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THE LABOUR DEPARTMENT AFTER SIXTY-FOUR YEARS

"The division of responsibility and authority between the central and regional authorities, the basic principle of the federal type of government, was made in Canada at the time when government functions were few and simple," the Minister of Labour, Mr. Allen J. MacEachen, told the recent meeting of the International Association of Government Labour Officials in Vancouver on August 10. However, the Minister went on, "the functions of government are not simple today". He quoted the Rowell-Sirois Royal Commission to the effect that "co-operation in the pursuit of common objectives" was today equally important with "the division of powers" in the guaranteeing of "efficiency and economy in government" and that such co-operation between "autonomous governments" was not easy to achieve.

"I wouldn't deny that there is some truth in this," Mr. MacEachen commented, "but in this country we have managed to work out ways of co-operating whenever it becomes clear that co-operation is necessary. Certainly, in the areas in which my Department works, and in many other areas, federal-provincial co-operation is good, and often outstanding, and it is growing from year to year."

The speaker then proceeded with the following sketch of the development of the Department of Labour by way of illustration of his general point:

...Our Department of Labour was established in 1900. You won't think I am boasting if I point out that this was 13 years before the United States Department of Labor and 16 years before the Ministry of Labour in Britain.

The new Department's first duties were modest enough. The Act of Parliament that set it up was simply "an Act to aid in the prevention of trade disputes and to provide for the publication of statistical industrial information".

Of those early responsibilities, the collection and publishing of information became the responsibility of the *Labour Gazette*, which is now 64 years old.

The other was labour relations — a fundamental concern of any labour department. The Department came into being when it did chiefly as a response to the disclosure of abuses — sweated labour, in fact — in firms working on government contracts.

EARLY ROLE THAT OF OBSERVER

The Department of Labour of 1900 was not set up to influence the labour market — I don't suppose that anyone dreamt of such a thing then. In fact, without any means of investigating the forces at work, it was in no position to exert any influence — it was pretty much content to be an observer of the labour market and to record what it saw. At that time it may have been good enough to examine problems as they arose, perhaps with some deliberation, and deal with them individually.

This was equivalent to charting a course through a field of icebergs with the naked eye. What lay in the depths below could only be suspected. Today we have gone a long way towards learning the shape and extent of what lies below the surface, and we are beginning to learn to spot new icebergs when they are barely on the horizon.

(Over)