Last week my colleague, the Minister for Labour and National Service, introduced into Federal Parliament the most significant amendments to the Conciliation and Arbitration Act for 25 years.

The need for revisions to our industrial legislation must be apparent to you all. Our system of conciliation and arbitration has been undergoing severe strain against a background of increasing industrial unrest and serious wage-induced inflation.

The industrial situation in Australia in recent times has not been an encouraging one. There are far too many strikes and far too many man days lost as a result of them. Working days lost in 1971 increased by 28 per cent over the loss for 1970, and wages lost increased by 46.5 per cent.

Already, this year there have been several serious disputes such as the one inflicted on the State Electricity Commission of Victoria. It's more than a matter of man hours lost, of course. Strikes and other forms of industrial action cause hardship to workers not directly involved. In the case of the S.E.C. strike, while only 11,000 S.E.C. workers were actually involved in industrial action, the strike resulted in up to some 200,000 workers in Victoria and thousands more in other States being stood down for varying periods of time. And there were many more who, although not stood down, were not productively employed for long periods as a result of power restrictions and other adverse affects of the strike.

At the same time, the economy has been bedevilled by inflation caused largely by excessive wage demands, by increasingly militant unions and by employers' inability or reluctance to resist union tactics and claims.
All these factors are part of the background to the legislation outlined by the Minister for Labour and National Service last week. I shall now outline some of the main provisions of the Government's bill.

The Conciliation and Arbitration functions of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission are to be separated, and "task forces" or panels of the Commission are to be established. An industry or group of industries will be assigned to a panel with the object of bringing about more speedy attention to disputes arising in the task force's particular area.

The bill strengthens the sanctions provisions of the Act, and reviews penalties. This has to be seen in the context of the Government's consistent policy that sanctions are a last resort and that every reasonable endeavour should be made to settle disputes by the traditional methods of conciliation and/or arbitration.

The secret ballot provisions of the Act will be extended to enable the Commission to order a ballot where a ban or strike is threatened or exists.

Decisions of the Commission can, of course, have major implications for the national economy. The bill will ensure that the Commission should have regard in particular to the state of the economy and the likely effects on that economy of any award that it might make.

The bill also contains stricter provisions to ensure a more effective democratic control of unions and other registered organisations. It also tightens the provisions under which union amalgamations can proceed. Under the bill, for an amalgamation to succeed, it will require a vote by at least half of the eligible membership of each organisation, and a vote in favour by more than half of those voting formally in each organisation. In other words, at least 25 per cent
of each union's membership will have to vote in favour of the amalgamation before it is allowed to proceed.

Australia's economic progress must not be impeded by irresponsible industrial upheavals, but at the same time, the rank and file unionist must not be prevented from pursuing the legitimate aims and objectives of improving, within the nation's capacity, his wages and conditions of work. The Government's new legislation is framed with that in mind.

There has been good news for Warrnambool Institute of Advanced Education and Portland Technical School in the last few days.

Under a bill I introduced in Parliament last week, the Warrnambool Institute will be allocated $58,000 towards the erection of a student residence designed to accommodate 28 students. With the matching grant from the Victorian Government, this will provide $116,000 for the project which will be able to proceed immediately. It is hoped to have the building ready for occupancy by the beginning of the 1973 academic year.

This will bring the total anticipated capital allocation from the Commonwealth for the Warrnambool Institute to $189,460, which with Victoria's matching grant comes to $378,920.

The bill I introduced also provided a further $787,000 towards the running costs of Colleges of Advanced Education such as Warrnambool's Institute. When matched by the States, this will amount to $2,242,000.
I am also pleased to be able to tell you that the building programme at the Portland Technical School has been advanced by more than 12 months as a result of the special Commonwealth grant to the States for Government school building.

Of the $20 million grant, Victoria was allocated $5.1 million, and the Victorian Minister for Education, Mr. Thompson, has advised me that the building of stage two at the Portland Technical School has been advanced.

Costing about $400,000, stage two will comprise an administration block, a mathematics and science block and a gymnasium, and should be ready for occupancy next school year.

It is most gratifying to see examples such as these of Commonwealth-State co-operation in the very necessary field of providing educational facilities.

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