

Income Tax Act Amendment

Mr. Sharp: One of my officials advises me that he can pay for his pride every year. I might point out one thing in this regard which I think is important. Since the new proposed section 103A invokes a civil penalty under the act, no criminal penalty can be invoked:

Mr. Monteith: He can stay out of jail.

Mr. Sharp: Yes. If he objects to having a number as well as a name, he can pay the fine every year and feel virtuous.

Mr. Kindt: If an individual—perhaps even myself or the minister—fails to file his income tax form until the last two or three days in April and for some reason or other forgets to inscribe his social security number, he would then be in default because his form was not complete and he would have to pay a penalty. What are the rules in this regard? I should like a specific answer to that question. While I am on my feet let me say that now we have this number business in addition to all the other detail that is on these income tax forms. They are so involved that one must hire a consultant to fill out the form, and pay this person a large sum of money. This is no laughing matter; it is a serious matter.

Mr. Monteith: I agree that it is not a laughing matter. That is the way in which I once earned my living.

Mr. Kindt: Yes; I did too. I used to earn a lot of money by filling out income tax returns, until I found that I could not make any more money out of it. People do not want to pay for that. They object to paying for anything of this kind, and strongly object to filling out forms. It is no laughing matter if you are going to be penalized because you did not put your security number on the form. I do not know what the minister is laughing about, but he would find out how these people feel if he would go out and listen to the opinions of some of those who are going to be asked to fill out these income tax forms. He thinks he is doing something here that the people will sanction, and he is making a joke of it.

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Chairman, I was not smiling at the remarks of the hon. gentleman. I was thinking about a story concerning a form filled out by an applicant in the civil service. The question on the form was, "Sex?", and the reply was "Yes". However, perhaps I can answer the question asked by the hon. member in this way: For example, if a taxpayer

[Mr. Monteith.]

fails to sign his name on the form as taxpayers sometimes do, it is sent back with a polite request that the form be signed. No penalty is involved. If a taxpayer should forget to fill in his social insurance number, I am quite sure the officials would send the form back and ask him to fill it in. If he refused to do so, this would be the only circumstance in which there would be any penalty.

Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton South): Mr. Chairman, a moment ago I brought to the attention of the minister the fact that the Post Office Department expect soon to have electronic computers that will read the name as well as the number. The minister seemed to have accepted this because he referred to the special cost of this type of equipment. I do not know how he could have any knowledge that it would cost more money to have a computer that can remember a name rather than a series of numbers. However, immediately thereafter the minister went back to his theme about why it was necessary to have numbers. He seemed to disregard the fact that the Post Office Department expects to have these electronic computers that will read the name. It appears, Mr. Chairman, that the minister apparently is not listening. I may be wasting my time.

Mr. Kindt: He never listens to anything; he laughs.

Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton South): The fact remains, however, that if there are these electronic computers which can read the name, then the argument the minister uses about a computer, and the numbers, is not necessarily a proper argument. I should like to call attention to the fact that when he apparently accepted my argument in the first place, he seemed to refer to the cost of these machines. Let me again emphasize how much it would cost to instal electronic computers. The Department of National Revenue has indicated that this equipment can be made available, and I suggest that the minister responsible should look into the possibility of installing this type of a computer system, but such a system should not be installed until it is found to be of economic advantage.

● (9:00 p.m.)

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Chairman, the government is always interested in finding ways of cutting down on expenses. If machines are developed that can distinguish between names and numbers I am sure the government will take advantage of them.