

not have enough food in his belly or a proper place to live? Do we not know who breaks your windows? Do we not know who steals your hub-caps? Do we not know who causes crime?

• (1650)

A young guy, 26 years old, came into my office a couple of years ago. He had been in jail since he was 16. He sat across from me and he said: "I can't handle it outside, Mike. I got to go back into the slammer. That is where I have grown up. At least there, I know what it is like in a prison. I can't live on the outside." I spent some time with Randy and said: "Well, Randy, here is a support group. Here is some social assistance. Here is how you get a telephone and how you use a telephone and how to budget your weekly allowance."

He came back a week later and he said: "I can't do it. I just can't cope with this." So, I called my local cops and asked: "What can we do for this guy?" They said: "Mike, we can't do anything for him. He has not broken any laws." But Randy knew the system in Canada. He knew that if he went out the next day and robbed the Bank of Montreal, we would not be worried about money. We would know exactly what to do with Randy. And that is exactly what Randy did. He went out the next day and held a young woman hostage in a bank.

We knew right away how to handle this. The Durham Regional Police Force arrived with their 12-gauge shotguns on the dashboard. The legal system clicked into place, and there was no problem with that. If we had tried the day before to get a little counselling for Randy, there was not enough time, there was not enough budget, and no one cared enough. But the moment he knew how to hold up a bank, we knew how to deal with that situation. That is the great tragedy in this country.

One of the things that makes me very angry about Canadians is that they do not know their country very well. There are many people to whom I have talked who have said: "Well, there is no problem with child poverty in Canada. I mean, maybe there is the odd, isolated incident here and there." We should take all those people down to an inner-city school for an afternoon and put them into a roomful of 30 little kids, five and six years old, who have not been fed properly that day. We

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should just leave them there for an afternoon and see how they cope with children who are hungry. They ought to try that for a while. It is not nearly as comfortable nor as easy as anybody would like it to be but it is there and it is real.

Maybe it would be a great asset to the House this afternoon if there was a single mother in here who was able to say: "I have to make some decisions about whether I go to work or not. Because, if I go to work this week, then I have to withdraw all the benefits that I get from social assistance, all the little medical cards and all of the subsidized housing. I am disqualified for one group of benefits the moment I earn a certain amount of money." How would any one of us like to make that decision? Do you want a little dignity and go to work, or do you want to rob your children of some benefits?

Well, many of our provinces are trying to work their way through some great change in the social assistance system which seems to be hide-bound into little rules and regulations and has absolutely no common sense to it. That is a challenge because there are lots of people who are extremely well paid and extremely intelligent who are there to defend the system as it is. They do not want any change because it alters their life-styles. It makes them change, instead of their clientele.

One of the good things, to be positive if I can for a moment, is that at least this House on a couple of occasions has taken part of an afternoon to talk about poverty, but it has not done a heck of a lot in the interim. I want to make some arguments that we do know how to alleviate some of these problems.

We do know, for example, that we will make the choice, as people who are participants in governments, as to whether or not we want just to hand people money—and there is nothing wrong with that—or whether we want to do something substantive such as raising the minimum wage and, in the long run, how we spend our tax money. That is really what the argument is. The argument is not about whether or not the Government of Canada gets involved in the long run in the financial impact of poverty. It does. Whether it wants to or not, sooner or later, it will pay the price. It simply is a question of when we pay the price.