

Income Tax Act Amendment

Mr. Sharp: I am very glad to have this information. The treasury is not sufficiently flush to afford one of these machines. Perhaps in due course we shall buy one, and then we can get rid of these numbers. In the meantime we have to rely on the equipment which is available and which operates on the basis of numbers only.

Mr. Ballard: I should like to add my protest to that of the hon. member for Medicine Hat about the use of computer numbers, the SIN numbers, as they have been called, in connection with income tax returns. One of the points the hon. member makes is that government income tax files will no longer be secret. But there is no confidentiality left in the revenue department. When the Income Tax Act was amended last July the traditional secrecy which existed between taxpayers and the department was removed.

I refer to section 133(4)(c) of that act which reads follows:

An official or authorized person may communicate or allow to be communicated information obtained under this act, or allow inspection of or access to any book, record, writing, return or other document obtained by or on behalf of the Minister for the purposes of this Act, to or by any person otherwise legally entitled thereto.

The other day when the house was in committee I pointed out to the minister that income tax files had actually been taken from the department and used in a civil law case for the first time in Canada. This was made possible by the section of the act to which I have just referred. It is all very well for the minister to say that there is confidentiality within the department. But it no longer exists. As proof, we need only recall what took place a few weeks ago when we passed the old age security amending legislation. The officials administering that act can now call upon the director of taxation for information to be used to verify the returns filed by applicants for supplementary old age pensions.

These are two examples of opening the doors to the files of the income tax department. I suggest that if the doors can be opened for such reasons it will not be long before the records of the Department of National Revenue become an open book not only to other departments of government but to all the courts of the land.

In the case of *Bazos v. Bazos* which I cited the other night, the issue before the court concerned a will. I suggest that the type of court case into which income tax files can be injected will gradually broaden until we see

these files brought into court in connection with divorce applications, and a whole variety of civil cases. I believe the hon. member for Medicine Hat has put forward a valid argument against the use of numbers. I will go further. He has based his argument upon the possibility that the records in the Department of National Revenue may no longer be secret. Unhappily, in my opinion, at this point of time they are no longer secret, despite the tradition of the past. I know this is a protest made in vain but I should nevertheless like to protest very strongly against the erosion of our traditional concept of confidentiality between the taxpayer and the department.

I believe the use of numbers opens the door to making this information which the government gathers available over a wide spectrum. As individual citizens of Canada we will find our affairs becoming an open book to the bureaucrats in the government. The minister should put his foot down at this point. It is not that we do not trust the present Minister of Finance; we often pass legislation in this house because we know that the Minister of Finance is a fine fellow. I think the present minister would do nothing to jeopardize the rights of the individual. But another minister of finance 20 or 30 years from now might dispose of this information in a far different way from that in which the present minister intends it to be used. We are just reaching the point where the lives of all the people of Canada will be laid bare for examination by every department of government, in fact by all the people in the land.

An hon. Member: Like "1984".

Mr. Kindt: There are parts of this clause which do not appeal to me. Only a year or two ago the subject of social security numbers was raised in the house. Questions were asked on the floor of the house. Ministers were pressed to say who would be required to obtain such numbers, and whether members of parliament would be required to obtain them. Hon. members were told at that time that no social security numbers were to be obtained by members of parliament or by certain other groups of people covered by the questions asked. Now all that is out the window. Under the provisions of clause 21 we have to obtain a social security number. Some bureaucrat, with the aid of the minister, is having this written into law. The explanatory notes state that such a number is necessary