

International Labour Organization

The International Labour Organization (ILO) was established in 1919 as part of the peace settlement following the first World War. Originally associated with the League of Nations, in 1946 it became a Specialized Agency of the United Nations. The main purpose of the ILO is to contribute to the establishment of lasting peace through promoting social justice. Among its specific objectives are the establishment of fair wage practices; the regulations of hours and conditions of work; the recognition of the right of collective bargaining and the principle of freedom of association; the extension of workmen's compensation, sickness and unemployment insurance, weekly rest and holidays with pay; and protection against accidents and occupational diseases.

The tripartite structure of the ILO is unique among the Specialized Agencies of the United Nations. Representatives of governments, employers and workers from 77 member states participate in determining ILO activities and policies. Under the constitution, there are three main organs: the annual International Labour Conference, which is the policy making body to which each member nation may send 4 delegates (1 worker, 1 employer, 2 government) plus technical advisers; the Governing Body, which is the executive council, composed of 40 members (10 worker, 10 employer, 20 government, half of the government seats being reserved, on a non-elective basis, for the ten "members of chief industrial importance", including Canada); and the International Labour Office, in Geneva, which is the permanent secretariat of the ILO, under a Director-General elected by the Governing Body. The Office has branches in Ottawa and various other parts of the world, and field offices for operational activities.

The ILO's principal method of achieving its objectives is by the adoption of conventions and recommendations by the International Labour Conference. Members ratifying an ILO Convention are obliged to bring their labour standards into harmony with the provisions of the convention and to report annually on its implementation. Recommendations are not subject to ratification, but set forth general principles to guide governments in drafting regulations in various labour fields. In the last 38 years the ILO has adopted 104 conventions and 102 recommendations forming a broadly systematic international labour code. Canada has ratified a total of 18 conventions dealing with hours of work and weekly rest in industry, conditions of employment of seafarers and dock workers, minimum wage fixing machinery, and other subjects. As Canada is a federal country with most labour matters wholly or partly under the jurisdiction of the provinces, there are obstacles in the way of the federal government ratifying many of the ILO Conventions.

The 39th Annual ILO Conference was held in Geneva in June 1956, and was attended by 800 delegates, advisers and observers from 82 countries. The admission of 7 new members in 1956 (Jordan, Morocco, Spain, Sudan, Tunisia, Romania and Paraguay) brought membership in the ILO to 77 states.

One of the most important items before the Conference was the McNair Report on Freedom of Employers' and Workers' Organizations (issued in March 1956). Since 1954, when the U.S.S.R. returned to the ILO after being expelled in 1939, controversy has been increasing about the right of