

‘Tragedy in the Commons,’ through the eyes of former MPs

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Many Canadians are frustrated with the state of politics in the country — including some of the politicians.

[A new book](#) goes behind the curtain through interviews with 80 former MPs and asks what’s really going on.

“What propelled to start these exit interviews in the first place, was trying to get a grip on how a country like Canada, which is so widely respected internationally, has such dissatisfied citizens,” [Alison Loat](#), author of *Tragedy in the Commons*, said in an interview on [The West Block with Tom Clark](#).

“All of [the former MPs] share a deep respect for public service, but many of them felt that frustration of the short-term political gain culture that can dominate our politics.”

The interviews with MPs from all parties across the country revealed a common dissatisfaction with the way in which politics is displayed and conducted during the daily question period, Loat said.

When asked why their frustrations didn’t spur change, many of the politicians interestingly pointed the finger at their own political party, she said.

“It wasn’t specifically the leader they were talking about, but more the sense that there were forces or individuals who were constraining and making them act in a certain way that they felt uncomfortable about,” Loat said Sunday.

While Loat’s book, co-authored with Michael MacMillan, focuses on opinions of past MPs, one current parliamentarian said the current state of affairs is poor.

“It’s really a struggle right now between democracy and the power of political parties,” said Green Party leader Elizabeth May. “It’s not one prime minister or one party that’s responsible ... every prime minister absolutely absorbs all the powers left behind by them.”

Accusing the government of “muzzling” bureaucrats and “silencing” scientists, May described the centralization of power in the Prime Minister’s Office as a “cancerous growth on the body politic.”

In a caucus of two Green MPs in, May answers to nobody.

“I’m very lucky, because I’m not the average MP. I don’t have to report to a bunch of backroom people who are running a non-stop election campaign,” she said.

“But for my colleagues, I feel terribly, dreadfully sorry for the MPs in all the other parties, because they are — and this is something I want to share with all Canadians — they are wonderful people.”

May said she believes a vast majority of politicians enter public life because of a desire to serve their community.

“But after they’re elected, the boom is lowered and they find out that they’re only supposed to say what’s on a cue card in front of them, vote the way they’re told to vote, sit down when they’re told to sit down.”

And standing up to leaders can take a lot of guts, she said.

“You have to be brave to stand up in the system,” she said. “If you’re going to stand up, your only option, really, is to go sit as an independent ... All the party leaders’ offices have too much power. And reducing that is going to be essential if we’re going to restore a healthy democracy.”