Critical Analysis of Minority Governments in the History of Canada

Many people around the world including Canadians have regarded politics as a dirty one-sided game where the top 1% (the elite class) usually benefit no matter which political party is in the position of power. For many decades, legislative politics has played a huge role in the development of Canada. These historic moments have led to legislative politics becoming an important factor in Canada's democracy. This eventually means that elected members exchange their perspectives/views along party lines. Party politics and its correlation to legislative politics is worthy to take note of. Canada's legislature is known as parliament and all provinces & Yukon contain a legislative assembly (Northwest Territories & Nunavut will be excluded from this essay as both territories operate on a consensus government system, this means that all elected members of its legislature are independent (a.k.a Non-partisan) and the legislature itself elects the Executive Council). Parliament and legislative assemblies have functioned many times under a minority government. Were those governments who did not have full control over the legislature effective? This depends on the situation and the circumstances at the time a minority government was in power. Canada's history defines very well which type of government is favored in which type of situation. Two major types of situations usually arise; (1) National Unity among the Federal, Provincial, and Municipal Governments (2) The State of the Economy. When either of the two situations arises, and a minority government is in power, it is tested to their limit by opposition members of the legislature. No government would want to face a Motion of No Confidence (Vote of No Confidence), if failed then it must resign from its position in power. Canada's democracy is very similar to the United Kingdom's form of democracy. Canada has in place the first-past-the-post electoral system which has originated in England, this system often benefits majority governments coming into power in the legislature. Minority governments should be favored more within the State of Canada as it will strengthen Canadian democracy and this way more discussion will be embraced from opposition members. The more parties involved in exchanging views on public policy can perhaps help improve the country's, provinces, and/or territory's major weaknesses and open up more doors for new opportunities for the people of Canada.

Canada is a country of many religions, ethnicities, cultures, and social/political ideologies. For the population of Canada or the population of any of the provinces & Yukon to be better represented in its legislature, all parties must have an equal say in the day-to-day activities when very powerful government officials are making critical decisions that align with the national, provincial, and/or territorial interest. Having minority governments will not lead to one-party domination in the legislature and this will eventually lead the way for more focus towards change that is required to improve society and close any loopholes in laws that have been previously passed. For any type of public policy to be efficient in the long term, the party in power should always involve themselves in consulting with other parties and work as a team because when there is discussion happening, promises that are made by politicians will be accomplished in the best way possible. In order to overcome any type of problem, different solutions must be heard before any decision is made. Looking at The Canadian Democratic Audit on Legislatures which is examined by Marc Gervais in his research towards analyzing Canada's democracy, we can see a very important argument that is made by Marc as he goes into further detail, his argument states:

“Legislatures, and the men and women who serve in them, are at the very heart of Canadian democracy” (Docherty, 2005, p. 3). To be sure, legislatures are key democratic institutions where elected representatives give binding assent to measures of public policy on behalf of the electorate. (Gervais, M. 2011, p.1)

In addition to this, Marc also writes ““they confer legitimacy on a particular measure of public policy” (Norton, 1998, p. xiii).” (Gervais, M. 2011, p.1), Marc intends to quote Docherty & Norton because the author feels that with more cooperation happening among various party members, better laws will be presented & passed and more efficient policies will be created. Party representation in the cabinet & the legislature are very important factors of democracy according to the author. This means that if Canada’s citizens have chosen different party candidates to represent their social beliefs & political ideologies, then it must be respected by the party that is invited by the de facto head of state to form the government. In order to legitimize its legislative agenda, all parties that have secured seats in the legislature must have some sort of input before final decisions are made.

Looking at Canada’s history, there have been 14 minority governments at the federal level and many across 9 provinces (Alberta is the only province in Canada that never had a minority government) & Yukon, and a few of them have been tremendously prosperous. Focusing on the federal level of Canada’s democracy, Prime Ministers like William Lyon Mackenzie King, Lester B. Pearson, Pierre Trudeau, and Stephen Harper have done very well in proceeding with their political strategies and legislative agendas. Some key criticism for having a minority government is that it often lasts for about 2 years (479 days to be more exact), whereas majority governments last for the full 4-year term (Bakvis, H. 2015, p.3-4). However, parties who secure a majority government tend to keep all the power within themselves, ignoring everything other parties have to say. It is often believed that parties who secure a majority government are less accountable and transparent for their actions and decisions compared to parties who secure a minority government. Countries like Germany, Finland, New Zealand, Israel, Denmark, etc. have coalition governments formed very often. This means that different parties come together and agree on how their respective views on society can help improve communities and the nation as a whole. Despite the fact that