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The International Labour Organization

WORKING FOR PEOPLE WHO WORK, the International Labour Organization this year completed fifty years of service as the oldest of the United Nations specialized agencies.

Set up in 1919 under the League of Nations to bring governments, employers and trade unions together for united action to meet problems arising out of industrialization, the ILO has sought to meet that obligation by standard-setting, research, spreading information, and providing technical co-operation.

Its guiding principle is: "All human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity."

Seeking to put its finger on the causes of the unrest which threatened the peace and harmony of the world, the ILO Constitution blamed "injustice, hardship and privation." It sought to establish by international action the regulation of hours of work, prevention of unemployment, provision of an adequate living wage, protection of the worker against sickness, disease and injury arising out of his employment, protection of children, young persons and women, and provision for old age.

This is probably the greatest enterprise of our age — the continuing improvement of the standard of living of men and women in every country; the fight against ignorance, misery and poverty; and the promotion of world security and peace.

Millions of people who are unaware of the importance or even the existence of the International Labour Organization benefit daily by the work it does.

What does the ILO do? It is a world forum where labour and social problems are discussed by representatives of labour and employers and governments, sitting down together to work out solutions. It sets standards, as a result of these deliberations, for working and living conditions.

The ILO does not impose international views or solutions, but works through national governments.

Its standards help employers' and workers' organizations to formulate their own plans and programmes and collective agreements. The ILO follows through, when requested, with technical co-operation, research and publishing.

This year, labour, management, and government sit down together at a tripartite conference in Ottawa to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the International Labour Organization.

They will discuss such topics as labour-management relations and labour standards; the need for trained supervisors and shop stewards; the importance of communication, consultation, and the resolution of problems; the responsibility of labour, management, and the government to the public; and the role of member countries, especially Canada, in external aid programmes.

The Organization

The ILO recognized from its earliest times that as an international body intimately associated with one of mankind's touchiest activities it must be above reproach. Its integrity must be demonstrated in every decision and pronouncement. It must speak out as an evidence that it has no hidden purposes. It resists all attempts to interject political issues, and it takes precautions lest its aims and purposes become lost or buried under political propaganda.

Those purposes reach into every country on earth, whether it is a tiny place with only a few hundred thousand people or a nation that is continental in its territory.

In one country the ILO may teach peasants to use a plough; in another country it may teach industrial management staff how to use an electronic computer. It may help with the revision of labour legislation, the organization of co-operatives, or the setting-up of small industrial institutes.

Canada's interest

When the League of Nations, with which the ILO

was affiliated, dissolved after World War II, the ILO survived to join the United Nations' family. Its member states increased from 45 in 1919 to 122 in 1969.

Canada was in the movement from the beginning. She took an active part in the discussion which led to establishment of the Organization in 1919, and has been represented by government, worker, and employer delegates at every session of the International Labour Conference. She was host to the ILO during the war years, at McGill University in Montreal, until the ILO returned to its permanent headquarters in Geneva in 1948.

Because Canada is a federal country, with most labour matters wholly or partly under provincial jurisdiction, there have been limitations upon the number of ILO Conventions that could be ratified.

This has been embarrassing because of Canada's international posture as one of the states of chief industrial importance, hence expected to set a good example.

An effort to press through the "Hours of Work" convention providing for the 8-hour day, made under cover of Section 132 of the British North America Act, ran aground on the snag of provincial rights. The Supreme Court confirmed the view that the provinces had legislative competence in this field, and this was confirmed by the Privy Council.

Nevertheless, the influence of ILO instruments is to be seen in many items of Canadian legislation, and as John Mainwaring, Director of the International Labour Affairs Branch, Canada Department of Labour, put it: "We have got past the despairing stage of not too many years ago when we considered it inexpedient to seek to do anything very much about ILO Conventions which fell partly within provincial jurisdiction."

The favourable economic conditions of recent years and the enhanced strength of organized labour have been accompanied by a considerable expansion of provincial labour legislation. Provincial ministers, advisers and observers have been included in delegations to the ILO Conferences and other meetings. Some Conventions have been ratified after consultation with the provincial governments, and consultative procedures are being made more productive.

Canada has not performed outstandingly in the field programmes of the ILO. In the twenty years since the ILO moved into the technical assistance field in underdeveloped countries, fewer than a hundred Canadians have been recruited to serve on projects, although Canadian experts in significant numbers serve on projects sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency. Some reasons given are: preference for Europeans, distance from Geneva, and the higher salaries expected. Canada is, however, co-operating with the ILO in setting up a pilot training centre of a national apprenticeship scheme in Tanzania.

While the Department of External Affairs has the general responsibility for handling Canada's international relations, the Department of Labour is the official liaison agency between the Canadian Government and the International Labour Organization.

