THE ILO HEADQUARTERS

GENEVA
I - HISTORY

The International Labour Office has occupied its present Geneva headquarters since 1974. The building, faced with glass and cast aluminium, poised on a hill between the Jura mountains and the lake, reflects the consolidation of work which began as a pioneering venture.

Created to strengthen peace by furthering social justice, the ILO has been bringing together workers', employers' and government representatives for more than half a century to devise measures which will improve conditions of work and the general welfare of working people. It has been both a witness and a participant in far-reaching social and labour changes.

The first headquarters building

Soon after the International Labour Organisation was created by the 1919 peace treaties, its secretariat found temporary premises in London. However, since it had been decided at Versailles that the ILO should be an autonomous part of the League of Nations, the International Labour Office moved to Geneva. On 14 July 1920, it opened its first headquarters at the Villa Thudicum, a former girls' school which now houses the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Work had already started on the earliest international labour standards, which were adopted in the first International Labour Conferences, held in Washington and Genoa. Studies and publications were launched from the Geneva headquarters and contact with many countries was established. Within one year the building was already too small and plans were made for the construction of adequate premises.

They were built in a park on the west bank of the Lake of
Geneva. The classically-ornamented stone and concrete building, with its square tower on top of the entrance, was graced with reclining allegorical figures and bronze statues of workers.

On inauguration day, three people approached the triple lock to the wrought-iron gate with golden keys in their hands: the chairman of the Governing Body, representing governments, and the two vice-chairmen, representing employers and workers. This act symbolised the tripartite nature of the Organisation, still its unique distinguishing feature among international bodies.

**Wartime move to Canada**

When in 1940 Switzerland found itself surrounded by nations at war, the ILO moved to Montreal, Canada, and continued its work in premises made available by MacGill University. Activities continued, although on a reduced scale. At the 1944 session of the International Labour Conference, in Philadelphia, USA, a historic declaration was adopted which redefined the aims and purposes of the Organisation. The Declaration of Philadelphia stated that labour is not a commodity, that freedom of expression and of association are essential to sustained progress, that poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere and that all human beings have a right to pursue their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity.

A war-shattered world believed that such ideals could become reality. The United Nations had been created as an expression of the aspiration towards a new world order, and in 1946 the ILO became the first of the specialised agencies associated with the UN. It had, by then, returned to Geneva and settled once again in the lakeside building.

It was there that, in 1969, the ILO celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, received the visit of Pope Paul VI and heard the news that it had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

**Bursting at the seams**

Several new wings had been added to the ILO building between 1937 and 1958, and an annex was built in the Petit-Saconnex area in 1964. A third set of offices had to be found in town. A labyrinth of office files, many of them of considerable historical value, had been accumulating in storerooms at La Praille.
When further expansion of the main building proved to be impracticable, the Governing Body in 1965 took the decision to build anew. An agreement was signed between the ILO and the FIPPOI, the Swiss Property Foundation for International Organisations, whereby the old building was bought by FIPPOI and the ILO received a forty-year loan to finance construction of a new building.

The cornerstone was laid in May 1970, consisting of three blocks symbolising the government, worker and employer groups of the Organisation. The new building was formally inaugurated in November 1974.
II - DESCRIPTION

The ILO headquarters building in Geneva, designed by a team of outstanding architects - Eugène Beaudoin (French), Alberto Camenzind (Swiss) and Pier Luigi Nervi (Italian) - consists of three main sections: the South Wing, with the conference rooms and the library, the North Wing, with the general services, and the central office block between the two. The total length is 250 metres.

The central block comprises 11 storeys; it is carried on 56 white pillars, each supporting a weight of some 1,500 tons. Its sides (facing east and west) are concave, giving maximum width where internal space is needed for lifts, stair wells and other utilities and providing daylight for all offices; the outside curves are repeated in the corridors, avoiding the monotony of long straight hallways.

The façade is made up of 8,000 cast aluminium modules with a patterned but untreated surface. The building was one of the first in Europe to use this material, which was developed in and imported from Japan. The relatively pollution-free atmosphere in Geneva makes possible the use of untreated aluminium in this manner.

