

## *Studies in Documents*

### *The Archival Records of Labour Canada*

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In common with working people in other western countries, Canadians waited well past the start of industrialization for the creation of a government agency which was focussed on their problems and interests. In Canada, the federal Department of Labour was created in 1900, the product of union pressure, political interest on the part of the governing party, and the clear need for government intervention and regulation in the field of labour relations.

Creation of departments of labour by modern governments, and the history of these departments, reveal much about the twentieth century. Trade unions and collective bargaining are major social effects of industrialization, and departments of labour represent the modern state's attempt to deal with these developments. The Canadian Department of Labour was fortunate to have as both its first Deputy Minister and its first full Minister an energetic individual (William Lyon Mackenzie King) who was an original thinker and writer on labour questions and who later became Canada's longest-serving prime minister. His success was at least partly due to the perception that he was a modern leader who could deal with social problems in Canadian society. For much of its history, the Department of Labour benefitted from having in the prime minister's chair someone who knew and loved the department and had confidence in it. If, in the last twenty years (as Labour Canada), the Department of Labour has entered a quieter phase in its history, it remains an important and effective instrument of modern government in Canada.

The records of any government department are, one hopes, a record of the principal important activities of that department, rather than anything else. This is true of the Department of Labour's records as well. The point becomes interesting because a number of researchers approach the department's records hoping to find there records of trade union activity which cannot be documented elsewhere. When a union's records have not survived, researchers have often hoped that the department's records might supply the lack. Unfortunately, they are often disappointed. It can be hoped that the records will document the department's interaction with the labour movement in Canada, but they cannot be expected to do more than that.

Over the course of most of the twentieth century, the Department of Labour grew steadily in size and importance as new responsibilities were assigned to it. The

department became responsible for Canada's relations with the International Labour Organization in 1919. In 1920, the department became responsible (jointly with the provinces) for the Employment Service of Canada, with offices across Canada. In 1930, the Unemployment Relief Commission began its work under the direction of the Minister of Labour. Responsibility for an innovative piece of legislation in the education field, the Technical and Vocational Training Act, was given to the department in 1937. During the Second World War, the department was responsible for all manpower phases of the mobilization of the Canadian people in the war effort. The National Selection Service, the Department of National War Services, the National Registration of 1940, prisoner-of-war camps in Canada, and the employment of persons of Japanese ancestry evacuated from British Columbia, were all carried out under the direction of the Minister of Labour and his departmental officials. In 1940, Canada's new Unemployment Insurance Commission also came under the direction of the department.

In the post-war period, the department maintained its responsibilities for labour relations, employment and workforce planning at the federal level. The department was also responsible for advising immigration authorities on which types of workers were needed in the Canadian economy. In 1954, the department created its Women's Bureau, the first unit of the federal government to be devoted to the interests of women in the workforce.

In 1966, with the creation of the new Departments of Manpower and Immigration and of Regional Economic Expansion, the Department of Labour was relieved of some of its major responsibilities. All manpower planning functions, as well as the Unemployment Insurance Commission, were transferred from the Department of Labour to the Department of Manpower and Immigration. The department (now Labour Canada) is now in its ninth decade. At the time of writing, the department had responsibility for nine different pieces of legislation.<sup>1</sup>

Legislation administered by Labour Canada in 1988 therefore includes: working conditions such as hours of work, minimum wages, annual vacations, holidays with pay, equal wages, unjust dismissal, group and individual terminations of employment, severance pay, the regulation of fair wages and hours of labour contracts made with the federal government for construction, remodelling, repair or demolition of any work; federal mediation and conciliation services; government employee and merchant seamen compensation; occupational safety and health; and labour adjustment assistance benefits for workers affected by redundancy layoffs.

Before looking in detail at the records of the Department of Labour as they have survived, we might look at the process of getting the department established. For at least fifteen years before 1900, there was serious discussion in Ottawa of the need to establish an agency of government with exclusive responsibility for labour matters. It required the passage of an equal number of years after the department's creation for it to become an important department of government.

