

Income Tax Amendment

● (9:50 p.m.)

Perhaps we need more assurance that no one else will have access to this information compiled by computers. With that assurance I am sure this measure will be accepted. Before it is acceptable we must know that there will be a separation of information so far as computers are concerned, so that the information will not be available to everyone. I agree with the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre who suggested that this general information should not be made available to anyone who seeks it.

In spite of the assurances given some months ago by the Minister of National Health and Welfare and in the absence of any satisfactory explanation, I think a great deal more supervision should be employed in respect of the information available from these computers. There is always the possibility that records and information, obtained in confidence, will become available generally as a result of computer operation. Without some assurance of a separation of confidential and public information there is a possibility of an invasion on human rights. We in this parliament must do everything possible to avert that invasion.

Mr. Fulton: Mr. Chairman, I have been very interested in the remarks made during the last 15 or 20 minutes, particularly those of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre regarding the effects of the provision in this measure having regard to the Income Tax Act. There may be some merit to the suggestion that for administrative purposes, in so far as the social security measures of this nation are concerned, individuals should have social insurance numbers. In this regard let me point out that there are provisions in the national health and welfare measures which require individuals to have these numbers. This is the first invasion of this kind we have observed in the nature of paraphernalia, purposes, and methods of enforcing the Income Tax Act. No one heretofore has been obliged to accept an income tax number in order that income tax regulations may be enforced, formidable and restrictive as they may be. This particular provision would have the effect of applying an income tax number by an indirect method, for a purpose other than enforcement of the Income Tax Act.

While I understand the reasons behind the insistence that people must have a social insurance number, I cannot understand the application of that principle to this particular

[Mr. Olson.]

measure. It will be used to enforce collection of income taxes under a government instituted social security program. We as members of parliament are well aware of the difficulties involved in income tax legislation, and we all appreciate that certain injustices occur. In the present case the government is using extraordinarily restrictive apparatus for a purpose not intended. If we must be labelled by a social security number, let us be so labelled without the impending threat of such a label being used for income tax collection purposes. The people of Canada resent very much being regarded as wards of the government, and resent being numbered for income tax purposes. They resent even more being numbered on the basis of social security in order to accomplish something not intended.

Mr. Winkler: Mr. Chairman, I should like to ask the minister whether in his view this particular clause will apply to old age supplements in years to come?

Mr. Sharp: I do not know the answer to that question. Let me make the very general statement that we are asking approval for identification of something that is not capable of being used for another reason. If we could be sure of an identification by names, that would be sufficient, but we all know that many individuals in this country have the same name by birth and very often the same name by marriage. The identification we now seek I do not think infringes in any way upon our freedoms. We are simply seeking a method of identification which can be used in respect of individuals who come under the provisions of various measures because of different circumstances. The whole thing involves a matter of identification.

Mr. Fulton: Mr. Chairman, if this measure involves simply a matter of identification, why does the measure provide such a heavy penalty under the Income Tax Act?

● (10:00 p.m.)

Mr. Sharp: In the first place, Mr. Chairman, the penalties are not as serious as has been suggested; I can assure hon. members of that. They are just the ordinary sort of penalties that are provided if in your income tax return you file your name in an improper way. In other words, the same penalty would be provided if you did not fill out your name properly. This is exactly the kind of penalty that is involved in this measure. If you misinformed the tax authorities by filling in your name incorrectly, or your address in the