

3.—Canada and the International Labour Organization.¹

The International Labour Organization was set up in accordance with Part XIII of the Treaty of Versailles. The general object of the Organization is given in the preamble to that document:—

“Whereas the League of Nations has for its object the establishment of universal peace, and such a peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice;

“And whereas conditions of labour exist involving such injustice, hardship and privation to large numbers of people as to produce unrest so great that the peace and harmony of the world are imperilled; and an improvement of those conditions is urgently required; as for example, by the regulation of the hours of work, including the establishment of a maximum working day and week, the regulation of the labour supply, the prevention of unemployment, the provision of an adequate living wage, the protection of the worker against sickness, disease and injury arising out of his employment, the protection of children, young persons and women, provision for old age and injury, protection of the interests of workers when employed in countries other than their own, recognition of the principle of freedom of association, the organization of vocational and technical education and other measures;

“Whereas also the failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of labour is an obstacle in the way of other nations which desire to improve the conditions in their own countries:

“The High Contracting Parties, moved by sentiments of justice and humanity as well as by the desire to secure the permanent peace of the world, agree to the following.”

The scheme of organization provides for an International Labour Conference, to be held at least once a year, and a permanent International Labour Office.

The International Labour Conference is composed of four delegates from each Member of the Organization, two representatives of the government, one of the employers and one of the workpeople. Its task is to consider proposals dealing with questions similar to those laid down in the preamble and to embody its findings in draft conventions or recommendations. Each Member binds itself to bring such of these conventions and recommendations as are adopted by a two-thirds majority of the Conference before the competent authority or authorities. The authority has complete liberty to decide whether or not it will ratify any or all of these conventions, and what action, if any, it will take on the recommendations.

It is of special interest to Canada that the Treaty recognizes the limited power of a federal government, and provides that in the case of a federal state, the authority of which to enter into conventions on labour matters is limited, the federal government may treat a draft convention as a recommendation only.

Article 396 of the Treaty states that “the functions of the International Labour Office shall include the collection and distribution of information on all subjects relating to the international adjustment of conditions of industrial life and labour, and particularly the examination of subjects which it is proposed to bring before the Conference, with a view to the conclusion of international conventions and the conduct of such special investigations as may be ordered by the Conference.”

The International Labour Office is required to collect all available information in regard to the problems to be dealt with, and to prepare draft conventions or recommendations for submission to the Conference. The work of the Office has been divided, for the proper performance of its duties, into two divisions, namely: the Diplomatic Division, which conducts the correspondence with Governments and is called upon to deal “with the questions connected with the obligations entailed by the labour provisions of the Treaty and in particular with those relating to the

¹Contributed by the Department of Labour, Ottawa.