to be constrained in the time we have to debate such an essential issue?

Instead of having time to study it, instead of having time to hear the groups of Canadians across the country who are concerned about whether the erosion of universality is going to lead to the erosion of universality in so many other areas, we have to abandon that debate, we have to turn it over to the editorial writers and hope that they will take time to raise with Canadians this essential issue of public policy.

This is scandalous, Madam Speaker. It is scandalous not just because it is closure but because it is closure on such an important measure. It should not be done. I suggest to the government, in view of the failure of the Department of Finance to get its amendments introduced at committee stage, in view of the implicit recognition that comes with that failure that the bill itself is fundamentally flawed, that it needs to be amended, that the government should withdraw the bill, forget about trying to push it through this week, introduce a proper income tax amendment bill in the new year and put the clawback aside until it has been considered and debated by Canadians across Canada.

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops): Madam Speaker, when the young people of Canada are studying the history of Canada years from now they will look back on 1989 as the year that the Government of Canada decided to abandon one of the crucial principles of what being a Canadian is all about. Being a Canadian means that if you get sick, it does not matter who you are, rich or poor, whether you live in Newfoundland or Saskatchewan, you will have adequate medical attention. It means that your children will go to school. You do not have to pay extra. You do not have to send them to private schools or special schools which are going to cost you money. Your contribution through the general tax system will take care of that education. It means that if you are raising children you get a family allowance cheque every month until the children are age 18. And it means that if you are an elderly person, no matter who you are, rich or poor, no matter what your ethnic origins, your religion, or where you live, you get a pension. That is what it means to be a Canadian.

This year the government decided it was going to change all of that, that it was going to tear universality up and throw it out of the window. The government says that it has had enough. It does not want a fair system for everybody in this country, it wants charity. If you can prove to the government that you are poor enough to receive a pension, then you will get a pension. If you are poor enough to prove to the government you require family allowance, then you will get family allowance cheques.

This means that we are going back to the old days of the means test, a degrading experience. That is Tory times. This is what being a Conservative in this country is all about. I suspect that those people who are watching the House of Commons on their television sets today, trying to understand what is going on, Canadian is all about. If they look through all the veils and so on of what the various ministers have said, lo and behold, way out there is the free trade deal staring them in the face. Because the free trade deal says that we have agreed, as a country, to harmonize our social programs with those in the United States of America.

• (1200)

We know how abysmal the health care system is in the United States. We know how families are the last sort of caring aspect of the American administration, the American way of life, in terms of support and care,. That is what is happening here today. To make it worse, not only is this government dismantling something that is fundamental to being a Canadian, it is now saying: "We don't want the opposition members of the House of Commons to speak about this because if they speak about it the people who are watching their television sets at home today will be aware of what is going on". It decided: "We are going to muzzle the debate. We are going to curtail the debate. We are going to shut down the debate. We are going to introduce dictatorial, totalitarian methods that say we no longer want the Parliament of Canada to explain to the people of Canada what this government is doing".

That has to be a very dark day for freedom of speech. It is a dark day for those who believe in the fundamentals of a parliamentary democracy. It is a dark day for those Canadians who actually believe that democracy is something we are struggling to keep. As we see other countries, particularly in the east bloc, begin to slowly introduce the principles that we have held high for generations, this Conservative government has decided to dismantle this and make this House of Commons and Parliament of Canada into an ineffectual place. As soon as it hears criticisms coming from members of the