

The Budget—Mr. Peters

Mr. Peters: Maybe it went down to nine.

An hon. Member: When you were not here.

Mr. Peters: I have been here or very close by. The interest in the budget is very limited. The budget debate is one of the classic debates in this House, but it would seem to me that this budget debate will not bring forth very much interest because the budget itself did not contain much of interest.

I think part of the difficulty stems from the fact that we have had the white paper and many Canadians are concerned about it. I presume that there are more people concerned about it than there are people who are in favour of the propositions contained in it. Many people had thought the government would have increased personal exemption in respect of income tax. Some people believed this was already in effect. It is surprising how many people make such an assumption from what they read in the newspapers. Most people who make inquiries about the white paper do not make them really on the basis of the white paper proposals but rather on the basis of an impression they have. I would be interested in knowing the motivation of many people who have sent me clippings. I should be interested in knowing whether or not they have really read the proposals contained in the white paper. I do not know whether they are really concerned about the proposals of the white paper or are concerned about what is being said in the newspapers concerning what is contained in the white paper.

This raises another problem. One of my colleagues told me today that two persons who have been members of the press gallery for some time have been appointed executive assistants to the government. The executive assistants whom I have known over the years were good newspapermen. I congratulate the ministers who appointed them. When we realize that the best people are hired for these positions and then look at the press gallery, we sometimes wonder what the public receives in the way of information. While many people have read the white paper, most people depend on what the newspapers say about it. So, it is really the people in the press gallery who are interpreting the white paper and the people are reacting to this interpretation rather than to the facts. There are another 10 persons or so whom the government could hire as executive assistants from among the members of the press gallery and that would be the end of that. If anyone

[Mr. Peters.]

doubts this, I suggest that they take a look at some of the people who have been hired by the government departments.

I always thought that a newspaperman received a fairly good salary. Perhaps he receives more as an executive assistant. It is certainly a smoother job with no deadlines, and perhaps one can become an expert in this field more easily than in the newspaper field. This raises in my mind the question of how the people are to really know what is happening in Parliament. As an example, I might refer to the question period. The questions presented by members of the press to Members of Parliament are pretty poor questions. The executive secretaries to the ministers already have the answer before the question is asked because of their previous experience. I think this is a reflection on all of us and perhaps we should find another way to obtain questions.

The fact that there was nothing in the budget, and the fact that very little has been said in the newspapers and other media about the budget, does not mean the budget will have no effect on the public. In my opinion it will have a detrimental effect. There is no relief for Canada's poor. A number of people have pointed this out. We have decided in Canada that the poor should become poorer and the people on higher incomes should become more affluent.

I should like to see the government undertake a study to determine how much tax the old age pensioner pays. Anyone who maintains a house will know there are considerable hidden taxes which he must pay. He must buy paint or material to repair a step or a floor, and so on, and he pays a tax on this. Every time he buys something he pays a hidden tax. It is surprising to me that the tax the old age pensioner pays is the same as the tax paid by the very affluent person. Of course, one can only drink and smoke so much and one can only buy so much for his daily needs, and the amount is almost identical in the case of those who have and those who have not. The poor person percentage-wise pays a very much higher tax than the more affluent person in the middle class. What protection is there for those in this class? It is interesting that the old age pensioner and those on fixed incomes pay the same tax on clothing as anyone else pays. Perhaps it is not possible to arrange things otherwise.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) is taking a free ride for a two-year period. He