

BIOGRAPHY



JOHN COMRIE KC, LLB, BCL, FCIARB

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John Comrie KC is the Managing Director of DefinitiveADR, a firm providing alternative dispute resolution services throughout Canada and the United States as well as internationally.

Mr. Comrie specializes in Canadian labour mediation and arbitration. In 2014 he was appointed by the Honourable Mr. Don Morgan, Minister of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety in the Government of Saskatchewan to act as a neutral arbitrator of labour law disputes in that Province. Since then he has been appointed by the Minister as well as union and management side lawyers to arbitrate many Saskatchewan based disputes involving a wide range of typical employer-union issues.

His most important award concerns the application of Canadian human rights codes in the context of workers compensation regimes. For almost 30 years the superior courts forced claimants to proceed under applicable workmens's compensation legislation if a "workplace injury" was involved, even if for sexual harassment. However, Mr. Comrie's award in CUPE (Local 21) v City of Regina allowed such a claim to proceed on the basis it could be distinguished from past Supreme Court decisions, largely because of an alleged violation of a provincial Human Rights Code. This 100 page analysis of the law is available on his website. Other recent awards concern an analysis of the disability law in the context of addiction, the law of harassment and bullying and an interpretation of the Saskatchewan emergency covid legislation and how it impacted the Saskatchewan Employment Act.

Another recent case of Mr. Comrie's has also garnered attention involving a significant review of institutional privacy obligations in a large hospital and university research setting. As well, Mr. Comrie has a background working with unions in large commercial and industrial settings such as the Saskatchewan steel industry. He has also worked in the Saskatchewan mining industry, including a several week long investigation working cooperatively with both union and management personnel. The study examined operational problems on underground crews, resulting in the regeneration of a new workplace culture.

Mr. Comrie's interest and experience in labour and employee issues includes his work as a Director of Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers, responsible for the provision of a broad range of family and individual counselling services to Saskatchewan lawyers. From 1999 to 2001 he served as the Chair of their Board of Directors. He also has significant experience doing volunteer work in Kentucky and Texas, including collegiate recovery programs and he continues to be active in the recovery advocacy movement in both Canada and the US.

Mr. Comrie's background involves an early interest in politics and human rights issues on both sides of the political fence and a subsequent career as General Counsel to a large unionized public manufacturing company based originally in Western Canada but eventually in Chicago. As a result he developed a broad experience understanding and interpreting labour relations law from the perspective of both management and the union movement.

An early interest in human rights issues included a unique education pedigree because of his contact at McGill with leading intellectuals, including lectures from F.R. Scott who argued the famous *Roncarelli* case before the Supreme Court and mentorship from John Humphrey, the original draftsman of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, first promulgated in 1948 and the inspiration for Canada's adoption of the World's first state legislated protection of disability rights.

His experience on the management side, includes providing legal services to a large public company with a large unionized workforce in many provinces and states. As a result, he developed a broad experience with typical labour issues in both Canada and the US. His commercial experience also includes dispute resolution between parties with other kinds of differing perspectives such as are common in international commercial transactions, construction projects and traditional civil litigation claims.

Mr. Comrie was raised in Regina, Canada and then attended McGill University in Montreal where he graduated with a first degree in economics and then studied for a Master's Degree in philosophy at Queen's University and the Goethe Institute in Germany. In the early seventies he returned to McGill where he graduated in 1976 with two law degrees in English Common Law and French Civil Law, together with training in Roman law. Mr. Comrie combines his extensive commercial experience with a long standing interest in comparative law and the World's differing legal systems. He holds the unusual distinction of being authorized to practice law in the United States and Canada holding licenses in both Illinois and Saskatchewan. In 1993 he was honoured with an appointment as Queen's Counsel for his contribution to the Canadian legal profession.

Mr. Comrie has also had significant alternative dispute resolution experience. He has personally managed a number of large commercial disputes including a construction claim in excess of \$160 million relating to a number of complex technical and commercial issues in a \$500 million steel mill complex and the settlement of more than 30 significant construction project and insurance claims using various alternative dispute resolution processes.

He was also active in a large number of administrative tribunal hearings related to trade policy in both Canada and the United States. He has personally conducted trade hearings before the Tariff Board of Canada, appeared as a witness in trade cases before the Canadian Import Tribunal in Canada and testified in Congress on US trade policy. His extensive experience in trade cases both on behalf of his own company as well as his participation in US and Canadian industry cases before the International Trade Commission and the Canadian Import Tribunal. Much of that work was organized in concert with the United Steelworkers of America. It included the successful direction and participation in more than 15 major trade cases from 1982 to 2007 against imports of steel into the US and Canada.

Mr. Comrie completed formal mediation training at the University of Texas law school in Austin and arbitration training at the renowned Queen Mary School of International Commercial Arbitration at the University of London. He is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators in London and a past Advisory Board Member of the Institute for Transnational Arbitration in Dallas.