On 9 December 1886 under Order-in-Council 1938, Sir John A. Macdonald announced the creation of a Royal Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labour in Canada, under the chairmanship of Judge James Armstrong of Sorel, Quebec, for the purpose of "inquiring into and reporting upon the subject of Labour, its relations to Capital, the hours of labour, the earnings of labouring men

and women, and the means of promotion of their material, social, intellectual and moral prosperity, and of improving and developing the productive industries of the Dominion so as to advance and improve the trade and commerce of Canada; also, of enquiring into and reporting on the practical operations of courts of Arbitration and Conciliation in the Settlement of disputes between employers and employees, and on the best mode of settling such disputes; also, of enquiring into and reporting on the expediency of placing all such matters as are to form the subjects of such enquiry under the administration of one of the Ministers of the Crown." Eventually the Commission's membership was expanded to include members with trade union backgrounds, and an extensive series of hearings was conducted in industrial centres in Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes.<sup>2</sup>

In February 1889, the commission's report recommended, among many other things, creation of a "Labour Bureau" under the administration of one of the Ministers of the Crown. The full recommendation on this crucial point read as follows: "Your commissioners are firmly persuaded that the interests of working people will be promoted if all matters relating to labour and capital be placed under the administration of one of the Ministers of the Crown, so that a Labour Bureau may be established, statistics collected, information disseminated, and working people find readier means of making their needs and desires known to the Government."<sup>3</sup>

On 16 May 1890, An Act to provide for the collection and publishing of Labour Statistics became law.<sup>4</sup> A partial response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital, the new act provided for the creation in the Department of Agriculture of a Bureau of Labour Statistics "to collect, classify and arrange, and present in quarterly bulletins and in yearly reports to Parliament, statistics relating to all kinds of labour in Canada..." Among the classifications of statistics to be sought by the bureau were "a description of the different kinds of labour organizations in existence in Canada, and what they accomplish in favour of the classes for whose benefit they are organized."<sup>5</sup> The bureau was never established.

The Department of Labour owes its birth to Section 10 of the Conciliation Act of 1900, which read as follows:

With a view to the dissemination of accurate statistical and other information relating to the conditions of labour, the Minister shall establish and have charge of a Department of Labour, which shall collect, digest, and publish in suitable form statistical and other information relating to the conditions of labour, shall institute and conduct inquiries into important industrial questions upon which adequate information may not at present be available, and issue at least once in every month a publication to be known as Labour Gazette, which shall contain information regarding conditions of the labour market and kindred subjects, and shall be distributed or procurable in accordance with terms and conditions in that behalf prescribed by the Minister.<sup>6</sup>

The act itself was modelled on an act passed by the British Parliament in 1896. The major provisions of the Canadian act, in addition to Section 10, allowed the federal government to conduct inquiries into the causes of industrial disputes, to appoint arbitrators, conciliators or boards of conciliation when asked to do so by

the parties to a dispute, and to take positive action aimed at getting the conciliation process started in disputes where the parties were not agreed on the need for conciliation. At the time of the passage of the act, it was estimated that Canada had a workforce of about two million, but that only about twenty-seven thousand workers were organized into trade unions. Most of these were craft unions.

Although the Conciliation Act<sup>7</sup> spoke of the creation of a "Department of Labour", it is more correct to see the department in its early years as a bureau. Its staff was limited and its growth slow. The Department of Labour's principal objectives were the following: preparation and publication of the *Labour Gazette*; settlement of industrial disputes under the terms of the conciliation act; carrying out of the resolution of the House of Commons of March 1900 "to secure to those employed on public work the payment of fair wages and the performance of work under proper conditions"; and administration of the Alien Labour Acts "to restrict the importation and employment of aliens."<sup>8</sup> Responsibility for administering the new department was placed with the Postmaster General, William Mulock. (The office of Minister of Labour, as a separate cabinet portfolio was not to be established until 1909.) William Lyon Mackenzie King was appointed Deputy Minister of Labour, effective 15 September 1900.<sup>9</sup> A grandson of William Lyon Mackenzie, King graduated from the University of Toronto in 1895 and studied economics at Chicago and Harvard. Total expenditures for the department for the fiscal year 1900-1901 were \$27,395.45. The *Labour Gazette* had an average circulation of 6,912 copies monthly during the first year of its operation. By 1909, this figure had more than doubled to 13,618.

In July 1900, the House of Commons had passed the Fair Wages Resolution:

That it be resolved that all Government contracts should contain such conditions as will prevent abuses, which may arise from the sub-letting of contracts and that every effort should be made to secure the payment of such wages as are generally accepted as current in each trade for competent workmen in the district where the work is carried out, and that this House cordially concurs in such policy and deems it the duty of the Government to take immediate steps to give effect thereto.