All of the office space in this block, for more than 2,000 people, is built on a modular system, with movable internal partitions.

In the South Wing there are 13 conference rooms, including the main meeting room for the Governing Body, with seating capacities ranging from 20 to 400. There is also a film projection room with 300 places. The library, in the same wing, can seat more than 30 persons in its reading room. All meeting rooms are equipped for simultaneous interpretation.

The North Wing contains, among other features, a restaurant with service for 300 to 400 people, a self-service cafeteria with 400 to 500 places, a snack bar with 100 places, the delivery platform and the technical services.

Underground garages on four levels have a space for a total of 1,450 cars.
How the building is operated. About 70 kilometres of ducts convey the heat generated in four underground boilers to different parts of the building. Air is renewed three times every hour in the offices; 500,000 cubic metres of air may circulate during that time through the ventilation units. Heating, air conditioning and ventilation are monitored by a central electronic control unit, which also signals any alarm from the 1,500 fire-detectors.

The time is given by a master quartz clock connected to about 120 clocks in the meeting rooms, halls and passageways.

Built-in facilities for handicapped persons include ramps, a special lift and a specially-equipped washroom and lavatory.

Conception of the building (from a radio interview with the Swiss architect, A. Camenzind): "... Our architectural approach was very strictly determined by the ILO, by its organisational needs...

"We concerned ourselves particularly with solving problems of human work and human presence. An example is the shape of the façades. From outside, the building looks big; from inside, because of the curvature, it feels small, it has a human scale...

"All considered, it was built for the lowest possible price. Cost by cubic metre is about the same as for a low-rent apartment block. One of the reasons for its relatively low cost is the fact that subcontracting was international and drew some extremely competitive bidding. It was a truly international enterprise..."

The urban surrounding "An architect could not design a building of this size without thinking of the landscape. But serious confusions are made. Some people believe that nature, as such, should always be left intact. Logically, then, one would have to build only underground.

"There are cases - as, for instance, building in mountain surroundings - when an architect has to bow before nature, find complete harmony with it. Urban nature (the urban landscape) is something quite different. Architecture has a right to impose itself and determine the new landscape. In my own part of Switzerland, the Tessin, the landscape is determined by church spires. In this case, we considered that a building of this sort must be one of the elements that determine the urban landscape - Geneva."
Many gifts have been made to the ILO for its headquarters by governments and by workers' and employers' organisations from all parts of the world. Some of the gifts are ornamental, from trees for the grounds to works of art by well-known masters; many are in the form of contributions in money or in kind - precious woods, marble, carpets - to the interior finishing and furnishing of rooms and some offices.

These gifts bear witness to the attachment of member States, workers and employers to the objectives of the Organisation; all who contributed, however modestly, will be able to feel that they are permanently associated with the ILO's home.

Gifts received from governments:

- **Australia**: interior finishing and furniture for the office of the Director-General and for his conference room;
- **Austria**: tapestry;
- **Barbados**: mahogany wood;
- **Bulgaria**: a bronze statue for the grounds;
- **Burma**: teak wood panels;
- **Canada**: decorative ceiling light fixtures for the Governing Body room, for room II and part of the nearby lobby;
- **Chad**: a stuffed antelope;
- **Colombia**: an oil painting by Alejandro Obregón;
- **Federal Republic of Germany**: 100,000 Deutschmarks for the internal finishing and furnishing of the library reading room;
- **Greece**: a bas-relief; a copy of an ancient statue;
- **Guyana**: tatabu wood panels;
- **Hungary**: an oil painting by Iászlo Patay and an ornamental table;
- **India**: a marble screen for the Governing Body room; teak wall-panelling;
Iran a carpet; a decorative aluminium panel; a copy of the Hammurabi code obelisk;
Iraq a Donegal carpet; 15,000,000 yen, as a contribution towards the cost of the aluminium façade;
Ireland a decorative wood and glass-mosaic panel; a group of cedars for the grounds;
Japan furniture for a meeting room;
Lebanon a bas-relief in tin;
Malaysia an ivory antelope head;
Malta a set of furniture;
Mexico mural painting by Pedro Coronel for the library reading room; a modern wire sculpture;
Morocco a group of cedars for the grounds;
Nepal carved wood panels for the entrance to a meeting room;
Netherlands equipment for the ILO radio studio;
Nigeria wood panelling and statuettes;
Pakistan pink marble for a hallway;
Switzerland a set of clocks for corridors and meeting rooms, together with a master control clock;
Tunisia a number of carpets;
Turkey a carpet for the office of the Chairman of the Governing Body;
United Kingdom a set of desks and chairs;
Venezuela a composition in wire and painted metal by Jesús Rafael Soto;
Zambia a copper wall plaque.

