Collective bargaining should be freely carried on, between labour and management, with the least possible interference by government. But where differences reach a crucial stage the protection of the public interest may make it necessary for the government to provide tested procedures designed to assist the parties in arriving at a settlement. This is a major function of the conciliation provisions of our collective bargaining legislation.

The freedom implicit in this legislation imposes a direct responsibility on labour, management, and also the government, for the effective functioning of the law. The record shows that the good faith of management and of labour has been an essential element in the success of Canadian conciliation procedures.

What is the record? The vast majority of collective agreements are renewed each year without strike action. More than 6,000 collective agreements are on file in the Department of Labour. In 1951, over 5,700 agreements were negotiated or renegotiated peacefully over the bargaining table.

Although the record on the whole has been good, the procedures established under the legislation have not always worked out as intended. This has led some to suggest that the conciliation machinery should be changed radically or even abolished altogether.

The criticisms have generally concentrated on the lengthy delays, shifting of responsibility for final decisions from labour and management to conciliation boards, and the postponement of real bargaining until after a board's decision.

But perhaps fewer of the difficulties would arise if we paid more attention to the spirit and intent of the legislation.

All parties, management, labour and government administrators, might well examine their own record from time to time to see if they have paid enough attention to the spirit and intent of the legislation. Speaking now only of the labour side, if there have been lengthy or unwarranted delays in the functioning of the conciliation machinery, I ask you to consider if there have not been some delays on the part of union officers. Have your own representatives, most of whom, I know, are busy men, been called away on other work, to attend a convention or take care of a pressing situation elsewhere? If a conciliation board seems to take a long time to render its report, after coming into a dispute without an intimate prior knowledge of the issues, is it possibly because the trade union negotiators with our without similar intent on the part of management, have shifted responsibility to the conciliation board for recommendations or decisions rather than to get down to serious and genuine collective bargaining on the issues.

I have posed these questions for your consideration just to point up my request to you for full and wholehearted utilization of collective bargaining and conciliation procedures.

Our labour codes may not be perfect either in the federal or provincial jurisdictions, but they are the best that have so far been devised either here or elsewhere.