

**CEC Bulletin:
GOVERNMENT ASKS CEC TO ADVISE
ON INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ISSUES**

Background:

The Canadian Government is actively working with South American and Caribbean countries to develop free trade opportunities.

Beginning with NAFTA, Canada has gone on to sign trade agreements with a number of other countries. All this is, in many respects, a prelude to a commitment by North and South American governments to a common market by 2005. Each of these trade agreements include labour side agreements which were negotiated with the assistance of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC).

Faced with opportunities for expanding international trade and needing input into the labour negotiations that are being included in these trade agreements, HRDC has made two decisions with major implications for CEC.

1. ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL LABOUR AFFAIRS (ACILA)

HRDC has established a panel of Workers and Employers to advise Labour Minister Claudette Bradshaw on international labour cooperation agreements, parallel to free trade agreements, such as NAFTA, FTAA, Canada/Chile FTA, Canada/Costa Rica FTA, as well as other agreements with El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. The Minister is seeking a meeting of the panel this Fall.

The panel will be composed of six business representatives, with three of them being nominated by the CEC. The other three representatives will be nominated, respectively, by Federally Regulated Employers - Transportation and Communication (FETCO), the Canadian Council of Chief Executive Officers (formerly the Business Council on National Issues), and the Conseil du Patronat du Quebec.

CEC representatives: Andrew Finlay - SCOTIABANK; Andrew Shields - CANADIAN PACIFIC; Jim Cameron - GENERAL MOTORS.

Co-chairs: Nancy Hughes-Anthony - CANADIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE; Bob White - CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS.

While the Government's larger interest is trade, the bipartite panel and HRDC will focus on associated labour issues.

With NAFTA and other similar agreements as the floor, the Worker members may push to introduce more substantive labour provisions into present or future trade agreements, possibly including support for the ILO Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, the ILO Declaration on Multinationals, the Global Compact (a UN initiative with ILO backing) codes of conduct, and mechanisms to allow alleged violations of labour law to be taken to special tribunals.

In previous trade negotiations where labour agreements were included, business input into the contents of those labour texts was minimal. Given the potential influence of this new committee, with three of six employers selected by the CEC, there is unique opportunity for employers to influence our government on questions of labour relations and employment policy as it negotiates new international trade agreements.

2. INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF LABOUR (IACML)

Ministers of Labour of the Organization of American States (OAS), which includes all countries in the Western Hemisphere, have formed an organization called the Inter-American Conference of Minister of Labour (IACML), and have given themselves a very large agenda.

The IACML initiative is part of the ongoing activities of the OAS in the run-up to the proposed American Free Trade Agreement, which is due to come into operation by 2005.

According to press releases, IACML is an integral part of the Summit of the Americas process, and one of the few instances where business and labour organizations have an official consultative capacity to advise OAS Labour Ministers on the perspectives of their respective sectors within civil society.

For the next year, HRDC will be Secretariat for IACML. Being Secretariat involves organizing meetings and delegates, setting agendas and arranging for position papers.

IACML has agreed that a representative group of Employers and Workers should have a participatory role in all meetings and working groups. The two groups of Employers and Workers already exist, known by their Spanish acronyms, CEATAL (Employers) and COSATE (Workers). CEATAL is chaired by Daniel Funes de Rioja, Argentina, who is also Spokesperson for Employers at the INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION (ILO). COSATE Chair is Hassan Yussuff, of the Canadian Labour Congress. Jim Lawson of the CEC is a Vice President of CEATAL.

IACML (with CEATAL and COSATE participating) has already held several meetings, and has prepared a Plan of Action.

Looking ahead, IACML will conduct 4 technical workshops during the next six months, and will hold three high-level policy working group meetings, in advance of the next IACML meeting, in October 2003.

Implications for Canadian employers: HRDC has asked CEC to take responsibility for CEATAL activities for all IACML meetings during this period.

CEC's role will be:

- ° To coordinate employer participation, and integrate the input of CEATAL members in all activities. Working Groups, Technical Workshops, and Minister's Meeting.
- ° To prepare three leading edge policy papers representing the views of CEATAL employers for presentation to the Labour Ministers.
- ° To assist in the preparation of agendas for IACML meetings, suggesting themes and proposing speakers
- ° To review and analyze preparatory documents
- ° .And to actively participate in all meetings.

From being an organization that has focused exclusively on the Canadian implications of ILO issues for more than 75 years, HRDC is now asking the CEC to be the voice of Canadian employers on a broad variety of related international labour issues - through ACILA; and in a very large way - at IACML meetings - by providing leadership to Employer organizations in the western hemisphere in dialoguing with OAS Labour Ministers. With member support, the CEC will continue the expansion of its role with respect to international labour issues through 2003.