

IV. MAKING IT HAPPEN: THE WILL FOR CHANGE

In previous sections of this report, we have surveyed past actions, directions for the future, and the contribution this Committee plans to make. In this concluding section, we consider the immediate issue: how can change be made to happen?

The absence, within the federal government, of an effective and accountable mechanism for change is one important reason why Canada's commitments to people with disabilities remain only partly fulfilled. As well, it is hard to deny convincingly that another reason is provided by the nature and degree of real will underlying these commitments. In surveys of public opinion and through the commitments of successive governments, Canadians have professed concern about the situation of persons with disabilities, and intentions to act. The results achieved to date suggest, however, that it may be time for Canadians to consider their true motives.

Do we really care about people with disabilities? Or are we interested primarily in feeling good about ourselves, and achieving the easy gratification which comes from declarations of good intentions? We suspect that the full answer to this question is not without an element of discomfort. We have been impressed again and again, however, during the course of our hearings and as we interact with Canadians outside our committee rooms, by how many Canadians genuinely want to join forces with disabled people in coming to grips with inequalities. All of our witnesses — ministers, bureaucrats, corporate officials, consumers and their representatives, and independent experts — agree that the present situation of persons with disabilities is unacceptable. *All*, and we think it is important to stress the level of consensus here, are making efforts, subject to the constraints which govern their activities, to bring about changes.

We do not believe that the problem is primarily one of sincerity. Nor, we suspect, do most people with disabilities. It is precisely the coexistence, during the past decade, of apparently genuine sincerity and the absence of significant progress which, in our view, underlies their present sense of frustration. If a major social interest, political leader, or even the public in general were to declare opposition to equality for persons with disabilities, then they would at least have an adversary to confront and, perhaps, a tangible explanation for the absence of change. As it is, however, they have only our constant sincerity.

The problem of will, we have come to believe, is not a product of the absence of sincere intentions but rather, primarily, of the inconsistency of attention. As we have argued in our historical overview in Chapter 2, public and political attention has too often tended to focus on disability issues while commitments are made, and then to move elsewhere before actions fulfilling these commitments are carried out, or results can be assessed. This