



CLC POLICY STATEMENT

HUMAN RIGHTS

1968 IS INTERNATIONAL Human Rights Year — the 20th anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Every member of the United Nations has been called upon to evaluate how far it has travelled on the road to human rights. In Canada, we have come a considerable distance.

We can afford to look with some pride on the human rights achievements of the labour movement in this country. Almost every major achievement, every campaign for legislation, has involved participation by organized labour. We are proud of the work of our Human Rights Committees throughout the country in persuading governments and mobilizing public opinion to pursue the goal of equality of treatment without regard to race, creed, sex, colour or national origin.

But despite progress made, we cannot afford to be satisfied. Canada is a long way from realizing the ideals of the UN Declaration. The stage must still be set for further efforts to improve human rights in Canada.

A considerable amount of human rights legislation is to be found on the statute books of the federal government and most of the provinces. The federal government and most provinces boast Fair Employment Practices Acts. Many provinces have Fair Accommodation Practices Acts. Some have fair housing legislation.

The legislative picture is far from complete and a major problem exists in the lack of effective administration. Only a few of the governments concerned maintain full-time staff to administer their human rights legislation. With the exception of Ontario and more recently the Federal Government and Nova Scotia, human rights administration is not a full-time assignment for the responsible government officers. Over-burdened officials and the Department of Labour can do nothing about these laws until after a complaint has been filed. Even then their duties often interfere with speedy and effective enforcement.

Part-time enforcement suggests half-hearted interest. An effective government program must be put on a full-time

(Text of the statement on human rights approved by the 7th CLC convention, Toronto, May 6-10, 1968.)

basis. It is not enough for government officers to wait for complaints to be filed. The government should go into the community and aggressively promote compliance with the law, even in the absence of specific complaints.

Many federal manpower centres have been found accepting discriminatory job orders in violation of the law. Private placement agencies in Nova Scotia and Quebec showed the same response in a similarly high proportion of cases. Obviously the requirements of human rights legislation are not being translated into the day-to-day life of the community.

Federal and provincial governments should publicize their human rights legislation in the press, on radio and television, and through widespread distribution of literature. Full-time human rights officers should engage in face-to-face meetings with proprietors of tourist accommodations, employers, personnel managers, landlords, placement agencies, and others, in order to impress upon them their obligations under the law. Such officers should also meet with leaders of minority groups in order to encourage their members to take advantage of their rights under the law. It should be the objective of the federal and provincial governments to develop a high degree of sensitivity to human rights throughout the country. It is accordingly the policy of the Canadian Labour Congress to urge the federal government and, through its provincial federations of labour, the provincial governments, to promote activities along these lines.

In many cases, generations of discrimination and neglect have produced a level of poverty and inequality which human rights legislation is not adequate to overcome. Large numbers of Nova Scotia Negroes, Prairie Metis, Northern Eskimos and most of Canada's Indians fall into this category. Even if all formal racial discrimination were to disappear overnight, very few of the tremendous number of unemployed Indians, for example, would be able to secure employment. The reason for this is that very few of them have had the background, training, and education which would equip them to succeed in the labour market. Thus what is required is not merely the absence of discrimination, but also the presence of positive programs which would help the Indians and other disadvantaged minorities.

Organized labour has a role to play in assisting Indians, Eskimos and others in achieving their just place in Canadian life. It must place its experience in legislative representations, in organizational methods and in collective bargaining at their disposal as part of its own contribution toward the development of human rights in Canada.

But the crucial challenge is to involve those directly concerned in the process of redressing their grievances. Without their own active involvement, no solutions are likely to have permanent effect. We must assist them to develop their own organizations to achieve their own goals.

The Canadian Labour Congress urges the provincial federations of labour, local labour councils and local unions to become engaged in human rights activities in their respective localities. Assistance should be offered to minority groups in order to develop effective community action for the resolution of their problems. The approach of International Human Rights Year provides a strong incentive for action to be taken in Canada to remove those inequalities which trouble the national conscience. Organized labour must play its part.

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