It is hereby declared that the work to which the foregoing policy shall apply includes not only work undertaken by the Government itself, but also all works aided by grant of Dominion public funds.<sup>10</sup>

Daniel O'Donoghue was appointed the department's first Fair Wages Officer in 1900, in order to implement this fair wages resolution of the House of Commons.

During the fiscal year 1901-1902, the department provided conciliation and arbitration services in eleven industrial disputes, of which the most important were those occurring in Rossland, B.C., and Halifax, Nova Scotia. The department investigated seventeen complaints of unfair wages or poor working conditions lodged against government contractors. The total average monthly circulation of the *Labour Gazette* rose to 8,370 copies during the year. The reports of *Labour Gazette* correspondents were systematized to include reports on the general condition of the labour market in the correspondent's locality for that month, the conditions of local

industries, and the condition of the particular trades. Department officials also worked on the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration, and on the British Columbia Fisheries Commission.

R.H. Coats became Associate Editor of *The Labour Gazette* under the direction of King. A former journalist with the *Toronto Globe*, Coats became Chief Statistician of the Department of Labour in 1905, responsible for the many statistical studies and compilations published by the department. Appointed Dominion Statistician in 1915, he remained in that position until 1942. The Dominion Bureau of Statistics was created under his direction in 1918.

The Railway Labour Disputes Act<sup>11</sup> became law on 10 July 1903, and its implementation became part of the mandate of the Department of Labour. In April 1904, the Grand Trunk Railroad dispute was referred to the department. The Deputy Minister conducted an investigation into the importation of Italian labourers into Montreal in the spring of 1904. As a result of his investigation, a Royal Commission on the subject was set up under the direction of Judge John Winchester.

The *Labour Gazette* added to its regular features a monthly article and table dealing with industrial accidents. The *Gazette* reported that between seven hundred and one thousand men were killed and between two thousand and three thousand seriously injured each year in Canada in industrial accidents. The department also published a "Wholesale Prices Report" in the form of an index in the *Labour Gazette*. This report, based on information supplied by a network of *Labour Gazette* correspondents across Canada, became an annual departmental publication.

With the passage of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act (An Act to aid in the Prevention and Settlement of Strikes and Lockouts in Mines and Industries connected with Public Utilities),<sup>12</sup> the Department of Labour entered an important new phase in its early development. Twenty-nine formal applications to the department under the legislation were received in 1907-08. Deputy Minister King noted in his report for 1907-1908 that the legislation aimed "...simply to 'aid' in the prevention or settlement of those disputes in which the public welfare is most closely concerned."<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the legislation significantly increased the work of the department, "...involving the frequent exercise of functions of a quasi-judicial character and importance and necessitating the writing of thousands of letters, much of the correspondence being moreover, of a most exacting nature."<sup>14</sup> In addition, King conducted government inquiries into losses sustained by Chinese and Japanese residents of Vancouver during anti-Asiatic riots in that city, and travelled to Great Britain to discuss Oriental and Indian immigration to Canada with the British government.

Under the Government Annuities Act (An Act to authorize the issue of Government Annuities for Old Age),<sup>15</sup> the Department of Labour became responsible for the administration of a plan by which Canadians could better provide for their old age. Under the terms of the act, individuals could purchase "an immediate or deferred annuity" from the government. Employers could purchase annuities for their employees.

On 19 May 1909, An Act respecting the Department of Labour received royal assent. The act created the position of Minister of Labour as a separate member of the Cabinet. "The Minister of Labour shall be charged with the administration of the Conciliation and Labour Act and the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act of 1907 and such other duties as may be assigned to him by the Governor-in-Council."<sup>16</sup> William Lyon Mackenzie King was sworn in as Minister of Labour on 2 June 1909. He was the first Minister of Labour to hold no other portfolio, an indication of the increased importance of this department. King resigned as Deputy Minister of Labour on 21 September 1908, and was elected to the House of Commons in the October 1908 general election as the Liberal candidate for Waterloo North.

