

to this clawback. It is widely opposed by seniors groups across Canada.

Social workers regard it as a threat to the universal social programs that Canada has enjoyed as the result of enlightened administrations—and I may say they happen to have been Liberal administrations over the years.

What the minister and the government are now doing is destroying the universal principle in these social programs through the back door. In the 1989 budget papers that describe this clawback tax, it is not even referred to as a tax, it is called transfers to persons, and appears under the rubric “repayment of social transfers”. So, it is not considered a tax increase in the budget papers. It is referred to as a repayment of social transfers. No one in Canada regards this as anything but a new tax, an unfair tax, and one the government should be ashamed to support in the House.

We have been through this debate before. The House has dealt with the issue. Fortunately we have an opportunity today to revisit the issue since the Senate, which I know the New Democratic Party has taken to supporting, is now sending this bill back with modest amendments. I am disappointed they are not more drastic amendments, but the fact is they are modest amendments with which we have to deal.

In speaking in support of the Senate today, I do so, not out of any great sense of pride, but I am glad that at least somebody in this country is taking some steps, as we took and were outvoted, to support the seniors of this country who are having their rights chiselled away by this government and its policies.

In going back to the earlier part of the minister's speech, which as I said was unbelievable, he spoke about the public debt in 1984 when his government took office. He will correct me if I have his figure wrong, but I think he indicated that the public debt when the government took office was \$280 billion. That is not accurate. The minister knows that is inaccurate. That was the figure at March 31, 1985 after six disastrous months of Conservative rule. The minister knows, as well as I do, that what the government did in those six months was spend, spend, spend.

For the first time in office for years since the nine-month Clark government, the Conservative Party de-

clared that the best thing to do was to spend the taxpayers' dollars with what could only be described as gay abandon. It went handing out money right, left and centre, spending like crazy. It ran up the national debt to \$280 billion by the end of the year from \$252 billion in September of that year. My hon. friend from Ottawa South is more knowledgeable in the figures than I am, but I believe that was the figure when the Conservative Party took office.

Mr. Manley: We're off by \$100 billion.

Mr. Milliken: It was \$180 billion, I am sorry. It was \$180 billion and \$150 billion, because it is about \$300 billion now.

• (1640)

The Minister of State for Finance may not have been in the cabinet at the outset of that period, but in any event he is supporting that lavish spending. The government tries to blame the \$38 billion deficit that was run up during that year on the bad, old Liberals. The Liberals were out of office for six months of that year, and it was during the last six months that spending went right out of control. The hon. Minister of State for Finance knows that full well. He knows that his colleague, the Minister of Finance, is fully responsible for that absolute orgy of public spending that was precipitated by the election in 1988.

The Minister of State for Finance laughs, but that is the fact and he knows it.

The motion which he proposed in the House today deals with the Senate amendments. I am concerned that his motion states that one of the reasons this House ought to reject the Senate amendments is that the amendments, “contradict the principles”—and I stress the word principles—“of the bill by generally decreasing the amount of revenues to be raised by the bill”.

Everyone who has studied parliamentary procedure knows that bills do not have principles. They have a single principle, one principle. And Beauchesne's *Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, Sixth Edition at citation 659 reads:

The second reading is the most important stage through which the bill is required to pass; for its whole principle—

Singular “principle”.

—is then at issue and is affirmed or denied by a vote of the House.