

*Supply*

● (1110)

That in itself is an indictment of the Minister's management of the Department. He is simply uninformed about what has been happening in his Department. More serious than that in the course of Question Period in recent days, is the Minister's abject refusal to get the truth and make it available to the Canadian people and the Parliament of Canada.

Over the course of several weeks, the Hon. Member for Cambridge (Mr. Speyer) and other colleagues on this side of the House have raised the issue of quotas that have been put in place in several district tax offices across the country, where tax assessors are being driven to maximize their take and to squeeze every last cent out of ordinary taxpayers irrespective of whether the money is in fact owed.

What happened when this was raised in the House of Commons? The first thing that happened was that every chartered accountancy firm in the City of Cambridge wrote to my colleague from Cambridge and said that they believed there was a quota system in place in the Kitchener district tax office. The Hon. Member for Cambridge quite properly raised that on the floor of the House of Commons and asked the Minister to reply.

What did the Minister say? He said that there were no such quotas. What did we learn later after the Minister had been informed that in fact quotas existed, a fact which the Minister now concedes? Then the Minister said it was only in Kitchener, that it was an isolated incident, that it did not take place anywhere else in the country, and that it was simply the one office in Kitchener where the officials got carried away. He said he had put a stop to this. Further, he said that to end these non-existent quotas which were not in place anywhere else in the country, he was sending out a directive to all district tax offices telling them that the practice was not to be permitted.

What did we learn after the Minister made the statement that it was only in Kitchener? We then learned that there were quotas in place in Toronto, a fact which has been conceded by the director of the district tax office, a fact which has been proven by documentary evidence, a fact which the Minister himself still refuses to concede to the House of Commons notwithstanding the documentary evidence presented to him. The Director General of Taxation has pointed out that in fact quotas have been in place in a number of offices. We have documentary evidence proving that in the case of the Calgary district tax office quotas have been in place there. Occasion after occasion we have had a continuing cover-up on the part of the Minister and of the Department attempting to withhold from Canadians the truth, and a willingness on the part of the Minister to leave information which he knows to be false on the record. Canadians deserve better than that.

I think it is a fair question to ask the Minister why he issued a directive to all district tax offices saying that there were to be no quotas, that they were wrong and that under no circumstances were district tax offices to have quotas. Why has he repeatedly said, both to the press and in the House of Commons, that he is opposed to quotas and will do everything he

can to ensure that they are stopped? If quotas are innocuous, if they have not damaged the rights of Canadians and if they have not damaged the position of the assessors themselves and treated them unfairly, why would the Minister be this concerned and take this extraordinary action to put a stop to them and insist to the House that no quotas would be permitted under his administration?

The answer is that the Minister accepts that in fact quotas are dangerous, that they take away people's rights, that they are unjust both to the assessors who are forced to wring money out of people whether or not it is owed, and that they are unjust as well to ordinary Canadians who find that they are unfairly reassessed as a result of quotas being in place. It is unjust for an assessor to be told that if he wants to get ahead, get promoted, get a merit increase or even hang on to his job, he has to meet some arbitrary quotas set by the officials over him. The Minister believes that is wrong, and we agree.

A second question arises: If the Minister feels that people's civil rights are invaded by the imposition of quotas, why does he not agree that Canadians who have had their rights affected by these quotas and have been unfairly reassessed as a result of them have the right to know whether or not quotas have been in place in their local district tax offices? Why the cover-up. Why is the Minister not prepared to table in the House of Commons a list of all offices in which quotas have been in place? Indeed, why would the Minister not accept his responsibilities as a Minister and actively and vigorously find out for himself in which offices quotas have been in place to make sure that those whose rights have been affected could seek redress? Any Minister of the Crown who was doing his job and knew that injustices had taken place under his administration would have a responsibility to set the record straight, to tell the truth and do whatever he could to ensure that people's rights were respected and the abuses stopped. Yet this Minister still refuses.

● (1115)

Under this Minister, we have seen cases of extraordinary actions being taken by the Department. For example, an attempt was made by the Department to ask for the whole of a computerized data base belonging to a municipality. Here again the Minister said he was unaware of this, that it was simply a matter of a local district office overstepping itself, that he could not be expected to know and that he would put a stop to it.

What does this Minister know? What has he been doing? What is the Minister's responsibility to make sure that local offices follow policy and respect the rights of Canadians, including the right to privacy? What has he done to discharge his responsibilities to Parliament and the people of Canada? On the record, he has done nothing. What we have had is abuses of which the Minister was unaware and of which he remains unconcerned.

What about his Liberal colleagues? Members on this side of the House have been deluged for the past year with complaints from our constituents, from pensioners, ordinary people with