During 1908-09, King was extremely busy. On 4 May 1908, his report on Oriental and Indian immigration to Canada was tabled in the House of Commons. It called for more strict regulation by Canada of such immigration, and suggested that steamship companies be told that Canada did not want to see such immigration increase. (There was considerable feeling in Canada that such immigration might compete unfairly in the labour market.) King also reported to Parliament regarding his commissions to study damages to Japanese and Chinese persons in Vancouver occasioned by the anti-Oriental riots of 1907. On 29 June 1908, King was appointed a one-person Royal Commission on industrial disputes in the cotton factories in the province of Quebec. In May 1908, over five thousand textile workers in the province had struck against an employers' decision to reduce wages in the industry by ten per cent. King held hearings in July and August 1908 and tabled his report in the House of Commons on 23 January 1909. Workers had returned to work in June 1908 in the hope that federal action would solve the dispute. King suggested that "industrial peace might be preserved and ... promoted" if there were joint agreements between employers and employees "with some system of automatic adjustment of wages", and one month's notice required before any change in wages, hours or other conditions of employment took effect.<sup>17</sup> He suggested that permanent boards of conciliation might be effective.

The Fair Wages Branch of the department reported that it had prepared 315 fair wage schedules during 1908-1909 and investigated seventeen specific complaints of unfair wages being paid. In its annual report for the year ending 31 March 1909, the Department of Labour reported that it had prepared sixteen hundred Fair Wages Schedules under the Fair Wages Resolution passed by the House of Commons in 1900. Almost one-half had been prepared for the Department of Railways and Canals, and over one-third for the Department of Public Works.<sup>18</sup>

Under the Combines Investigation Act (An Act to provide for the investigation of combines, monopolies, trusts and mergers)<sup>19</sup>, the Department of Labour became responsible for administering a system whereby complaints "that a combine exists, and that prices have been enhanced or competition restricted by reason of such combine, to the detriment of consumers or producers" might be made to a judge. If the judge decided that an investigation was warranted, then the Minister of Labour was required to set up a three-person board to investigate the complaint and make a report to the minister. Any person found guilty of creating or conducting a combine under the legislation became liable to a fine of one thousand dollars a day and costs if "such person continues to offend."

The Department of Labour's publication *Labour Organization in Canada* was published for the first time in 1910. In this new publication, the Department listed the principal unions and labour organizations of Canada, their addresses, the names of their officers, and details of their membership statistics.

The department's first office outside Ottawa was established in Vancouver, B.C., in 1912. J.D. McNiven was appointed to staff the office in his capacity as Fair Wages and Inspection officer. "With the rapid development of the western provinces and the constantly increasing demand for public buildings, there is every reason to believe that it will before long become necessary to establish other western officers at Winnipeg and other points." By 1916, a Winnipeg office was opened.<sup>20</sup>

It could be said that, by the time Canada entered the First World War, the country had at least provided itself with a modern and substantial department at the national level devoted to labour and labour matters.

### ***The History of the Records and Their Acquisition***

In December 1988, Record Group 27 (Labour Canada), held in the Government Archives Division of the National Archives of Canada, consisted of 1750 metres of records. Although the Department of Labour began in 1900, this record group at the National Archives of Canada is of relatively recent creation. None of the Department of Labour's archival records were transferred to the Public Archives of Canada until 1955. Less than six metres of records were received before 1965, and by 1970 only 97 metres had been received. The record group can be said to have begun its serious existence in 1970-71. During that fiscal year, the Archives received over 200 metres of records from the department, including some of the most important series now held. The first accessions of Strikes and Lockouts records (to 1962), the early administrative files of the department (the Lacelle files), and the records of the Unemployment Relief Commission of the 1930s were all received in 1970-71. An additional 330 metres of records has been received in the 1980s (up to October 1988). Most of this material has been received by direct transfer from the department as a result of the implementation of records schedules jointly prepared by the National Archives and Labour Canada.

The creation and growth of this collection have been fostered by the growth of records practices in the federal government of Canada in the past twenty years, and by the increasing sophistication of archival practice with regard to government records at the National Archives of Canada.<sup>21</sup> While a full study of these developments is outside the scope of this article, it can be said that government records have simply received more attention and had greater importance attributed to them in recent years.

Once there is federal legislation which gives Canadians the right to ask to see files created and held by their national government, that government must be able to say what records it holds and what has happened to any records it once created but does no longer hold. The Canadian Human Rights Act started the process, and the access to information and privacy legislation of 1983 continued it. It is also true that the new social and labour history courses in our colleges and universities after 1970 fostered the growth in use of this collection. Archives, particularly govern-

ment archives, are public service institutions and try to provide the services that their clients need from them.

### *The Main Series*

Sixty-nine records series make up the records of Labour Canada in the Government Records Division of the National Archives of Canada. All these series have been determined to be of archival value but, inevitably, some acquire greater importance than others because of the departmental activity they document or because of the use historical researchers have made of them.

