

I. ACCOUNTABILITY: HISTORY OF AN IMPASSE

At the present time, our hearings on the economic integration of disabled persons have convinced us that the situation is reaching an impasse. We have heard government officials, along with their corporate counterparts, point with pride to a record of achievement in meeting the needs of disabled persons. Above all, they present plans, plans and more plans. But we have also heard the voices of persons with disabilities seethe with the frustration of having to repeat well-known and well-worn arguments for actions that they feel had been promised ten years ago. What has created these two different and opposite realities?

If we look at the interactions between public expectations, parliamentary committees and government activities during the past decade, we feel that a large part of the explanation lies in the sequence of events since *Obstacles* was tabled in Parliament. The Special Committee on the Disabled and Handicapped which prepared that report in 1981 undertook the only comprehensive *tour d'horizon* on issues which related to disability which has ever been prepared in this country. The study received considerable fanfare as Canada's contribution to the International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981 and as a gateway to the Decade of Disabled Persons which runs from 1983 to 1992.

Expectations of the anticipated achievements of the Decade were enormous. The Committee's investigation met with an overwhelming response. Canadians submitted over 600 briefs, the majority of them unsolicited, and the Committee heard over 500 witnesses in centres across the country. Representatives and individuals from every aspect of Canadian society voiced their views: ministers and officials from federal, provincial and municipal governments; social service organizations of all types and organizations of persons with disabilities.

In critical ways, achievements of the 1980s lived up to anticipation. Pre-eminent among the advances for persons with disabilities was constitutional recognition. The inclusion of disabled persons in Sections 15 (1) and (2) of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, remains an outstanding achievement of Canadian governments — both federal and provincial. Among all the nations of the world, Canada stands alone in including in our Constitution a clause according "equal protection and equal benefit of the law...without discrimination based on...mental or physical disability." Not only are these equality rights protected in the Constitution but since 1985, disabled persons have been provided with funds from a federally-funded Court Challenges Program to clarify these rights.

Another achievement, National Access Awareness Week, promotes at the grassroots level the partnership of the public, corporate and voluntary sectors along with national associations of and for people with disabilities. During this week, countless Canadians volunteer their time, energy and effort to provide all their fellow citizens with the opportunity to examine their communities and to become involved in developing strategies