

United States and which often surpass the powers even of the policy, which may in some cases even be unconstitutional.

If the Government genuinely recognizes those facts, surely it is essential that the Government act now to curtail those powers and bring them back into line with basic civil liberties in this country, to ensure that never again will the Department use these excessive powers to take away the basic civil liberties of Canadian taxpayers.

Repeated studies have indicated how serious this problem has been, going back as far as the Rowe report which was commissioned by the Minister's predecessor. It studied the administration of the income tax system, referred to problems within it and talked about the need for the political will to act quickly to address the problems. Yet this report, which was conducted by a former leader of the Liberal Party in Newfoundland, was ignored by the Minister. It was suppressed for over a year. An attempt was made to prevent it from ever seeing the light of day. Instead of acting on the report, the Minister handed it to his officials who prepared a rebuttal in which they dismissed, one after another, each of Mr. Rowe's concerns and recommendations. There probably has never been a neater snow job on a Minister in my time in Parliament than was done in this case. He handed this report to his officials and they convinced him that there was no need for action.

That report was presented to the Minister in December 1982. Nothing was done. Since that time there has been a succession of other reports. Most recently, within the past week, we found a report that was prepared by the Joint Committee of the Canadian Bar Association and the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants which makes, in a very telling way, the argument which I was just placing before the House. We saw in that joint brief that was prepared by the CICA and the Bar Association a statement that recognizes how serious the problems have become. It includes this statement:

Revenue Canada must have broad enforcement powers. But a balance must be struck between the necessity for effective tax administration and the protection of taxpayers from undue and unreasonable interference. In our view, the Income Tax Act (the 'Act') provides inadequate restraints on Revenue Canada's enforcement powers. The Act should be amended to impose powers. The Act should be amended to impose reasonable limitations on Revenue Canada's enforcement powers and to provide for independent judicial scrutiny of the exercise of those powers in all circumstances.

They refer as well in their report to their experience in dealing with the Department. They say this: "Most Revenue Canada employees are courteous, honest, competent and reasonable." The report continued by indicating: "Nevertheless our experience was that the attitudinal problem we have described is growing throughout all levels of Revenue Canada." That report was presented just last week by some of the most senior tax practitioners in the country.

● (1150)

On behalf of my Party, I endorse strongly the recommendations which have been made by the Joint Committee of the Canadian Bar Association and Canadian Institute of Char-

Supply

tered Accountants. In virtually every regard they are consistent with recommendations that were made by the Progressive Conservative Task Force on Revenue Canada.

Let us review for a moment the history of Parliament's involvement in this issue. Last fall we raised a series of questions with regard to problems in the administration of the Income Tax Act—the issue of quotas which were initially denied by the Minister but which he subsequently confirmed existed, and the issue of attempts by Revenue Canada to gain direct access to the computerized data banks of the City of Kitchener. This was the second issue which was of major concern and which we referred to the Privacy Commissioner. His report, which was released quite recently, found that Revenue Canada had taken a careless approach in this whole issue and that it had not observed proper regard for the rights of Canadian taxpayers living in the City of Kitchener. He raised serious concerns about the whole issue of privacy.

Hon. Members on this side of the House of Commons, including my Leader and my former Leader, called upon the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Bussi eres) to strike a committee of the House of Commons with a majority of Liberal Members and with a Liberal chairman, whose job it would be, first of all, to give Canadians a chance to be heard or to express their points of view about the administration of the income tax system; and second, to give to the Minister and to the Government a series of recommendations which would improve the administration of that system to make it more efficient, fair, accountable and effective. Yet the Minister refused. Parliament was to be denied the opportunity to have that sort of committee study. He said that it was good enough to parcel out this responsibility, which should be undertaken by elected representatives, to a group of private consultants.

As a result, my Leader announced at the beginning of February the creation of the Progressive Conservative Task Force on Revenue Canada. Five members of our caucus visited 23 communities across the country throughout the month of April. We listened to over 300 oral submissions and received a tremendous volume of written material, both when we were on the tour and after we returned. As a consequence of those hearings, we produced the report of the PC task force on April 8, 1984.

The contrast between the Government's approach to this issue and the approach taken by my Party is striking. First, we felt that it was an issue in which elected representatives should be involved. The Government sought to gag Parliament and to prevent Members of Parliament from hearing about this. The Government felt it was appropriate simply to parcel it out to private consultants. My Party spent its own money to pay for the work of the task force. We brought in a report, which has been virtually universally acclaimed by the press, the public and tax practitioners, on a budget of \$100,000, paid for not by taxpayers but by the Progressive Conservative Party. In contrast, the Government's Woods Gordon study, the private consultants' study, was commissioned in January and then will not be making their report until toward the end of this year. The Minister has indicated that the budget for the Woods