### *Minister's and Deputy Minister's Records*

The leading positions in any government department are those of the Minister and Deputy Minister, and the records of these offices are most important from the archival point of view. RG 27 holds only 10.9 m. of Minister's Office records, relatively little considering the Department's eighty-eight year existence. Although better records practices in recent years will eventually produce a more complete archival record for Labour Ministers holding office since 1963, it would appear that little can be done to repair the lack of official records for such important federal Labour Ministers of the past as Gideon Robertson (1918-1920, 1930-1932), Norman Robertson (1935-1939), Humphrey Mitchell (1941-1950), and Milton Gregg (1950-1957).<sup>22</sup>

We are better supplied with Deputy Ministers records (89.9 m.), but there are important gaps here as well. The records are much better for the years after 1930, and Deputy Ministers records for the period 1900-1914 are rare.<sup>23</sup> In the Lacelle Files (named after the records clerk who created the filing system), we have over twenty metres of files covering all major activities of the Deputy Minister's Office between 1902 and 1945, but there are only a few surviving files in this series on subjects which must have generated dozens of files over several years in the original records system of the office. In two other series labelled "Administration" and "General Services", we find the main subject and correspondence files of the Deputy Minister's Office for the years 1930 to 1974, while another series, "Committees, Conferences, Meetings" illustrates the Department of Labour's participation in a number of important boards and dominion-provincial conferences between 1920 and 1966.

### *Industrial Relations Board*

An important part of the Department of Labour's original mandate was to collect industrial relations information and to make it available to employers and unions in Canada, as well as retaining it for departmental purposes. Three series of records in RG 27 bear witness to this function. The Strikes and Lockouts Files collected by the Economics and Research Branch of the department provide researchers with an information file on every strike and lockout occurring in Canada between 1907 and 1977.<sup>24</sup> Consisting mainly of newspaper clippings, the files were created in order to provide the department with basic information on industrial disputes in Canada as they occurred, to permit the Minister to answer questions in Parliament, and to permit departmental staff to do statistical analyses of strike activity. The most popular

series with researchers, the files have been microfilmed and, currently, a computer application project in these records aims at producing a more sophisticated finding aid for the material.

Companions to the Strikes and Lockouts Files in the record group are the Collective Agreements series, 1910-1986, and the Conciliation and Arbitration files, 1944-1981. Taken together, the three series can permit the researcher to see the basic history of a strike, read the collective agreement which settled it, and read a file on any conciliation process undertaken by the federal government to help achieve a settlement.

In the realm of basic historical information, researchers can also benefit from two other file series maintained by the department. For many years the department maintained a Press Clipping Division which clipped Canadian newspapers on a wide variety of topics of interest to departmental officials, including such topics as "Labour Organization," "Training and Women", and "Legislation." These files cover the years 1900-1971. Also available is the Vertical Files series created by the Department of Labour Library. These files represent the information files which the Library created for internal use, beginning in 1900. They contain numbers of early pamphlets, leaflets and bulletins on labour subjects not usually found in other collections. The departmental library at Labour Canada retains a copy of these files on microfiche as well as an index to them.

Other series in this record group document important emergency activities undertaken by the Department of Labour on behalf of the federal government. In 1930, the department became responsible for Ottawa's programme of unemployment relief payments to Canada's provinces and municipalities, and this activity is documented in records from the Unemployment Relief Commission. The department's key responsibility for Canadian manpower policy during the Second World War is documented in the National Selective Service records. (The activities of the department's Japanese Division are represented in a section of the central registry files.) As the Second World War came to an end, the Department of Labour became responsible, along with the Department of Immigration, for the government's policy of expanded immigration to Canada after 1945.<sup>25</sup> The department also supervised an extensive farm labour programme in Canada during these years.

