

Section 11.—Canada and the International Labour Organization

The Department of Labour is the officially designated liaison agency between the Canadian Government and the International Labour Organization. The ILO was established in 1919, in association with the League of Nations under the Treaties of Peace, with the object of improving labour and social conditions throughout the world by international agreement and legislative action. Under an agreement approved by the General Conference of the International Labour Organization at its 29th Session held at Montreal, Que., Oct. 2, 1946, and by the United Nations General Assembly on Dec. 14, 1946, the Organization became a specialized agency of the United Nations although retaining its autonomy.

The Organization is an association of 66 nations, financed by their governments and controlled by representatives of those governments and of their organized employers and workers and comprises: (1) the General Conference of representatives of the Member States; (2) the International Labour Office; and (3) the Governing Body. Its structure and field of activity has been extended considerably since 1945 by the establishment of eight tripartite committees to deal with problems of major world industries, by triennial Regional Conferences and other Special Conferences, and by the technical assistance program to aid the development of backward countries.

The Conference meets at least once a year and is composed of four delegates from each Member State—two representing the government, one representing the employers and one representing the workers. These are accompanied by technical advisers for the various items on the agenda. The principal function of the Annual Conferences is the formulation of international standards concerning working and living conditions, in the form of Conventions and Recommendations. A Convention is adopted by a two-thirds majority of delegates at the Conference and must be considered by the competent authorities in each Member State with a view to possible ratification; however, each Member State decides for itself whether or not to ratify any Convention, and only by ratification does it assume the obligation to bring its legislation in that field up to the standard set by the Convention. In Canada, the provincial legislatures are the competent authorities with jurisdiction over the subject matter of most of the ILO Conventions and Recommendations. A Recommendation is adopted by a two-thirds majority vote of Conference delegates; it contains general principles for the guidance of national governments in drafting legislation or in issuing administrative orders and is not subject to ratification by Member States.

The International Labour Office acts as the permanent secretariat of the Organization and as an information centre and publishing house with respect to all questions on industry and labour. In the operational field, it assists Member States by furnishing experts on manpower and technical assistance. The ILO maintains a Canadian branch office at 95 Rideau Street, Ottawa.

The Governing Body of the ILO consists of 32 members—16 government representatives, eight employer representatives and eight worker representatives. Of the government seats, each of the eight States of chief industrial importance (of which Canada is one) holds a permanent place, while the other eight government representatives are elected triennially by the Conference; the worker and employer members also are elected every three years at the Conference by their groups.