

A good example of this arose last week with the presentation by the Minister of National Health and Welfare of his brighter futures budget which was designed to address the concerns and the problems of children at risk.

All those advocates for children and all those social policy groups that face the problems of children and attempt to help children on a daily basis and attempt to address the concerns of poverty pointed out to the minister that a national child care program was the single most important vehicle through which to assist children at risk.

Needless to say, the minister did not pursue that route and went on to engage in what is partly a public relations exercise and what is clearly a band-aid approach, and not a very effective band-aid approach at that, to the concerns of children living at risk.

If we want to look at where this approach takes us, this approach which does not deal with prevention but deals with punishment, at finances or resources available for the building of prisons but not available for community projects, for social services to ensure that crime does not take place, we only have to look south of the border. If we ever needed to be reminded of the problems of a society with a very large gap between rich and poor, with a very large lower class, with a large group, millions of people whose concerns are not addressed, high unemployment and so on, we could look at the examples in Los Angeles of where that neglect leads a society.

In Canada the gap between rich and poor is getting larger, not smaller. Those who are poor are getting poorer and those who are rich are getting richer. Unemployment remains at extremely high and totally unacceptable levels.

It is no wonder that, faced with despair, with lack of opportunity, with no hope, some Canadians turn to crime. It is not enough, as this bill tries to do, to stress that the government does not have the money to deal with crime, that the approach taken is one of ensuring that through a competitiveness approach people will find jobs and will therefore be able to sustain themselves and their families.

It is not a question of whether the resources are there. It is a question of when we are going to spend those resources and when we are going to assist people rather than make life more difficult for them.

Government Orders

The Canadian Police Association, in its brief to the committee, was quite clear on how to deal with criminal activity and how to reduce it. I am sure we would all agree that the police forces across Canada have a great deal of experience and expertise in dealing with the issue and understanding why people commit crimes, in meeting criminals on a daily basis and learning about their problems and their needs.

The Canadian Police Association said the answer to the crime problem is simple. We must eliminate poverty, hunger, prejudice, violence, drug use and mental instability. Additionally, we should provide quality education for all and stable employment for everyone.

Why would the government not listen to the Canadian Police Association? Why would it continue with its approach to keep prisoners in jail longer without any effective rehabilitation programs, without any approach at the provincial level, at the level of providing people with adequate incomes in order to maintain themselves and their families? Why would the government not pursue an approach of providing hope and a future for Canadians?

Criminologists would point out the same approach. One criminologist who appeared before the committee, Irvin Waller of the University of Ottawa, said the exclusive reliance on cops, courts and corrections is not sufficient to stem the tide. Over and over that evidence is being presented. We know that is the case and we know that prevention is what we must do in order to deal with problems with crime.

The Canadian Police Association said we must educate our youth about all drugs and the dangerous results if they abuse these substances. In order to accomplish this goal, someone is going to have to jar federal, provincial and municipal governments into providing funds to deal with this danger. Responsibility is passed from federal to provincial to municipal authorities with no additional funds being granted.

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It is going to take an investment in people. It is going to take an investment in Canadians to ensure that we really and truly address our concerns and our problems about crime in Canada. This bill does not even begin to address crime from a prevention point of view. Surely that is the only approach that will work.