

It is special in another way. It is a major step toward the Americanization of our social programs. The Americans do not have anything like the kind of social network that we have here in Canada. For example, they have pensions, but they are contributory pensions. The people intending to benefit from these pension programs contribute regularly to them. They have plans set up in the manner of our contributory Canada Pension Plan, for example, or the Quebec Pension Plan, and as means tested programs such as our guaranteed income supplement.

These are some of their programs. But they have no universal pension program equivalent to our old age security system. No pension exists in the United States where residents have a right, simply by virtue of the fact that they have reached the age of 65 and have been residents long enough, to qualify. This is a step to bring us in line with the American plan of not having a universal program. It is a major step toward Americanization. Perhaps it is even more than that because, in some instances, some of our senior citizens did contribute to the old age security plan.

• (1610)

Madam Speaker, you are not old enough to remember, but some of us in this House are, when there was a special 2 per cent income tax that was levied for the express purpose of providing funds for the old age security system. So seniors are having that taken away from them with this clawback provision in this legislation. It is special in that way as well. It is the first time that the government has ever said, "Contribute to a plan and later on we will confiscate the funds". So it is special in that respect as well.

It is special in another way. It is a special tax in that it is a major step toward the end of universality. In spite of the Prime Minister's reassurances, and other members have spoken about this—but I think they are important enough to read into the record—he said on March 7, 1984, when he was not the Prime Minister, "Our position is simple and straightforward. We are in favour of universality of social programs and they shall not be touched."

Speaking on October 15, 1988, at Summerside, P.E.I., the Prime Minister told seniors—and you will recall, Madam Speaker, that we were in the middle of an election campaign then, which might make a difference—"Let me say a special word to the senior citizens. In the future Canada will be doing more, not less, for all

of you". He said, "all of you", he didn't say for some, at the expense of others.

He went on to say, "As long as I am Prime Minister of Canada, social benefits, especially those for the elderly, will be improved, not diminished, by our government, which is committed to social justice and fairness for Canadians". He made it very clear in the middle of an election campaign that he was totally committed to the idea of universality, that he would do more rather than less.

There are other ways in which the budget takes away from senior citizens, not specifically, but it certainly affects them. It means that they will have lower net incomes. In this instance the government is going after them again with this clawback provision of the old age pension. It is a major step towards the end of universality because it applies particularly to the kinds of income that the Prime Minister dealt with very specifically when he said that the government would not do exactly what it is doing right now.

The Prime Minister made the same promises with respect to other social programs. He said the same thing with respect to medicare. Dare I ask, Madam Speaker, will that be next? He said the same thing with respect to hospital insurance. Dare I ask, Madam Speaker, will that be next? Where will he stop?

We can quote others. We can quote the Conservative chairman of the finance committee when he admitted, quite candidly, what the government is doing in this legislation. He said, "We have decided to eliminate universality". That is precisely what the government is doing with this legislation in this particular section. He also said, "While the clawback may be unfair and sneaky, it is there." I agree with the person who said that. I do not think there is any question about it.

I think many members of the Conservative party, if you could get them separately and quietly and ask them to speak candidly, would also agree. They would also agree that during the election campaign they went around reassuring people that there would never be any danger of any Tory proposal that would in any way at all affect universality. Yet they are supporting this legislation now.

If that is the way they feel about it, if they really believe that Canada cannot afford universality, that it is not proper for us to make universal programs available, such as the old age pension, the family allowance, why do they not have the intestinal fortitude to come out and say so and simply bring in legislation doing away with these programs? Why not admit it? Why not be honest about