

mother, I try to tell my children that they have to be responsible for the actions they take. The same could be said about the government. The government has to be responsible for the actions it has taken.

If the government made a mistake in drafting the legislation in 1987, it should not be possible to go back to rewrite history, wiping away that mistake. Just as my children are learning the lesson that one cannot erase behaviour, so the government should not have the ability to erase its mistakes. Although this is a relatively obscure bill in the big picture of debates giving ferment across the country, it is an important principle that the rewriting of history should not take place here.

The House of Commons has a lot of power and, when that power is used disproportionately, it becomes an abuse of power. Such an incident is about to take place if the government does not agree to support the amendment of the hon. member for Essex—Windsor. We cannot go back and rewrite history. We cannot do it in our own personal lives, and we should not be doing it in the life of our country.

Government members say this is the government's money, it should be accruing to the government and it is all the taxpayers' money. That is true but, as each of us know, we have to be responsible for our own money. If we misspend it or if we make a mistake with it, we cannot go back and rewrite history. I cannot go to my bank and say: "Oh, excuse me, I did not mean to withdraw that \$200 two years ago. Could you please put it back?" The government should not be able to do that either.

This is an important principle. The government is trying to rewrite history to make it retroactive, and it will have an impact on those caisses populaires in Quebec and across Canada. Those caisses populaires are membership-owned. If \$260,000 to \$400,000 is lost per small caisse populaire, it is a significant amount of money. Where does it come from? It comes out the pockets of those people who invest in those institutions. Members of those institutions should not be responsible for cleaning up the government's mistakes.

Our party is often accused of not being good fiscal managers. It is one of those myths is that social democrats cannot quite manage financially. This is an opportunity for me to say that the hon. member for Essex—Windsor has brought a very good point. He is not

### *Government Orders*

prepared to support this bill, neither are we in this party prepared to support this bill, if the government thinks that it can rewrite history.

The government has made a mistake in the drafting of the bill and it should be responsible for it. We are prepared to support the bill if the government supports the amendment.

**Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops):** Madam Speaker, I, too, am privileged to have an opportunity to make some comments on Bill C-51.

On balance, Bill C-51 is a very good bill. Certainly, its principle has been discussed already and we are now having a chance to discuss it further as a result of the amendment put forward by the hon. member for Essex—Windsor. We believe in the general thrust of the bill.

It gives clearance for the federal government to have the right to take action, in cases of bankrupt firms, to recover deductions made from employees' wages to pay income tax, unemployment insurance, Canada Pension, et cetera. In such action, the federal government will have priority over all other creditors, since the money in question was not an asset of the firm but held in deemed trust on behalf of the workers involved.

• (1630)

Therefore, in a bankruptcy proceeding where the creditors have to divide up the assets in an effort to reclaim their losses, I think it is fair to say that monies that were held by the company involved on behalf of its employees for unemployment insurance or for Canada Pension and the like are not assets of the company and ought to be passed along to the federal government. That is the point of this legislation. For years and years, that has been the approach in dealing with bankrupt firms.

There is something almost sinister in this bill, because the government is saying that not only is it going to make these changes today, which we support, but it is going to reach back into the past and apply them retroactively.

I remember when the members of the government were in opposition. At that time, the Liberal government decided to move on some aspects of the National Energy Program with policies that were somewhat retroactive. The members of the opposition, the Conservative Party in those days, said that this was unreasonable and