### ***Canada Labour Code Records***

More and more in the past twenty years, Labour Canada has been involved in the development and implementation of the Canada Labour Code in industries under federal jurisdiction. Labour standards (fair wages, hours of work, safe working conditions) were among the earliest legislated concerns of the Department of Labour but, as Parliament has amplified the Code since 1966, Labour Canada has become more and more involved in these areas. At present, RG 27 contains records of the Labour Standards Branch (1949-1979), the Employment Relations and Conditions of Work Branch (1944-1983), and the Occupational Safety and Health Branch (1919-1981). Included are policy and administrative records as well as company compliance files and some complaint files.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Research Use and Access***

How and how often particular records are used by researchers, what finding aids exist for them, and what regulations govern access to them are all important questions concerning any collection of records.<sup>27</sup> Internal records on hand in the Government Archives Division show that about six hundred labour history researchers<sup>28</sup> have used the RG 27 records between 1974 and 1988. A little over twenty-five percent of all researchers used the records to pursue research topics related to the history of the department, government labour policy, or legislation and programmes which were the responsibility of the department. About twenty per cent used the records to research industrial relations topics such as particular strikes or lockouts, conciliation boards, or collective agreements. Another twenty per cent were attempting to research the history of workers in one particular union or one particular industry or geographical location. About ten per cent of all research in RG 27 was aimed at establishing some aspect of women's history in the workforce or the Canadian labour movement. Nearly ten per cent of RG 27 researchers focussed on the Department of Labour's activities during the Second World War (manpower policy, National Selective Service, internment of Japanese-Canadians, prisoner-of-war camps).

Since 1 July 1983, access to Record Group 27, as with other federal government records held by the National Archives of Canada, has been governed by the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act. Prior to that date, access to such records was controlled by the creating department under general guidelines set by the Cabinet and by Treasury Board. It would seem that the legislation has led to an increase in research activity in these records, though other factors may be at work too.<sup>29</sup> (As seen below, as many researchers sought access to closed Department of Labour records between 1 January 1984 and 1 October 1988 as for the fifteen years prior to 1984 for which statistics were kept.)

Since undertaking full responsibility for access to these records in 1984, the Access Section of the Government Archives Division has dealt with over eighty different researchers making requests for access to files not automatically opened to research in the archival records of the Department of Labour. A total of about 850 individual files has been reviewed in response to direct requests from these researchers. In more than ninety per cent of these reviews, the entire file asked for was made available for research. In only five cases (0.59 per cent of the total) did an entire file have to be kept closed under the legislation and, in the remaining cases (sixty files or 7.1 per cent of those requested), a portion of the file was severed and kept closed while the remainder of the file was made available for research.

It is interesting to compare these statistics with those from the period before the new legislation came into effect. As was said, in the fifteen years before 1984 (back to 1969 when detailed statistics on access to RG 27 began to be kept), a similar number of individual researchers (83) asked the Department of Labour for access to departmental records held at the Public Archives. In almost every case, Labour Canada officials in the Deputy Minister's Office charged with this responsibility agreed to these requests. In the circumstances, however, it was difficult to maintain consistency with each successive request. How exactly to protect the privacy of individuals mentioned in files was always a problem. At

times, files were opened for a researcher to read but copies could not be taken. At times, reliance was placed on having researchers sign forms saying they would not reveal personal information about private individuals found in files made available to them.

Strongly to the credit of Labour Canada officials during these years was their willingness to have whole series of records in RG 27 (such as the Lacelle files and the Strikes and Lockouts files) declared open to research, exclusive of the years covered. In 1976, Labour Canada used its discretion under the Cabinet Directive on public records to open all its records older than twenty-five years to research (with the usual exceptions of national security, national interest and privacy) when most departments were maintaining a thirty-year rule for research requests.<sup>30</sup>

At this point, only the Strikes and Lockouts files (1907-1977) among the major series have been microfilmed. However, it is hoped that the Lacelle files will be filmed during 1989. Individual researchers or institutions can buy the microfilm of these records or borrow reels through the interlibrary loan system.<sup>31</sup> Many provincial archives and major research libraries in Canada have purchased this microfilm collection.

### ***Computer Applications***

Since May 1987, the National Archives has been engaged in a computer application project aimed at producing a set of sophisticated finding aids for the Strikes and Lockouts files in RG 27, the most heavily used series of files in the record group. At the end of the project (anticipated to occur late in 1989), there will be a set of paper finding aids breaking the roughly 20,000 files in this series down by name of employer, type of worker, geographical location of the strike or lockout, and date. There is also a thesaurus listing all the types of worker found in the files, and a list of occurrences giving all employer names and other information.

Researchers and institutions will be able to purchase the whole set of finding aids on microfilm and perhaps even on diskette. It will be possible to "ask questions" of the computerized finding aid and to obtain printouts listing, for example, all the file references for strikes in coal mines in Alberta between 1919 and 1939, or references to all strikes conducted against the Ford Motor Company in Canada. It is anticipated that the project will permit quicker searches and that it will facilitate greater research in the files, particularly of a comparative kind.