There was a meeting of the American States Members of the ILO in Ottawa in 1966 which gave history a new phrase: "The Ottawa Plan for Human Resources Development." This is a plan for the countries of Latin America and of the Caribbean region, touching upon manpower planning, the training of workers and management, and the level of employment. Here originated the ILO World Employment Programme, which is now being developed continent by continent.

Structure of the ILO

As an international organization functioning in a difficult field, the ILO has adopted forms which do not come readily to the eye or ear: Governing Body and Conference.

The prime purpose of the annual Conference which is attended by about 1,100 delegates, advisers and observers, is to set international labour standards. The Governing Body which functions as an executive council, consisting of twenty-four government, twelve worker and twelve employer members, guides the operations of the organization. The Office is the research centre, operational headquarters, and publishing house. It has branch and field offices in many countries, including Canada.

When matters of importance work their way up to the Conference level, decisions about them may issue as Conventions or Recommendations or Resolutions. Acceptance of ILO standards is a matter of free choice, but member countries are obliged to submit the Conventions and Recommendations to their parliaments or other appropriate authorities for consideration.

A Convention is a draft international treaty. When a government ratifies a Convention it accepts the obligation to apply its provisions, and to report at intervals on how the Convention is being applied. Reports are scrutinized by an international committee of experts and then by the Conference.

There is a provision for complaint against a government which is not securing the effective observance of a Convention it has ratified. If other methods fail to hold the government to its obligations the complaint may be referred to the International Court of Justice.

The ILO maintains a scoreboard of ratifications, and it is a matter of pride for countries to make a good showing. Canada, in spite of its difficulties as a federal state, has ratified 24 Conventions, covering such things as hours of work in industry, unemployment indemnity, protection against accidents, and abolition of forced labour and discrimination.

The second class of instrument issuing from the ILO Conference is a Recommendation, which is a

guide to action but not a binding treaty. Taken together, these instruments have come to be known as the International Labour Code.

Social objectives

Behind the activities and statistics of the ILO is the awareness that workers are people. Labour involves not only a set of technological and economic relations, but also a set of social relations. Men work not only to earn a living but to live as well as they can in their environment.

The improvement of conditions of work and life are among the basic constitutional objectives of the ILO. In fact, the ILO was the first international organization to set precise standards implementing human rights.

Of the ILO Conventions, three are designed to ensure freedom of association and the right to organize; two are aimed at abolishing forced labour, and three others are directed toward the elimination of discrimination in employment.

Canada has ratified four of the Conventions which have a direct connection with the rights spelled out in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Attention of the ILO has been given to the plight of members of tribal or semi-tribal populations whose social and economic conditions are at a less advanced stage than those of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partly by their own customs and traditions or by special laws.

The aim of the ILO Convention is to promote systematic remedial action for these people, and for their progressive integration into the life of the country.

This Convention, not yet ratified by Canada, echoes what was said in the *Monthly Letter* of July 1947: "Everyone with sympathy for the Indians and care for Canada's obligations will wish success to the parliamentary committee in its search for an honourable and thorough way of discharging the Dominion's responsibilities to these First Citizens of Canada. It is not enough to save the Indian from extinction. If the Indian Affairs Branch can provide a fulcrum to help the Indian reach a new and more satisfying life, it will be a fine demonstration of practical democracy."

The status of women

All women, wherever they work — whether in a field or a factory or a home — are deeply affected by the work of the International Labour Organization. They have an equal interest with men in the ILO's declared intention to help build a world in which all human beings shall live out their lives in conditions of freedom and dignity, of equal opportunity and treatment.

In its early days the ILO laid stress upon protecting women against exploitation, but the programme has been broadened in keeping with the changing times.

Today it is aimed at helping women to attain better training and equal opportunities and equal treatment, so as to lift them out of their second-rate social status which has been an accepted condition in many countries.

Out of every one hundred women, thirty are economically active. Women make up a little over a third of the world's labour force. In Canada the number of working women has increased dramatically over the past quarter century: from one married woman in twenty to one in four.

These women workers, the ILO believes, should have equal opportunities to develop their capacities and to participate in economic and social life.

It recognizes that many women workers face special problems because of their function of motherhood and because of their heavy home responsibilities. One of the first Conventions, ratified by 25 countries (not including Canada), provided for six weeks' leave from work before childbirth.

In the years to come, the accent will be on the needs and problems of women in the developing countries, for these are vast and urgent. Progress is slow, because improvement is balked by the inertia of customs, attitudes and law.

Helping young people

What can the International Labour Organization do to help young people meet the challenge of our fast-changing society and develop their full skills and capacities for the common good?

