

The Progressive Conservative Party of Canada has been in opposition in Ottawa for forty-seven out of the past fifty-eight years, having lost twelve out of the last eighteen federal elections. In *The Tory Syndrome* George Perlin argues that Conservative electoral weakness can be ascribed at least in part to persistent internal conflict which has focused on or involved the party's leaders. Perlin explores the causes for the party's instability in a case study of events from the cabinet revolt against John Diefenbaker in 1963 to Robert Stanfield's resignation following the 1974 election. His analysis is based on research that included interviews with most of the people who held key roles in the party during this period and surveys of delegates who attended party conventions in 1967, 1971, and 1976. It is set in the context of a review of the history of earlier conflicts and their relationship to the Conservative decline from dominant to minority party in federal politics.

Perlin analyses the effects both of long-term cleavages in the values and social composition of the party and of attitudes and dispositions that are part of its internal political culture. In his conclusion he draws attention to the influence on conflict of attitudes and dispositions that have developed as a result of the party's habituation to the role of the opposition. He says these have helped create a mutually re-enforcing cycle of conflict and defeat that is independent of the original causes for the party's decline. Perlin believes the Progressive Conservative party will continue to win office from time to time because it is the only party strong enough to challenge Liberal hegemony in federal politics. But he argues that the party will require exceptionally adroit leadership and some considerable luck if it is to use such opportunities to break free of this cycle and achieve a more competitive position.

George Perlin is a political scientist who teaches at Queen's University. He has written about Canadian parties, voting behaviour, regionalism, and provincial politics.

The Tory Syndrome

LEADERSHIP POLITICS IN THE

PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

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