

*Government Orders*

The debate that we will engage in for the next day or two is really the first step in inviting Canadians to fully participate. After all, what we are debating are decisions that affect themselves, their families, their children, their training, their jobs, their hopes and their opportunities.

It is not a time to impose top-down decisions, to rush to the barricades with quick answers, but to really say let us give people a chance to become involved in a real way and to express their concerns and aspirations. That is why Parliament is so important. That is why the parliamentary committee will undertake this very monumental task. I extend my appreciation to the members of that committee for the work that they will undertake over the next several months in crossing this country and inviting Canadians to become part of the democratic process.

I hope what we can do today is start that dialogue with Canadians by reflecting for a moment or two on those moments that each of us finds as public servants where certain things happen to us, where we come across an experience, a certain happening, an event that defines for us what the issues are all about, that really begins to explain to us what is happening in our country.

I would like to begin this morning by giving members a brief account of my own sort of sense of epiphany of that happening on an early morning during the last campaign when I was knocking on doors on a very modest street in the Fort Rouge area of my district. When I came down the street I saw a woman leave a house with her briefcase and walk out. As I went up to the door I was greeted by a young man in his early twenties. Behind him was his wife and a young child maybe seven or eight months old.

Before I got to the normal introduction of who I am he said: "You don't have to say anything, Mr. Axworthy, I know why you are here. That woman who just left is my social worker. She comes to my house every two weeks to check up and make sure I am living up to all the rules so I will get my next cheque". He said: "I have been unemployed for 18 months and it is driving me crazy. I have a young family. I want to give them some hope and I need work to do that. I am going to vote for you this time because I am putting my hope in you, Mr. Chrétien and the party to make a difference for me. I know there are no guarantees. I know there are no easy solutions, but I am giving you a chance to show what you can do".

• (1045)

Today we are launching what we can do to begin to restore that sense of hope for hundreds of thousands of Canadians. We can make a difference. We can break away from the tired, old conventional wisdoms. We can begin to look at programs that

have been in place for 30 or 40 years which served a valuable purpose but no longer work as well.

We can reach out and talk to those three million Canadians who presently exist on some form of assistance, be it unemployment insurance, social assistance, or some other benefit. They are the ones who really want the change. Forget all the academics with their foundation grants seen on television who have the best answers as to how the system works. Talk to the people who are there now. Ask them if they want change and you will get 100 per cent approval saying: "Let's make a change. It is essential. Let's do something for ourselves".

That young man in my riding did not want a cheque. He wanted a job. He wanted a chance to put his talents to work as an individual. If we write those individuals 100 times or 1,000 times in each community across this country it adds up to a much stronger nation and then we can say to the world: "We have the best trained workforce in the world". We will attract the needed investment, create the required new products, and will develop the innovation we have if we put our trust and faith in investing in the people of this country. That is what this reform and these proposals are all about: trusting and investing in people and giving them a chance.

I hope we will use the debate in the next day or two to draw upon those experiences of small businesses that want to hire people but because of a whole series of rules cannot get workers when they need them. We have a social assistance system that tells a disabled Canadian: "You declare yourself unemployable in order to get a benefit". We are wasting the incredible pool of talent of four million Canadians who want to work if they are given the chance.

Over the next day or two let us talk about the children in this country. Over a million of them live in poverty because there is not proper child care, because there are not proper work opportunities for their parents, because there is no child support system to make sure the custodial parent does not have to raise them by themselves.

Let us talk about those experiences we see every day in our constituencies. Let us break through the fog, the mist and the smokescreens that have been created by those who have a vested interest in the way things are. Let us talk to people who want to change things to make things better and improve our social security system.

I rise today in that spirit of reform, of change, of looking for ideas and inviting Canadians to participate. I call on my colleagues in the House to join in a crusade to attempt to make a difference. Let us give Canadians the chance to define once again who they are and what they can be in this country of the 1990s and into the next century.