

development and take part in the development of their community. It is imperative that they have their say in the decision-making process which involves them and has an impact on them. Those last three objectives are priorities for me and they will be the focus of my efforts in the coming months.

● (1610)

[English]

Youth in Canada today are really no different from their predecessors, even though living conditions have changed. Young people have always demonstrated their creative and innovative potential and have always played an essential role in the constant adjustments which our societies must make in order to adapt to new realities. In this way, they represent an active and positive force. Their unstinting contribution to society's institutions has two important benefits. On the one hand, it enriches the institutions and pushes them toward renewal; on the other hand, it represents one of the most fundamental investments in their future.

Youth's achievements are often more easily recognized in the highly visible areas of the arts, culture, sports and politics. Yet in the past they have contributed directly to our economic institutions, particularly in areas which have become central today, such as advertising, communications and high technology.

Young people represent a significant portion of our society. Almost one person in five is between the ages of 15 and 24. They generally enjoy good health and a physical condition that compares favourably with that of youth in a number of developed countries. They are more educated than they were in the past and benefit from the positive aspects of our age of communications. However, young people are affected by the insecurities, difficulties and restrictions facing our society as a whole. At a time when they are making plans for their future and the search for personal autonomy is a constant concern, all young people are extremely sensitive to the precariousness of world peace, the vagaries of the current economic situation and the significant shift in social values and behaviour.

Young people today are under an unprecedented amount of stress. For some, it becomes a source of innovation, exceptional achievement and excellence. For others, it is a source of serious problems that lead to isolation, use of drugs and alcohol, delinquency and even suicide.

A large minority of young people do not have equal opportunities to earn an income, nor equal access to jobs and training. Poverty is widespread among young people. As well, unemployment and underemployment among youth are particularly serious as they affect young people's confidence in themselves and their abilities.

Adults and especially our major political, social and economic institutions can do much for young people who are in difficulty. However, I believe that young people can do a great deal for themselves if they are given the means to gain a better self-understanding, to help each other and to use their know-how and creativity to improve their circumstances.

*The Address—Mrs. Champagne*

Young people are not a homogeneous group. They are not as readily identifiable with specific ideological and political trends as they were in the past. They are students, workers, entrepreneurs and unemployed people. They live in urban centres and remote areas. They are men, women, natives, disabled and people of different ethnic origins. However, a single important characteristic unites them. Having lived in a state of dependence on their families and social institutions, they are beginning, and in many cases completing, their transition to personal autonomy. At age 15, 98 per cent of young people live with their parents, while the proportion is only 65 per cent at age 20 and 23 per cent at age 24. The transition to personal autonomy is crucial for young people and for society because it shapes the way in which youth participate in society, now and in the future.

Youth form a unique pool of human resources in a society and this alone is reason to pay special attention to their development and to potential obstacles to it.

[Translation]

I was saying, Mr. Speaker, my philosophy is based on optimistic realism. Any society must be particularly attentive to every new generation of young people. The vigour, the health and the future of any endeavour, whether industrial or cultural, can be judged by the quality and the commitment of those who bring new blood to it. The same is true for a society. I invite my colleagues and every Canadian to look at our youth from that point of view.

There are two other principles underlying my actions: one is a sense of equity and the other a search for excellence. All young people do not have the same potential. However, every youth must have all the opportunities to develop his own potential fully whether rich or poor, male or female, native or immigrant, and so on. Moreover, as a social group, young people must not be viewed as a separate class entitled to fewer rights. For instance, it is no more acceptable to pay a young person less than the minimum wage for his or her work than it would be an adult.

On the other hand, young people must yearn for excellence in their field of activity. Youth is by nature idealistic. This idealism must be encouraged, especially when it leads to creativity, challenge and excellence. These are the major principles underlying my action plan, which is threefold.

First, I shall continue to get involved with young people, with the groups representing them and with our social partners for the purpose of listening to their projects and discussing them, whether they be their own or whether they be carried out by governments or the private sector. My involvement will make it possible for me to examine existing means of action, especially in the various federal departments and agencies. I shall see what they entail and check, in cooperation with my Cabinet colleagues, to what extent they can meet the needs of our young people and how their efficiency can be improved. I shall also identify with them present shortcomings and the