This is not the only computer application planned for the Department of Labour records, but the Strikes and Lockouts files were chosen as a first target because of their high research use, because the material has been microfilmed and purchased by many institutions in Canada (so that any new finding aids produced can also be used by researchers outside Ottawa), and because a seventy-seven-year-old continuous and complete series of files on one subject in Canadian social history is a fairly rare thing and probably merits special attention.

### ***Other Related Government Records***

Not all the surviving records of Labour Canada are to be found in RG 27. Some records originally created by the Department of Labour later came to be transferred

to other departments or agencies as government mandates changed and responsibilities shifted. For example, some important records on manpower programmes and policies, along with those responsibilities, were shifted from Labour to the new Department of Manpower and Immigration when it was created in 1966, and can be found in the archival records of the new department rather than in RG 27. A similar shift of records and responsibilities took place when the Canada Labour Relations Board was created in 1948.

The Department of Labour has had extensive relations over the years with other federal government departments and agencies, such as the Privy Council Office (RG 2) and Treasury Board (RG 55), and these latter records can provide insight into the Department of Labour's work. At least ten federal royal commissions have been held in Canada since 1900 touching directly on matters of federal labour policy or industrial relations, and many of these were created on the recommendation of the Minister of Labour. The records of these royal commissions are held by the Government Archives Division as Record Group 33 (Royal Commissions).<sup>32</sup>

### ***Conclusions***

All one can legitimately hope for from a set of records surviving from a major government department is that they document the principal activities of the department for the years covered. The Labour Canada records do that satisfactorily for the years after 1930, but not for the years back to 1900. There is much one would wish to have on hand today that has not survived. Our hope and consolation is that present archival and records management practices in the scheduling and preservation of contemporary records will give us a more complete record in future.<sup>33</sup>

These comments should not blind us to the quality and importance of what has been preserved. The extensive research use of the Labour Canada records demonstrates, the irreplaceable nature of these records as a source in Canadian labour history. We owe a debt to the staff of the Department of Labour/Labour Canada who created these records and took steps to preserve them, and to the staff of the Public Archives/National Archives of Canada who acquired these records with a view to making them available as part of Canada's labour heritage.

## Notes

- \* The views expressed in this paper are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Archives of Canada. I am grateful to my National Archives colleagues Peter DeLottinville, Terry Cook and George de Zwann for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.
- 1 These are the *Canada Labour Code* (R.S.C. 1970 c. L-1); Part III (Labour Standards), Part IV (Safety of Employees), Part V (Industrial Relations); Department of Labour Act (R.S.C. 1970, c. L-2); Fair Wages and Hours of Labour Act (R.S.C. 1970, c. L-3); Government Employees Compensation Act (R.S.C. 1970, c. G-8); Merchant Seamen Compensation Act (R.S.C. 1970, c. M.-11 as amended by R.S.C. 1970, c. 19 (2nd Supplement)); Labour Adjustment Benefits Act (29-30-31-32 Eliz. II, c. 89 amended by 29-30-31-32 Eliz. II, c.c. 109, 169); Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety Act (26-27 Eliz. II, c. 29 amended by 29-30-31-32 Eliz. II, c. 47; and 32-33 Eliz. II, c. 40); Corporation and Labour Unions Return Act (R.S.C. 1970, c. 31 amended by 29-30-31-32 Eliz. II, c. 79; and 32-33 Eliz. II, c. 40); Wages Liability Act (R.S.C. 1970, c. W-9).
  - 2 See Greg Kealey (ed.), *Canada Investigates Industrialism: The Royal Commission on the Relations Between Capital and Labour, 1889 (Abridged)*, Toronto, 1973.
  - 3 Kealey, *Canada Investigates Industrialism*, p. 40.
  - 4 53 Vict., c. 15.
  - 5 53 Vict.
  - 6 63-64 Vict., c. 24 s. 10. Assented to 18 July 1900.
  - 7 63-64 Vict., c. 24, assented to 18 July 1900.
  - 8 *Labour Gazette*, February 1902, pp. 459ff.
  - 9 P.C. 2203.
  - 10 *Hansard*, House of Commons Debates 17 July 1900, p. 10495. Implementation of this Resolution was assigned to the new Department.
  - 11 2 Edw. VII, c. 55.
  - 12 6-7 Edw. VII, c. 20. Assented to 22 March 1907.
  - 13 *Annual Report of the Department of Labour for 1907-1908*, p. 9.
  - 14 *Ibid.*
  - 15 7-8 Edw. VII, c. 5.
  - 16 8-9 Edw. VII, c. 22.
  - 17 See *Report of the Deputy Minister of Labour for the Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 1909*, p. 129, in *Sessional Papers*, vol. 19, Session 1910, Sessional Paper 36.
  - 18 *Report of the Deputy Minister of Labour for the Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 1909*, p. 130, in *Sessional Papers*, Vol. 19, Session 1910, Sessional Paper 36.
  - 19 9-10 Edw. VII, c. 9. Assented to 4 May 1910.
  - 20 Department of Labour, *Annual Report, 1912-1913*, p. 11.
  - 21 A more sophisticated study than is being attempted here would also involve examination of the history of records handling and the development of records systems inside the Department of Labour itself since 1900. Researchers can often profit from a knowledge of departmental registry systems and their impact on what was created. For an example of this kind of records history research, see Bill Russell's brilliant study, "The White Man's Paper Burden: Aspects of Records Keeping in the Department of Indian Affairs, 1860-1914," *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-85), pp. 50-72.
  - 22 A number of federal Ministers of Labour serving since 1957 have deposited their personal political records with the Manuscript Division of the National Archives of Canada.
  - 23 The Manuscript Division of the National Archives of Canada holds the Mackenzie King Papers (MG 26 J), which contain significant records on King's career as the first Deputy Minister of Labour.
  - 24 Labour Canada is still creating this type of file today for strikes and lockouts as they occur, and the accumulated records for the years after 1977 will be transferred to the National Archives of Canada as their usefulness to the department comes to an end.
  - 25 The Department of Labour was responsible for advising as to which occupations in Canada were undersupplied with labour, and Labour departmental staff worked with Immigration officials in Europe processing applications for immigration to Canada.
  - 26 Canada was an early advocate and member (1919) of the International Labour Organization, which attempted to improve labour codes and labour standards around the world. RG 27 contains signifi-