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Tripartite gifts
New Zealand a 22-seat round table for a meeting room;
The Nordic countries - Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden: a combined gift of 250,000 Swiss francs for the internal finishing and furnishing of the Governing Body lounge;
Sri Lanka wood panels.

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Workers' organisations have also contributed substantially to the new building. Gifts have varied widely according to the resources of the different trade unions. The offices of the Workers' Vice-Chairman of the Governing Body, and of the Secretary of the Workers' group, have been entirely furnished as a result of a gift from the Canadian Labour Congress and the British TUC. Some organisations have sent carpets, decorative items and specimens of national craftsmanship; for example, a pewter water set given by the Malaysian Trades Union Congress, a carved wood and ivory piece from the National Union of Cameroon Workers, and a portrait of Bela Bartok by Ferenc Roka from the Central Council of Hungarian Trade Unions.

The gifts have come from East and West, North and South, representing the developed and developing countries. The large curtains covering the windows of the Workers' group main meeting room were a gift from the Central Council of Trades Unions of Poland. A smaller but striking gift was the "Kenti" cloth presented by the Trades Union Congress of Ghana.

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions sponsored a collection among its membership throughout the world, and as a result presented the ILO with the entire seating accommodation in the workers' main room.

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Malaysia  a tin bas-relief (Malayan Council of Employers' Organisations);
Netherlands  furniture and panelling;
Sierra Leone  furniture (Sierra Leone Employers' Federation);
Spain  a meeting room table and chairs (Consejo Nacional de Empresarios);
Tanzania  a wood sculpture;
Tunisia  a carpet (Union Tunisienne de l'industrie, du commerce et de l'artisanat);
United Kingdom  wood panelling (several employers' organisations, together with the Conseil national du patronat français).

These gifts were made on the initiative of the International Organisation of Employers.

The International Shipping Federation also made a contribution.

The following organisations have contributed to the common fund raised by the International Organisation of Employers to furnish the employers' rooms:

Australian Council of Employers' Federations and Associated Chambers of Manufacturers of Australia

Vereinigung Oesterreichischer Industrieller und Bundeskammer der Gewerblichen Wirtschaft (Austria)

Danish Employers' Confederation

Finnish Employers' Confederation

Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Mines

Amman Chamber of Commerce (Jordan)

Malta Employers' Association

Norwegian Employers' Confederation

Singapore Employers' Federation

Swedish Employers' Confederation

Union centrale des Associations patronales suisses (Switzerland)

Association nationale du patronat du Viet-Nam, Confédération générale des employeurs du Viet-Nam, Confédération générale de l'industrie et de l'artisanat du Viet-Nam.

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Some important gifts from member countries were also transferred to the new headquarters from the building which the ILO occupied until 1974.

Gifts shown inside the building:
- Max Pechstein's stained glass window, given to the ILO by Germany in 1926 and transferred with help from the government of the Federal Republic of Germany;
- the lacquered wall panels given in 1960 by the government of Viet-Nam;
- a carpet given in 1961 by the government of Iran;
- two large metal vases given by the Japanese government;
- a gilt bronze Christ given by Pope Paul VI in 1969;
- the bas-reliefs and statue of the god Phtah given in 1958 and 1959 by the Egyptian government.

Work shown in the grounds:
- two bronze statues by Constantin Meunier ("The Puddler" and "The Miner") given by the Belgian government in 1925 (door 1);
- a bronze statue by Augustunzic ("The Worker") given in 1939 by the Yugoslav government;
- a statue of Miguel Hidalgo by Juan Olaguíbel, with a pedestal of Mexican stone, given by Mexico in 1959 and removed to the new grounds with help from the government of that country.