



Campus Women

No place for women in a Tory country

by Heidi Modro The Link

There's a political hit list in Canada and if you're a woman, your name is on it.

The Conservatives were barely in power in 1984 when they announced their first round of social spending cuts.

They started with senior citizens, worked their way through Native friendship associations and media organizations right through to the current attacks on many of the gains women have made since the end of World War II.

Their first target: senior citizens and their right to have their old-age security pension increases protected from inflation.

Thousands of senior citizens from across the country rallied together, rented buses and drove to Parliament Hill with their placards, wheelchairs and canes to shame Prime Minister Brian Mulroney into not deindexing pensions.

Later that day, TV cameras picked up Mulroney, chin sagging and arms flapping, attempting to explain how going after pensions would help keep the country's then \$25 billion deficit under control.

But the Tories eventually backed down and decided that the elderly weren't, at least for the time being, fair game in their lust for budget-slashing.

Instead, the government turned to health care, education and unemployment insurance. It began the process of unloading the burden of social spending onto the provinces.

Critics say the Conservatives have systematically been rolling back whatever women have achieved in the past 50 years, whether it be through cutbacks, high interest rates, economic policies or their unsuccessful attempt at recriminalizing abortion.

And women are increasingly forced to pick up where the government has left off by fulfilling their traditional roles of caretakers of the aged, sick, and young.

"I don't know if they (the Conservatives) are doing unconsciously or consciously," said Alice de Wolfe, executive coordinator for the National Action Committee on The Status of Women (NAC).

"But whether it's conscious or not, their plan is to have women go back to the home and that's explicitly anti-women."

But Federal Health Minister Benoit Bouchard was definitely conscious of what he was doing last week when he said that he had "the privilege ... to be the killer" of the federal government's multibillion dollar, eight-year old electoral promise to create a national daycare program.

Bouchard explained the government's decision by pitting two issues against each other: Child abuse versus a national daycare programme. Bouchard said that a series of obscure government polls and studies indicated that Canadians would rather help abused kids than other kids needing daycare.

"I think it was pretty offensive of them to throw around numbers and to compare which of the two issues are the most important," said Daniell Hebert, spokeswoman for the Confederation des Syndicats Nationaux (CSN) Status of Women's Committee.

"It (the daycare plan) was an electoral promise that they had actually done quite a lot of work on and that had already gotten to the planning and policy stage. "I think this decision is going to backfire on them," said Laurell Ritchie, a spokesperson for the Conference of Canadian Unions.

"They're not going to con anyone with their statistics. Women need universal daycare and they're going to see through the government's cheap and dirty political trick."

That same week, the federal government also scrapped