- cant records on Canadian involvement in the ILO created by the Department's International Affairs Branch. See also Paulette Dozois' study in this issue of *Archivaria*, and John Mainwaring, *The International Labour Organization: A Canadian View*, (Ottawa, 1986.)
- 27 Researchers interested in these records can obtain a free, printed guide, courtesy of the National Archives of Canada. In conformity with the usual style for such publications in the archival community, this *Inventory* (which is the work of the present author) gives a basic administrative history of the Department of Labour, based on the departmental annual reports to Parliament, as well as a detailed description of the records themselves. The hope is that researchers across Canada will be able to establish for themselves from the *Inventory* whether the records of Labour Canada hold any material that might aid them in their research.
  - 28 Counted here are all researchers who wrote to the National Archives of Canada making inquiries about the Labour records, as well as all researchers who consulted the archivist responsible for RG 27 during any research trip to the Archives. The actual number of researchers using the records would be higher, as it is possible to use the records without direct consultation with Archives staff.
  - 29 For example, relatively few records were transferred to the Public Archives before 1970. Moreover, the new interest in labour history in Canada, reflected in the creation of a number of labour history courses in Canadian colleges and universities, began after 1975.
  - 30 It may be as well to point out that now, under the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act, neither the twenty-five-year rule nor the thirty-year rule is available as a mechanism for determining the availability of records to researchers. What must now be done is to review records to which access is requested in the light of the exemption criteria spelled out in the two acts. It is now possible to ask for access to records created very recently. All records that were available for research when the acts came into effect remain open, but all other records must be reviewed before their access status can be determined. All researchers/applicants have the same rights of access; academic or other status is not a pertinent factor under the legislation. The National Archives of Canada's pamphlet *Access to the Historical Records of the Government of Canada* outlines procedures for obtaining access to records held by the Government Archives Division.
  - 31 Sale of reels is handled by Crowntek/Xebec Imaging Systems, 1675 Russell Road, Ottawa K1G 0N1. There are 312 reels in the complete collection. For copies of finding aids or other general information on the microfilm, contact the Government Archives Division, National Archives of Canada, 395 Wellington Street, Ottawa K1A 0N3.
  - 32 The records of the 1966 Woods Task Force on Labour Relations are found in RG 2 (Privy Council Office).
  - 33 For example, the Government Archives Division now has responsibility for the acquisition of machine-readable records created by federal government departments and agencies, including Labour Canada.