

Canadian government and labor leaders, asserting their national status as a separate Canadian delegation at the Peace Conference, took the initiative along with other British delegates and with the United States delegates in drawing up the constitution of the International Labor Organization. The ILO was planned in association with the League of Nations, but as an autonomous tripartite agency where governments, employers and workers from member countries could discuss their urgent problems freely and independently.

In 1940, the ILO accepted an invitation from the Canadian Government to move to Montreal, where, throughout the war, it continued its worldwide work on a limited scale from the McGill University campus. The ILO returned to Geneva in 1948. One main task was to reassess and reorganize the objectives and programs of the Organization in order to meet the most critical problems of the postwar world. In 1946, the ILO became one of the Specialized Agencies of the United Nations.

Objectives

The ILO's aim, as reflected in the preamble to its constitution, was to contribute to universal and lasting peace through the promotion of social justice. The Declaration of Philadelphia, 1944, re-emphasized this and asserted that "poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere", stressing urgent need to aid the war-torn and underdeveloped parts of the world. In order to achieve these objectives, the ILO is "tripartite" in character, bringing together representatives of government, labor and management from the member nations, a feature unique among the UN Specialized Agencies. It has gradually built up an International Labor Code dealing with such matters as employment and unemployment, conditions and employment, industrial relations and labor inspection, freedom of association, employment of children and young persons, industrial safety and health, maternity protection and employment of women, human rights (including freedom from discrimination), social insurance and security, and special problems of various industries and occupations.

The Labor Code, now constantly being revised and strengthened, consists of (a) 128 conventions, the ratification of any of which by a member government obliges that country to maintain its legislation in the particular field at the convention standards and to report every two years to the ILO on its implementation, and (b) 132 recommendations that set forth general principles and detailed procedures, to guide governments and organizations in drafting legislation or administrative regulations if they so desire.

The ILO has also studied problems of special importance referred to it by the United Nations, such as forced labor and freedom of association. The most significant extension of ILO activities since 1950, however, has been its operational program designed to increase regional productivity and to raise economic levels in the less-developed member countries. The ILO spends money allocated for this work from various United Nations funds, and has also financed additional manpower-training projects from its own budget. There has been close co-operation with the other Specialized Agencies in all aspects of the ILO operational program, including co-ordinated joint projects in various areas.

Structure and Activities

The ILO has three main organs: