

Canada and the International Labour Organization

THE International Labour Organization is one of ten intergovernmental organizations which are linked with the United Nations through special agreements arranged by the Economic and Social Council and approved by the General Assembly and by the organization concerned. The "Specialized Agencies" of the United Nations are expert in their respective fields: labour, health, education, food and agriculture, finance and banking, civil aviation, postal matters, telecommunications and meteorology.

History

By 1815, the Industrial Revolution had produced many problems in such fields as control of child labour, industrial health and safety, working conditions in mines and factories, and limitation of hours of work. A number of European countries, including Britain, tried individually to reform some of the worst abuses in factories and mines; but the belief spread that international action was needed since the problems were the same in all industrialized countries. Robert Owen, British cotton manufacturer and social reformer, urged the Aix-la-Chapelle Conference of European powers in 1818 to draw up international standards for conditions of work in all their countries, and in the next eighty years various workers' international congresses passed resolutions demanding action. Several industrial conferences were held between 1890 and 1913 attended by representatives from European countries, to discuss international labour conventions designed to prevent night work and to establish a maximum ten-hour workday for women and young people. These conferences, however, were not very effective.

The World War of 1914-1918 required all-out production, and the working people loyally helped to achieve victory for the Allied countries. By 1919, inflation, unemployment and starvation had made the life of the workers miserable in the war-ravaged countries of Europe. Faced with this situation, the Allied Governments realized the need for a Labour Charter in the Peace Treaty of Versailles, not only to help in improving living and working conditions, but also to help in maintaining peace and prosperity throughout the world. The British Empire delegation at the Peace Conference (including Canadian government and labour leaders) took the initiative in drawing up the Constitution of the International Labour Organization. Although an autonomous organization, the ILO was associated with the League of Nations. In 1946, the ILO became one of the Specialized Agencies of the United Nations through an agreement with the United Nations.

Objectives

The ILO's aim, as reflected in the preamble of its constitution, is to contribute to universal and lasting peace through the promotion of social justice. In order to achieve this objective, ILO is "tripartite" in character bringing