

*Adjournment Debate*

As if all of this was not bad enough, I heard this year that one of the employees of Revenue Canada apparently walked out with some of my private records. In fact, this employee had walked out with the microfiche records of something like 16 million Canadian taxpayers. That to my mind is a real shocker.

We have heard of things disappearing from government records and files before. In fact, it seems to me I heard that the mould for the dollar coin had disappeared. As a matter of fact, I understand it disappeared when it was on its way to Winnipeg through the mail or a courier service. As a result of that, when I go to spend a dollar coin in the future, it will apparently not have a voyageur on the back of it but it will only have a Canadian loon. I can understand things like that disappearing and I know the Hon. Member for Scarborough West (Mr. Stackhouse) can understand that too.

Then I heard about government documents disappearing. I suppose you have probably heard about those as well, Mr. Speaker. Before the Nielsen task force report on the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development was released, someone else seemed to have it before you and I saw it, Mr. Speaker. The Forget Commission report seemed to have been made public before it was supposed to have been released. This fellow at *The Globe and Mail*, Victor Malarek, seems to have every confidential record of the Immigration Department before the Minister of State for Immigration (Mr. Weiner) has seen them. I suppose these things do get out into the public that are not supposed to but it does bother me.

It is particularly bad to see this happening to private business records of members of the public. It is particularly bad when it happens to something like the microfiche records of the Revenue Department affecting the lives of 16 million Canadians. To my mind, that is just a downright breach of the public trust.

I would hope that the procedures of the Department will be tightened up and explained to us. I hope the Parliamentary Secretary will be able to explain to us why, for instance, there were 180 different sets of these microfiche records floating around Canada and why they were located in as many as 60 different places. What sort of supervision is there? I expect that you and I should get some answers on that tonight and I expect the Parliamentary Secretary is going to assure us that this sort of thing is never going to happen to private citizens of this country again.

● (1825)

**Mrs. Jennifer Cossitt (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Revenue):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to respond to my hon. colleague on the question he raised December 16 of last year.

The Minister has been informed of the results of the RCMP investigation into the disappearance and subsequent recovery

of microfiche data on taxpayers. A Revenue Canada employee has been charged with theft, possession of stolen property, and breach of public trust. The matter is now before the courts. The Department has taken appropriate action in respect of all the individuals involved in this unfortunate chain of events. In addition, I wish to assure the House that significant steps have been taken to strengthen microfiche security procedures in the Department. A 100 per cent check of the inventory of all microfiche in the Department has been done. This revealed only minor discrepancies, all of which have been effectively dealt with. A complete review of the number of sets in our offices has been conducted and resulted in a significant reduction.

Telex instructions were issued immediately following knowledge of the disappearance to highlight microfiche security policies and remind staff to adhere strictly to them. Daytime cleaning has been instituted in sensitive locations. Strengthened employee screening procedures are now being implemented. Further improvements are being made as a result of the independent RCMP review of the Department's security arrangement for microfiche. The Hon. Member will appreciate that it would be counter-productive to elaborate on the specifics of any of the Department's security measures. However, the House should rest assured that real improvements have been made and that Revenue Canada is striving to prevent any similar occurrences in the future.

I must stress that the Minister's goal is to provide a balance between service to taxpayers and security of confidential information. I want to remind all Hon. Members that while the Department is extending improved and stringent measures to protect the confidentiality of taxpayers' financial records, it is at the same time entering the annual filing season. At this time of year we have very direct contact with more than 16 million taxpayers through the mailing of individual tax returns and guides, through the telephone inquiry service provided at district offices, and in the temporary tax assistance centres. I do not want this House to lose sight of the importance the Department places on providing service to the 16 million people who will file tax returns by April 30.

I believe that this effort to improve service should not go unnoticed. A new no-calculation option has been introduced on the T-1 special tax return for those who file to claim a child tax credit or the federal sales tax credit. Instructions in the general guide have been made clear and more readable with larger print and more space. These changes, coupled with improvements to our telephone inquiry service, will help all of us when we face the annual task of filing our tax returns. I believe we must keep the problems in perspective as we remember the continuing efforts of this Department to meet the needs of those it serves while protecting the confidentiality of the taxpayer.