

Listening to these fine promises, made with an almost New Democratic quiver in the voice, people might have believed for a moment that the new government would perhaps be more progressive than conservative. They had still not forgotten Brian Mulroney's great pledge in the 1984 election campaign:

"Our social programs are a sacred trust, not to be tampered with".

True Conservatives must have shuddered on hearing their leader express such faith in our social programs, the work of Liberal governments. But they reassured themselves by saying that once in power, Brian Mulroney's government would quickly set aside this ill-considered little sentence, the result of his tendency to exaggerate. Nevertheless, eight years later, like a nagging feeling of remorse, it has come back to haunt the Prime Minister every time another regressive measure takes away another piece of the "sacred trust". For example, let us recall the changes to unemployment insurance, the end to assistance for cooperative housing, the reduction in aid for social housing, and so many measures that seemed intended to further impoverish the most disadvantaged Canadian families.

Not only has the government abolished many existing social programs but it went back on the only promise that would have given a little comfort to poor families: the child-care program, which for a long time has received less attention than constitutional trivia.

Oh, how I regret not having the late Senator Croll's eloquence and passion in defending the poor and especially poor children. Were he with us today, he would have given us a display of his righteous anger which, one never knows, might perhaps have shaken the tranquil cynicism of the senators opposite whose only mission on earth, it seems, is to pass as soon as possible any bill submitted by their government, regardless of its social consequences.

Once again, for purely electoral reasons, the government decided that C-80 had to be rushed through, so that it could issue cheques starting on January 1. As if by chance, that is the same date as was arbitrarily set for implementing the GST.

In the House of Commons, they started discussing this important bill on June 1. After two days of debate yes, two days of debate!—the government used closure, a measure which parliamentarians with some respect for democracy use only in extreme situations. As has become its habit, this government held public hearings which were a mockery, since it imposed deadlines that were too short to enable witnesses to prepare their submissions and to alert the public.

In fact, most witnesses protested strongly against this show of force which ridicules the democratic process, or what is left of it, in the House of Commons!

Once again, many people who did not get the opportunity to be heard, or many witnesses who did not have the time to prepare their submission, rely on the Senate to correct this injustice. We shall see if the very docile government senators will

display a greater sense of democracy than their colleagues in the other place.

In many respects, Bill C-80 is typical of this government. For one thing, this legislation is introduced as a program to improve child benefits. We are told that is simply a matter of combining all the existing benefits into one. In other words, it is just a measure to make life easier for the public, an argument which is not without appeal in this period of increasing bureaucracy.

The other day, by chance I heard the minister Benoît Bouchard explain on television in his reassuring, deep voice that this legislation was just to streamline and simplify. He seemed to be saying: "Come on children, relax! There is nothing to it!"

Hon. Philippe D. Gigantès: You are going to starve to death tomorrow, in order to improve the system.

Senator Hébert: There! But when the government tells us about "streamlining" and "simplifying", there is reason to be concerned. There is always something suspicious. You only need to search a little to find the real intentions of a government which seems to have but one priority: To reduce, at the expense of the poor, a deficit which, as everyone knows, has simply doubled since it took power.

At first glance, Bill C-80 seems quite harmless and quite reasonable. According to its proponents, it would also have the advantage of combining family allowance, the refundable child tax credit and the non-refundable tax credit in a single monthly allowance.

The government forgot to mention that the real purpose of Bill C-80 is to end the universality of family allowance, despite Brian Mulroney's famous promise that he would never tamper with this "sacred trust", as he said in 1984, in referring to our social programs.

The government seems to be trying to make up for this unpardonable betrayal by saying this is a progressive measure that will direct funds to those who need it the most. It does no such thing. The Minister of Finance maintains that Bill C-80 will raise federal child benefits by \$400 million per year or \$2.1 billion over five years. The minister seems to forget that his government took more than \$3.5 million out of the child benefits system between 1986 and 1991. In other words, families in need will not receive a penny more.

Since 1984, the Conservatives' initiatives have never stopped undermining the security of our families and the foundation on which Liberal governments had built Canada.

Since the twenties, Liberal advances in social legislation continued practically without interruption until this government came to power. Since then, these progressive measures have been dying a slow death.

With Bill C-80, the Conservative government continues to dismantle Canada's universal social security programs. A short overview of our social security legislation will make this clear.