

While the comments of witnesses about most current programs focussed on results, their concerns about employment programs funded under the *Vocational Rehabilitation for Disabled Persons Act* (VRDP) related to underlying assumptions. It was argued that the thrust of these programs is too often segregational rather than integrative. Sheltered workshops supported by VRDP funding, for example, were portrayed as keeping people with disabilities outside the conventional workforce, unprotected by labour standards and without access to work-related benefits such as workers' compensation, unemployment insurance, or the Canada/Quebec pension plan.

We were impressed by the level of sincere goodwill, and many of the plans for enhanced action, described for us by corporate and governmental witnesses. We share, however, the sense of frustration repeatedly expressed to us by people with disabilities. Given the length of time disabled persons have been waiting for commitments to be fulfilled, sincerity and goodwill are no longer enough. Nor are governmental initiatives, unless they produce results.

### **C. Untangling the Web**

Poverty and employment issues lie at the centre of a web of interconnected causes and effects. While we can identify the central position of these two problems, we also know that we cannot develop effective solutions without taking account of the context in which poverty and unemployment persist. Our studies, therefore, will both explore these two problems and identify issues and areas of governmental activity with important linkages to them. Our recent work has already identified a number of such areas.

#### **1. Disincentives to Work**

Our witnesses have advised us that various employment, social benefit, and training programs contain disincentives for persons with disabilities to seek jobs, and are thus major contributors to both unemployment and poverty. Public and private insurance plans discourage persons who become disabled from returning to full or part-time employment by disqualifying them from future benefits. Disability pensions providing assistance for medical expenses, technical aids and attendant care may, in effect, "trap" people with disabilities in unemployment, given that available employment and benefits packages can result in a loss of disposable income to those becoming employed.

It was argued, as well, that assistive devices required for employment are not items of discretionary spending, and that the current tax system discourages people with disabilities from entering the workforce by failing to provide for the full deductibility of employment-related expenses, and discourages the employment of persons with disabilities by failing to permit employers to deduct the full costs of accommodating their needs.