal point of the Canadian parliamentary system. This is so because at the heart of a democratic system is the idea that citizens, when they elect their representatives, are in fact empowering those representatives to act on their behalf. To illustrate the importance of the House of Commons students should realize that no law can become law in Canada without the approval of the House of Commons. Furthermore, the government of Canada collects taxes so the assumption is that someone in government will spend that money. No money can be spent by the government without the approval of the House of Commons. Canadians can express their satisfaction, or lack of it, most effectively when they vote on election day.

Every democracy has a legislative (law making) assembly. While the Senate (see below) also has a role in the law making process, it is the House of Commons that initiates and carries out this process. Generally proposals for laws or spending initiatives come from the Cabinet, but these must be debated and passed by the House of Commons. Occasionally laws are initiated by an MP who is not in the Cabinet. These are called private members bills. (A bill is a proposed law that has not yet been passed.) To further illustrate the power of the House of Commons, if the Cabinet introduces a bill or a spending initiative and the House of Commons rejects it then the Prime Minister and his Cabinet must resign (usually followed by another election). It is via this power of our representatives in the House of Commons that Canadians exercise their democratic control of government.

## 6. SENATE

In Canada the **Senate** is not an elected body. The Senate consists of 105 men and women appointed by the Governor General, but only on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. Senators include business people, journalists, lawyers, teachers, etc. Appointment to the Senate is usually given as a "reward" for service to the community. Senators must be at least 30 years of age when they gain office, and they can hold office until age 75. Their primary function is to investigate bills passed by the House of Commons (more on this in the next section). For a bill to become law the Senate must pass the bills passed on by the House of Commons. It is very rare for the Senate to refuse a bill from the House.

## 7. EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The function of the **executive branch** is to make and apply government