

Supply

First and foremost, there has to be a change in attitude. Let me just cite some examples. I will not give names, but I will give positions here.

The Social Services Minister in the Province of Saskatchewan, when asked about poverty in that province, said—and I do not exaggerate—that poverty among children in Saskatchewan does not exist. Saskatchewan has the second highest level, in excess of 25 per cent, of child poverty in Canada.

A premier in one of the western provinces said if poor kids go to school hungry, it is because their parents do not love them. That is outrageous. It shows a terrible insensitivity. Every member in this House has poor families in his or her constituency. Every member in this House knows them. Every member knows that poor parents care for their kids just as much as any other parents. It is terribly offensive to suggest that we have poor kids because their parents do not care for them.

In another province a cabinet minister said kids go to school hungry in her province because their parents spend their money on booze and cigarettes.

There is a psychological explanation for this. We have learned during the course of the 20th century about the psychological mechanism of denial. We all do it in varying degrees in our personal lives. People in political life people do it too. That is to say, when there is a reality out there that you do not want to recognize, you do not recognize it. You pretend it does not exist, and at a certain profound level you believe it does not exist. This reaction, the psychological mechanism of denial, is going on at too many levels in our country.

If I may be personal again on this subject, when I discovered this in the middle of June and woke up to the reality myself from that newscast, I began to speak, and for five months, I spoke in every province of Canada on this subject. Every speech I have made since the middle of June, with the exception of two speeches which were exclusively devoted to the Constitution, I talked about child poverty. There is, to my knowledge, one and only one news report about that issue that has been made on a speech that I gave in five months of making speeches from coast to coast in Canada.

It would be interesting to understand why the news media in our country has ignored the question. Is there a

kind of denial mechanism that is going on there as well? Is it because it is not conflict laden, not entangled in personality battles of some kind, or regional battles? Whatever the reason—I repeat, five months of speeches with the exception of two in every part of Canada—I have said almost word for word what I have said today, and the nation has little knowledge of it. There is a problem. The reality is there. The reality is abominable, and the reality is correctible. But many Canadians—I believe most Canadians—do not know about it.

• (1030)

A friend of mine many years ago, Michael Harrington, who is now dead, wrote a remarkable book on poverty in the United States, a book called *The Other America*. That was almost three decades ago.

As a result of that book and because it came to the attention of a president, a young man named John Kennedy, it did get attention. It was taken up in the centres of power, which is normally what happens in a society. I say to the minister, those who have power are in a position to do something. Something was done. There was going to be something done in that particular instance. President Kennedy was planning a 1964 campaign based on the issue of poverty in America. As the whole world knows, he was shot and it was not done.

It was written about the United States, and it happened to take off for reasons I know not exactly, but I know it became a political issue because a president took it up. I am convinced that this will become an issue in this country of ours when premiers from coast to coast and when the Prime Minister of Canada say, "We have to put an end to child poverty".

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: I quoted some of the statements by ministers and governments who blame poverty of children on their parents. Many Canadians will believe that, and average Canadians will believe it as well. But I want to say that that is not the case. The study done recently for the city of Regina looking into hunger produced, as I understand it, a virtually unanimous report on the following points when it came to the causes of the poverty.