It is seeking to regulate and progressively limit child labour with a view to its abolition everywhere; it adopts Conventions to protect young workers, to ensure that they are well prepared for work, and to provide social security protection. It organizes and administers vocational guidance services, and develops methods, techniques and materials for vocational training.

The ILO considers skill training to be one of the best and most positive forms of service to working youth. It seeks to enlist community support and the practical support of labour and management in providing training services for girls and boys. It would eliminate all discrimination in access to training facilities on any grounds other than individual capacity and merit.

Usually the accent is on training strategic personnel such as supervisors, foremen, technicians and vocational instructors, for these are people who can train others. When a centre is fully developed, the ILO experts are withdrawn, relinquishing responsibility to the national authorities.

Health and safety

The emphasis of ILO activities in the field of occupational safety has developed from mere protection to a policy of the promotion of health among workers.

Safety is still an important feature. There are Conventions which lay down rules concerning the working environment, the strength of equipment, and training in first aid; there are rules regarding safe and hygienic practices; there is technical research into the harmful effects of materials; there is medical research to determine the causes and treatment of occupational diseases and the physical characteristics conducive to accidents; and there is safety education in universities, trade schools, and engineering colleges.

The model code of safety regulations for industrial establishments has 244 sets of regulations in sixteen chapters and runs to some 500 pages.

Canada provided a colourful episode in the campaign to prohibit the dangerous use of white phosphorus, a disease-causing substance used in the manufacture of matches. It is told by Mr. Mainwaring in the *Labour Gazette*. The Minister of Labour, who had made personal investigation of the effects of the disease in Canada, produced at a Cabinet meeting a jar containing the preserved jaw-bone of a woman worker who had been a victim. This convinced the Cabinet, but because an election intervened it was not until three years later that protective legislation was put on the statute books.

Labour-management

The International Labour Organization has an active programme designed to promote continuous improvement in the relations between labour and management. It operates through research and information services, technical co-operation, and educational programmes.

The association between the ILO and the trade union movement is of long standing. Labour and management participate with equal voice and vote in the formulation of ILO standards, receive copies of their governments' reports, and play a leading part in their final evaluation.

An impressive characteristic of our time is the increase in the demand for training institutes and facilities. There is a universal shortage of millions of managers, instructors and teachers, and of hundreds of millions of skilled workers and technicians.

More than three hundred ILO management development, productivity and small-scale industry experts are in the field. Their purpose is to train national personnel who will take over training as soon as possible.

The ILO's World Employment Programme has as its aim to create more opportunities for jobs and skills of value to the community and satisfying to the workers, especially in the new countries.

It will be, in the words of Kalmen Kaplansky, Director of the Canada Branch of the International Labour Office, "A world campaign for providing greater employment opportunities and enhanced training facilities for the hundreds of millions who are idle today through no fault of their own."

The need is indicated by the statistics: between 1970 and 1980 more than 280 million people will be added to the world's labour force. Of these, 226 million will be in the less developed regions of the world.

This calls for action on a massive scale, and it accounts for the ILO urge to participate in what has been called "The Great Adventure of modern times." Canada is committed to the extent of one per cent of her gross national product in 1970 for aid to developing countries. She now contributes about \$300 million a year.

Neither Canada nor the ILO can impose solutions to problems on the countries they seek to help: they can only assist them to find their own way to progress. They contribute toward strengthening the national economies of the developing countries so as to ensure the attainment of higher levels of economic and social welfare for their people.

In a country so industrialized as Canada it is natural that many people should be surprised to learn of the backwardness of other countries.

Although the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America possess two-thirds of the world's population their inhabitants share only one-sixth of the world's income. The gross national product of the richer countries in 1966 was \$1,400 billion; the transfer from richer to poorer countries was only \$7.5 billion.

The ILO has not lost itself in a maze of statistics, but is pursuing its belief that human resources development is the essential part of economic development. It is interested in providing leadership, inspiration and education to people, rather than in doses of technology. It seeks to promote fuller and more productive employment of the labour force, and to ensure more efficient utilization of the available manpower resources.

Work is for all

Work is common to all mankind, and, said Tolstoy in one of his essays, work will draw men together.

The ILO is not a group of sentimental humanitarians, but an association of men and women and States united to work toward lasting peace based upon social justice as it is represented by the rule of law, political democracy, human rights, and the fundamental freedoms.

It is contributing toward the improvement of living standards in all countries, believing as it does that "Poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere."

Expert though it may be in its fields of effort, the ILO encounters the tendency of people to expect great results in a short time. It needs support and effort on governmental level in every country, and among the people of every country, so that it may not be accused of making a utopian suit which we have not yet grown into.