

Supply—Labour

noticeable upturn of interest on the part of the progressive industries and unions. I believe it would interest hon. members to know that currently 2,158 labour-management committees are in active operation across Canada, covering a total of more than 631,000 employees.

It was the clear realization that the issues to be resolved in the future will be of increasing complexity which led to the government's decision to establish the task force to which reference has been made of late more than once in this chamber. However, I think we were wise—and I am sure hon. members will agree that it was far better to do this than to take serious steps during a period of continuing crises like we had in 1966—to establish a task force of very able men with a competent group of advisers to study the problems and major issues patiently, capably and comprehensively until satisfactory proposals are arrived at. My department is assisting and will of course continue to assist and co-operate with the task force.

I should now like to refer briefly to what has come out of the Freedman inquiry. The recognition in the Freedman report of the fact that essentially no plan can be accepted which would slow down the rate of technological advancement or the freedom of discovery, of course, is the immediate problem to be solved by the railways and the brotherhoods. In this specific area of direct federal interest I should like to say quite frankly that in my opinion, and certainly in the opinion of the officials of my department who have been following the matter very carefully, both the railway union involved and the C.N.R. management are entitled to very great credit for their recent demonstration of responsibility in coping with the dislocations as a result of technological advancement. In essence it has now been mutually agreed by the railway and the unions—and this is incorporated in an agreement—that in those cases where technological advancement would require the relocation of employees, the company will give the unions not less than 90 days' notice thereof and not less than 60 days' notice where relocation is not expected. In so notifying, the company will also include all pertinent details for the information of the union. Here is a concrete example of how the two industrial partners are honestly trying to work out an improved mechanism to meet the new conditions of today.

I think this underlines a very important point. Most changes, technological and otherwise, are of a manageable proportion, but

[Mr. Nicholson.]

each has its own particular characteristics and requirements. Technological changes often involve a relatively small number of people. This sort of problem does not lend itself to imposed governmental solutions which, by their very nature, must be comprehensive and general. Wherever and whenever possible the government role should be restricted, in my opinion, to assisting the private sector to make its own adjustments. That is exactly what the unions and the railways have done in the matter of run-throughs.

In line with the pressing need to take progressive steps to improve generally the efficiency of the collective bargaining process, the department is energetically studying the feasibility of setting up facilities for the training of more potential conciliators and mediators. That in my opinion, also is a forward-looking step. It is obvious in the industrial relations area that when you have highly trained and experienced negotiators to represent the union and highly trained and experienced negotiators to represent the company, each having very strong views, in order to be effective the mediators and conciliators assigned by the government ought to have some professional and training background so that they can bring the highest level of skill to bear objectively and realistically on the complex problems involved.

Hon. members will recall that the Department of Labour was host to—in a large measure its meetings took place in this chamber—the regional I.L.O. conference in September 1966, which was attended by over 250 representatives of unions, employer organizations and governments. This regional I.L.O. conference, the first ever to have been held in Canada, provided an excellent opportunity for the exchange of views of important matters which confront various countries in the labour field.

I might say that in addition to what it is doing in the field of inquiry and in the field of the training program for mediators and conciliators, the department is also expanding its labour councillor service abroad in order to improve the flow of labour information from overseas.

• (12:20 p.m.)

I should like to deal briefly now, Mr. Chairman, with the specific votes. The committee is being asked to approve \$12,811,000 for the Department of Labour, of which \$3,426,000 is for statutory items. Attention is directed to the new vote structure which is