

39th Conference of ILO

THE 39th Conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO) met at Geneva from June 6-28, 1956, under the presidency of Mr. Mohsein Nasr, the Iranian Minister of Labour. Founded in 1919, and originally associated with the League of Nations at Geneva, the ILO in 1946 became a Specialized Agency of the United Nations whose main purpose is the improvement of working and living conditions throughout the world. The admission of six new members this year—Jordan, Morocco, Rumania, Spain, Sudan, and Tunisia—brings the total membership to 76 states.

The constitution of the ILO contains a unique provision for "tripartite" participation by representatives of governments, employers, and employees from each member state. Canada was represented at the 39th Conference by Mr. Arthur H. Brown, Deputy Minister of Labour, and Mr. P. Goulet, of the Department of Labour, who served as Government delegates, Mr. W. A. Campbell, Vice-President and Secretary of Canadian Westinghouse Co. Ltd., who represented Canadian employers, and Mr. C. Jodoin, President of the Canadian Labour Congress, who represented Canadian workers. The delegates were accompanied by advisers.

Representation of Communist States

Ever since 1954, when the U.S.S.R. returned to the ILO after being expelled in 1939, controversy has been growing about the right of Communist states to be represented by tripartite delegations. Many ILO members assert that employer and worker representatives from many of the non-Communist countries (Communist countries in the ILO) have no freedom of action and are subservient to their respective governments, and in previous years the credentials of many of these delegates were challenged unsuccessfully. With the admission of Rumania, the controversy was renewed at the 39th Conference, and employer and worker representatives from many of the non-Communist countries objected to the seating of the Rumanian employer and worker delegates. These objections were voted down by the Conference, as was a similar challenge to the credentials of the Spanish worker delegates.

In 1955, the ILO Governing Body had set up a three-man committee, with Lord McNair, former President of the International Court of Justice, as Chairman, to examine the "Freedom of Employers and Workers Organizations" in all ILO member countries. The McNair Report, issued in March 1956, was before the 39th Conference, but for an exchange of views only as it is to be studied in detail in November by the ILO Governing Body.

Speaking in his capacity as Chairman of the Governing Body, Mr. Brown, the leader of the Canadian delegation, described the dilemma with which the ILO is faced in wishing both to support the principle of universality of membership and also to maintain effectively its tripartite system of representation. Many divergent views were expressed on this subject at the Conference: some delegates said that the ILO constitution should be amended to bar government-dominated employers and workers; others maintained that the ILO should