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CANADA AND THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

The International Labour Organization is one of 13 Specialized Agencies linked with the United Nations through 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, atomic energy, telecommunications, meteorology, international development and maritime matters.

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 80 years, various workers' international congresses passed resolutions demanding action. Several industrial conferences, attended by representatives from European countries, were held between 1890 and 1913, 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. During the Second World War, the International Labour Organization operated on a restricted basis from temporary headquarters in Montreal. In 1946, the ILO became one of the Specialized Agencies of the United Nations through an agreement with the United Nations. By 1963, the membership had increased to 108 countries.

OBJECTIVES

The ILO's aim, as reflected in the preamble to its constitution, and reaffirmed in the 1944 Declaration of Philadelphia, 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 together representatives

of government, labour and management from the member nations, a feature unique among the UN Specialized Agencies. It has gradually built up an International Labour Code dealing with such matters as employment and unemployment, conditions of employment, industrial relations and labour inspection, freedom of association, employment of children and young persons, industrial safety and health, maternity protection and employment of women, freedom from discrimination and other human rights, social insurance and security, and maritime labour.

The Labour Code consists of (a) 119 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) 119 Recommendations that set forth general principles and detailed practices, 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 labour and freedom of association. The most significant extension of ILO activities since 1950, however, has been its operational programme 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 the United Nations Expanded Technical Assistance Programme and the Special Fund, 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 programme.

STRUCTURE AND ACTIVITIES

The ILO has three main organs:

(1) The Governing Body consists of 48 members (24 government, 12 employer and 12 worker members). The ten nations of chief industrial importance (including Canada) have permanent government members, while the other 14 government members, the 12 worker members and the 12 employer members are elected every three years. There are also ten deputy members for each of the three groups. This executive council meets three or four times a year to formulate policies and programmes, to supervise the activities of the various conferences and committees, and to review the work of the International Labour Office.

(2) The International Labour Conference is now a world assembly of over 1100 delegates, advisers and observers, meeting each year to discuss urgent world labour problems, to survey the general activities of the Organization, and to approve the annual budget. Each member nation may send four delegates (two government, one worker, and one employer), as well as technical advisers. The Conference draws up and adopts International Labour Conventions and Recommendations for the voluntary guidance of legislatures and employers' and workers' organizations. It also debates and adopts resolutions on labour and social matters of current world importance.

(3) The International Labour Office at Geneva, Switzerland, acts under the Director-General as the permanent secretariat, the research and information center, and the publishing house for the Organization. Branch offices represent the ILO in various parts of the world (including a Canada branch at 202 Queen Street, Ottawa), and field offices have been set up in certain under-developed areas to carry out the technical assistance programme.

In addition to the three principal organs, there are numerous conferences, commissions and committees to meet specific needs. Regional conferences of American, European, Asian, African, and Near Eastern countries are held every few years. Ten industrial committees, established after 1945, meet every few years to discuss special problems affecting particular industries. There are advisory committees and panels of consultants in many fields such as

forced labour, freedom of association, migration, social security, women's work, juvenile employment, occupational safety and health, labour statistics, co-operation, etc.; every year groups of experts meet to study urgent problems in some of these fields. The most important conclusions of these bodies are eventually referred to the annual Conference for more thorough discussion, with a view to the adoption of Conventions and Recommendations.

CANADIAN PARTICIPATION

Canada's participation in international labour affairs dates from 1910, when Mr. Mackenzie King attended a labour conference at Lugano, Switzerland. The next year, as Minister of Labour, Mr. King acted on one of the conference recommendations by introducing a bill in the House of Commons to prohibit the use of white phosphorous in making matches. As already mentioned, Canada took an active part in the discussion, which led to the establishment of the International Labour Organization in 1919 and has supported it fully ever since. Canada has been represented by government, employer and worker delegates at each session of the International Labour Conference and has participated in many other ILO activities.

As early as 1926, Canada ratified four ILO Maritime Conventions and, by 1963, had ratified a total of 20 Conventions dealing with conditions of employment of seafarers and dockers, hours of work and weekly rest in industry, minimum wage-fixing machinery, employment service organization, and so forth. Canada reports regularly to the ILO on the measures that have been taken to implement these and other Conventions. Canadian legislation on these subjects is considered to equal or exceed the requirements of the various Conventions. Canada is a federal country, and the fact that most labour matters are wholly or partly under provincial jurisdiction has placed obstacles in the way of the Federal Government, up to the present, ratifying many of the ILO Conventions.

In the past Canada obtained helpful advice from the International Labour Office when such matters as conciliation in labour disputes, unemployment insurance, and establishment of employment services were being considered. More recently, Canada has been able to repay this assistance by contributing to the development of the less-industrialized nations. The ILO has used Canadian experts in its technical-assistance programme in under-developed countries, and has sent trainees from such countries to Canada for study and on-the-job training. A manual entitled "National Employment Services -- Canada" is used by the ILO in setting up employment services and training employment-office staff in developing countries.

While the Department of External Affairs has the general responsibility for handling Canada's international relations, including its United Nations commitments, the Department of Labour is the official liaison agency between the Canadian Government and the ILO. With the expansion in ILO activities after the Second World War, a special branch of the Department of Labour was established to work in close co-operation with the Department of External Affairs, with other federal departments, with the provincial departments of labour and with the employers' and workers' organizations, all of which have an interest in the ILO. In this way, the ILO is kept informed on the progress of industrial and economic conditions in Canada, and the Canadian governments and organizations concerned are kept in touch with developments in the international field. Each year some progress is made toward uniform and higher labour standards in Canada, in line with the International Labour Code, and Canada thus plays its part in furthering the purposes of the ILO.

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