

a 50-year-old universal baby bonus system and replaced it with a complex system of benefits which will give some lower-income families with one working parent a few more hundred dollars per year.

But families on social assistance, most of whom are of single mothers, will get the same amount of benefits they now get.

"The only positive news for women in the budget, the increased tax benefit for low income women, is countered by the death of family allowance," said Judy Fudge, spokesperson for the NAC.

The latest of several Tory attacks against women is a plan to scrap an immigration program, which allows domestic workers to apply for landed immigrant status after two years. The status ensures that domestic workers -- who are mostly women from Third World countries -- are not forced to work with temporary visas and therefore more vulnerable to employers' exploitation and abuse.

As for the federal government's constitutional proposal calling for the distribution of power to the provinces and the creation of an economic union, women's groups fear that this could allow both the provincial and federal governments to phase out legislation ensuring sexual or social equality and the right to eliminate minimum wage and rent control laws.

And although it is impossible to compile the number of jobs women lost through the combined effects of the free trade deal and the recession, women's groups said the government has turned a blind eye to assessing how these policies specifically affect women.

"There's no proof that a few officials got together and decided let's get rid of women for the work force, but that doesn't make the government any less responsible for not taking into account changes in the economy and technical restructuring in the work force," said Ritchie.

However, government officials did recently get together and decided to limit retroactive pay equity payments for women working in the public sector. The Canadian Human Rights Commission has vowed to pursue the pay equity complaints, which date back to 1979 and amount to \$1 billion.

Union officials have said that the recession, free trade, and the structural and technical changes in the economy, do affect women differently than they do men.

"Women who are dumped out of the manufacturing industry generally land in pick ghetto clerical work or have to find part-time work," said Alice de Wolfe of the NAC.

So far, the Conservative government's approach to women's issues has been to set up token committees and commissions. For example, the National Commission on Violence against Women, which was struck up last summer, is overshadowed by other commissions such as the \$25-million Keith Spicer Commission, a Tory public relations road show.

"It's really insulting that they gave the Commission so little money and attention for an issue that affects all women," said Julie Bessette for Quebec's Centre sur la Violence Feminine.



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