

[English]

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, of course the Government regrets the inconvenience that will be caused to the travelling public. However, the hon. gentleman knows that there is a bargaining process which must be respected. He has been a stout defender of that process and I would ask him to continue, in a consistent way, to defend that bargaining process.

The Government will stand by to intervene any time that those parties are of the opinion that it would be in their best interests for the Government to do so. Until such time as that request is made, and until such time as there is a genuine effort to get back to the bargaining table to resolve this dispute in the normal collective bargaining process, I think that would be premature.

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CORPORATE AFFAIRS

SALE OF PERSONAL FINANCIAL INFORMATION BY COMPANIES PREPARING INCOME TAX RETURNS

Mr. Howard McCurdy (Windsor—Walkerville): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Some 4 million Canadians have their tax returns completed by tax discounters or tax preparers. During the course of the Principal investigation it was found that personal financial information is being sold like a commodity for profit. Does the Minister find this situation acceptable? If not, what action does he intend to take to change it?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, this is of concern. The Income Tax Act clearly provides that information which citizens are compelled by law to provide to the Government is to be kept strictly confidential. When one goes to a tax discounter with one's return there is not the same compulsion, so the question of secrecy presumably could be left to the individual. If people do not wish to have their records used they should ensure that that is the case.

Nevertheless, the fact that this seems to be quite widespread is of concern. We are studying the situation to see whether in fact legislative action is required.

REQUEST FOR LEGISLATION TO PROTECT CONFIDENTIALITY OF INFORMATION

Mr. Howard McCurdy (Windsor—Walkerville): Mr. Speaker, I am gratified to hear the Minister's answer but I would like him to be a little more specific. Does he not think that this is a sufficiently important matter for legislation? Will he not consult with the provinces and the industry with a view to introducing legislation which would protect the confidentiality of people who avail themselves of this service?

Oral Questions

It seems to me that the course of action is clear. I want to know whether the Minister is going to follow that course of action.

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I think the Hon. Member would agree that it is probably advisable for us to determine the extent to which this is being practised and the implications this might have for this industry, the services of which the consumers seem to enjoy, and to make a rational assessment of all of the evidence before bringing in legislation.

I repeat, however, that it is a matter of concern. It is not something which we take lightly. We are monitoring and looking into the situation.

REGULATION OF COMPANIES

Mr. Howard McCurdy (Windsor—Walkerville): Mr. Speaker, maybe I should re-emphasize that one in three Canadians use this service and I think they expect that confidentiality will be maintained. The vague answer which we heard is nice and comforting, but this matter requires some urgency of action.

Will the Minister act, not only with regard to protecting the confidentiality of records submitted to the tax preparers and discounters, but also to examine the necessity of regulating an industry so intimately involved with the financial matters of so many Canadians?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I think the answer to the Member's second supplementary question was contained in my response to his first two questions. We do take this matter seriously, but even the article which stimulated the question from the Hon. Member indicates that at least two of the major providers of this tax service do in fact keep the information confidential.

An analysis of that kind of information must be considered before we make the final decision. However, protection of privacy is certainly a priority of the Government. We do not treat the issue lightly.

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SHIPBUILDING

HALIFAX SHIPYARD WORKERS' PROTEST DEMONSTRATION

Mr. Dave Dingwall (Cape Breton—East Richmond): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Public Works. He will know that 140 unemployed shipyard workers from Halifax protested here in Ottawa today about the way the Government is treating them. In 1984 his Prime Minister promised those very same workers "jobs, jobs, jobs". Three years later the Halifax shipyard workers have no jobs and no shipbuilding policy other than despair and unemployment.