
Law of the Sea Conference

Canada's delegation to the seventh session of the Third United Nations Law of the Sea Conference, being held in Geneva from March 28 to May 19, is headed by Secretary of State for External Affairs Don Jamieson, with the assistance of Ron Basford, Minister of Justice and Attorney-General of Canada, and Roméo LeBlanc, Minister of Fisheries and the Environment. J. Alan Beesley, Canada's High Commissioner to Australia, is deputy head of the delegation.

This session is crucial in preparing a new convention of the seas. Although the last session produced more results than previous ones, many sensitive and contentious matters have still not been settled, and some major disagreements remain on the issue of the international seabed.

The sixth session, however, enabled discussions to take place on most of the unresolved issues and, in certain major areas, the conference was closer than ever to reaching a consensus. These discussions resulted in the drafting of a new Informal Composite Negotiating Text. This document reflects Canada's objectives in several areas: the 12-mile territorial sea is universally accepted, the special anti-pollution measures in the Arctic are receiving increased international support, special measures have been taken with regard to salmon conservation, and a consensus is emerging around the idea of the 200-mile economic zone, which supports Canada in establishing the 200-mile exclusive fishing zone.

This progress, however, must be laid out in a universally-accepted convention and the conference will not be able to adopt such an instrument until it has solved the more difficult issues, particularly those pertaining to seabed mining. Canada has taken part in several informal meetings to advance negotiations on this.

Discussions on this topic at the seventh session are nevertheless expected to be difficult as well as in certain other areas, such as access of land-locked and geographically disadvantaged countries to the living resources of coastal states, the provisions for settlement of disputes pertaining to the sovereignty of coastal states over resources, the definition of the continental shelf and the related issue of revenue-sharing and the delimitation of the maritime boundaries between adjacent or opposite states.

Postage rates rise

Three new stamps were issued by Canada Post last month in preparation for an increase in postage rates effective April 1.

Two of the new stamps, both 14 cents for domestic first class mail, carry the same designs as the former first class regular issue stamps — the Parliament Buildings and a bas-relief portrait of Queen Elizabeth. The only change in their appearance is in the colour, with the blue of the former 12-cent stamps being replaced by crimson in the new ones.

The other stamp in the trio, a 30-cent value, the new international airmail rate (up from 25 cents), features the foliage of the red oak tree.

The oak design continues in the theme introduced for low-value definitives in 1977, with the trembling aspen, the Douglas fir, and the sugar maple.

Occupational health centre

Labour Minister John Munro introduced into Parliament on March 20 a bill to establish a Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. He said that "in Canada we need new and effective methods of reducing or eliminating health and safety hazards at the work-place". The proposed Centre, he said, would help meet this requirement.

The bill, endorsed by Minister of National Health and Welfare Monique Bégin, has been the subject of intensive consultation with provincial authorities, labour and management groups, safety specialists and others and, in principle, has won wide support.

The Centre will be a self-governing body whose purpose is to promote the fundamental right of all Canadians to a healthy, safe working environment. Among its main functions will be the establishment of an integrated information system on all aspects of occupational health and safety, dissemination of authoritative information and the stimulation of research in this vital area.

Cost of operating the Centre the first year will be \$1 million, subsequently increasing to about \$8-9 million a year. The latter figure represents 1 per cent of the \$800 million now being paid out each year by workmen's compensation boards in Canada as a result of injuries and illnesses on the job.

The Centre, initially to be financed by the Federal Government but with provision for support in the future by provincial governments, labour, business and other groups, will facilitate collaboration among all public authorities, both federal and provincial. While it will have no regulatory powers it will serve all interests and co-operate with all existing jurisdictions.

Mr. Munro points out: "Existing legislation in Canada relating to the work environment is massive and complex. There are 220 provincial and federal laws and 400 sets of regulations administered by 90 different departments and agencies. Yet each year the number of Canadians injured or made ill as a direct result of their work increases — over one million in 1976, and the cost to the economy grows — over \$800 million in known, direct costs. Obviously regulation alone is not a sufficient answer."

To ensure the Centre remains both independent and non-biased, its governing council will be multipartite. It will have representatives nominated by the lieutenant-governors in council of each province, the governments of the two territories, the Federal Government, labour and management, and the professional scientific and academic communities.

Great Lakes water quality

Canadian and U.S. representatives at the second round of negotiations to revise the 1972 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement in Ottawa on March 30, agreed that the agreement had functioned well and provided a sound basis upon which to construct a more effective accord.

Both sides conducted extensive reviews of the present pact and public hearings have been held in both countries. Based on these reviews and hearings, each side prepared revised draft texts which were exchanged prior to the March meeting.

Substantial agreement was reached on a number of areas including: a more comprehensive approach to pollution control in the Great Lakes system; the continued need for the abatement control and prevention of pollution from municipal and industrial sources; revised objectives including the need for further reducing phosphorus loadings; new limits on radioactivity; the control of persistent toxic substances; and control of pollution from indirect sources such as land use and airborne pollutants.