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## East Block and Westminster: Conventions, Values, and Public Service

### Chapter Summary

Canada's parliamentary system was based on the tradition of the Westminster conventions from England's political history. The Westminster conventions or the non-legal rules of the British constitution are identified in this chapter as ministerial responsibility, public service anonymity, and political neutrality. In particular, the East Block conventions relate to the relationships among the main players in Canada's parliamentary system, which include the politicians, the public servants, and the public. These conventions are important to understanding the democratic values of accountability, loyalty, and impartiality, which also relate to the values of Canada's public servants. These values serve as a reference for employees making decisions in their respective jobs, which are also influenced by a wide variety of political, economic, and social factors.

From these East Block conventions, the concept of political neutrality provides a framework to examine the relationship between and among politicians and public servants. Although this model is identified as an "ideal type" it provides for the degrees that a public servant is neutral in politics and political life to the extreme polarization whereby a public servant becomes more politicized. This politicization speaks to the involvement of a public servant in partisan politics and the author identifies six aspects of this political neutrality model. The first component is the separation of politics, policy, and administration, which discusses the political and administrative dichotomy in public service. Second, there is the merit, not patronage, principle which examines the abolition of patronage appointments for public servants. The third concept, no political partisanship or partisan political activity, speaks to the rights of public servants to engage in any political activities. The fourth principle, no public comment, is a debatable concept, as in the past public servants were prohibited from commenting or speaking about the government; however, in recent years, there have been some slight modifications to recognize the rights of public servants to speak on government policies and programs. This restriction on political activity is still unclear in government

matters and adheres to the next principle, which is ministerial responsibility and public service anonymity. The last concept, tenure in office, examines the importance of an impartial public service which can endure changes in government without being attached to any one particular political party. This aspect of political neutrality is paramount for public servants in Canada.

The final section of this chapter identifies the importance of public sector values, including ethical values, democratic values, professional values, and people values. In Canada, the federal public service operates with a Values and Ethics Code as well as a Charter of Values of Public Service.

## **Annotated Weblinks**

- 1) [https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pubs\\_pol/hrpubs/tb\\_851/vec-cve-eng.pdf](https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pubs_pol/hrpubs/tb_851/vec-cve-eng.pdf).

The Values and Ethics Code for federal public service employees outlines the core values and ethics as well as potential conflicts of interest, concerns, and issues.

- 2) <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/public-service/>

The Canadian Encyclopedia offers an overview of the federal public service in Canada, comprising the bureaucracy and collective bargaining issues for its employees.

- 3) <http://psac-ncr.com/legal-struggle-win-political-rights-federal-public-service-workers>.

This site by the union, Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) explains the historical legal challenges and the legal struggles to win political rights for federal public service workers.