

My horror grew when in the months that followed I heard more and similar stories of abuse, poverty, neglect and despair of women, young and old, of every age and race.

Taken separately these stories seem unrelated, distanced by circumstance. But woven together they form a cloth of shame the federal government must wear.

Imagine a 12-year old boy in Toronto who suddenly became troubled and aggressive. His parents, who both work outside the home, sought counselling from a psychologist. The problem they found was that the boy was stretched out of shape with grown-up responsibilities because the family could not afford or find proper child care. The boy spent four hours a day caring for his younger brother and sister. His boyhood was fast fading as a curtain of burden was drawn around him.

He did not have time to play with his friends. Private time was beyond his reach. Even his parents, exhausted from their jobs, bills and commuting were too tired to realize his needs. This boy has become the face of the government's oft-promised national child care program that a few hours before the budget was introduced, the Minister of National Health and Welfare had the courage to boast he was not introducing. It was really a sad day for Canada.

Let me quote from the opening paragraph of the *Winnipeg Free Press* editorial of March 1 entitled "Retreat from day care":

It is tragic for parents of young children and young people who hope to raise families that polls say Canadians no longer view a national day-care program as a priority. Health Minister Benoit Bouchard claims he has polls which tell him as much.

It continues:

To use that excuse to abandon government promises advanced to woo voters in 1984 and in 1988, however, is cynical and harmfully shortsighted.

Let me quote from the column of Mr. Leonard Shifrin in the *Free Press* of March 13, 1992. He said:

Cutting the surtax rate to give \$450 benefits to \$100,000 earners and \$40 benefits to \$25,000 earners will cost the treasury \$1.2 billion next year—three times the price of the child care plan.

A government that can afford such largess for the rich doesn't have to choose between increasing day care spaces and fighting child abuse.

In Winnipeg a single mother on welfare went on trial for the death of her young son. She was acquitted. The judge apologized for her suffering. The boy, one of two children, had died when he climbed on to the stove when his mother left to do laundry. Police found an apartment

that was clean and tidy, with play things but with very little furniture. The woman's background showed she had once been caught stealing diaper ointment and that she had pawned her furniture to buy food for her babies. This is a sad story indeed.

How many of us would wish to grow old? Do you stand before the mirror and ask the lines on your face to deepen and the seasons to pass more quickly? Yet there is a legion of people in Canada who anxiously await old age so they might be able to climb out from under the weight of their poverty. These people are mainly women in their late 50s and 60s. They are often without job skills or are at the mercy of the marketplace that hungers for youth. Usually they are alone, their husbands dead and their children unwilling or unable to help. They have lived through wartime. They have contributed greatly to the prosperity of Canada, yet they have no share of it. Most do not qualify for Canada Pension Plan benefits. Some are eligible for spouse's allowance which is not a great deal of money, but it means a great deal to those women who have nothing. It helps them to preserve their dignity in the face of abject poverty.

For most people age 65 means retirement. They can pick up those books they always meant to read, start new hobbies, golf, visit with grandchildren and travel. These times are the golden years. To the women who wait to grow old, age 65 means an old age pension.

Last week members of a federal seniors organization travelled to Ottawa to meet with members of the Liberal caucus and relate their fears. One of the women told how difficult it was for seniors to pay for the upkeep of their homes. Previously they were able to apply for home maintenance grants from CMHC, but the granting program was cancelled. Once seniors cannot pay for the upkeep of their homes they are usually forced to sell them. Then where do they go? Where will they go when the government pulls back from commitments to social housing which is often the only alternative left to many, many seniors?

In conclusion, let me say that the pay equity program is another problem. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees equality today but not tomorrow. If the government was to respond, it would respond with vigour. Women in this country need the government's help, yet with this budget they got less than zero. The child benefits package is a fraud. Child care has been killed. The Court Challenges Program was cancelled. The spouse's allowance has an axe hanging over it and pay equity is being ignored.