

Protecting labour rights - A crucial ILO body celebrates its 80th anniversary

On 24-25 November 2006 the ILO's International Labour Standards Department organized a twoday meeting on "Protecting labour rights as human rights: Present and future of international supervision", focusing on the effectiveness of supervision in the international legal system.

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In 1926, the ILO needed a way of evaluating the effectiveness of labour standard ratifications by its then 55 member States.

To achieve this, the fledgling Organization established a committee composed of eminent jurists from different geographic regions, legal systems and cultures to provide impartial and technical evaluation of the state of application of international labour standards.

This year marks the 80th anniversary of that group – the ILO Committee of Experts – an independent body for the supervision of the application of ratified international labour Conventions.

The ILO Committee of Experts may not be widely known outside the world of work, but its role has been vital and its membership over the decades – including Roberto Ago, Prafullachandra Natvarlal Bhagwati, Boutros Boutros Ghali, Arnold McNair, William Rappard, José Maria Ruda, Georges Scelle, Max Sorensen, Grigory Tunkin and Earl Warren – reads like a who's who of international law and diplomacy.

As the number of ILO member States has grown, so has the workload of the Committee. From its first-year workload of 180 reports from 26 of the ILO's 55 member States, the Committee's 20 members today examine some 1,900 country reports addressing more than 2,500 comments to a number of the ILO's current 179 member States.

Since 1964, the Committee of Experts has kept track of the number of cases of progress in which it noted changes in law and practice that improved the application of a ratified convention. To date, over 2,300 cases of progress have been noted. Today, the reports of the Committee are available to millions of users on the ILO's website.

Its founders could hardly have imagined this in 1926, but the concept was sound and remains so to this day.

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For more information, see <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/norm/activity/ceacr80/index.htm>