

The Budget—Mr. Stanfield

present circumstances he and his colleagues have no right to decide on their own, regardless of the views of the provinces, that this program should have top priority in this country today.

Mr. Benson: The government decides.

Mr. Stanfield: I suggest this is wrong, without consultation with the present parliament in this context. The minister is trying to hide behind parliament. I suggest he has a responsibility in respect of the leadership in this parliament. This decision was taken without consultation and without regard to priority. This is bound further to embitter federal-provincial relations. This is bound to compel the provinces to spend money in this field and less money elsewhere, for example on education.

The provinces have made their positions clear, and the province of Ontario has done so at some length. We know of the fiscal difficulties that face the provinces. The federal government suggests the provinces will get no more money and instead of discussing ways and means with the provinces of solving the problems by co-operation, the minister says he is going to tax more for the federal government programs, but the provinces will get nothing from this additional taxation and will have to tax more, themselves, to raise equal amounts of money to support the program the federal government wants to proceed with now.

In the present context it is wrong for this government to make this unilateral decision, which will involve the provinces in large new expenditures, regardless of the merits of the program. It is doubly wrong to ask the provinces to match federal expenditures in this regard. What are the priorities? The Minister of Finance obviously thinks this should have top priority. I happen to be one who agrees with the Economic Council of Canada, that education is of top priority in this country. Education together with growth related programs and expenditures should have top priority.

I am not trying to impose my views on the country, as I am not in a position to do so. If I were I would be prepared to join in consultation with the provinces in an attempt to work out a system of priorities important to the future growth of this country. This is essential not only for national growth but for individual Canadians. If the policies and attitudes of the present Minister of Finance and his colleagues result in young men and

women in Canada being denied an educational opportunity at the appropriate age, these individuals may never have another equal opportunity. This matter is important nationally, as well as to the individual.

Educational and social policies are important for other than economic reasons. Many aspects are involved in this matter. There is a trend toward automation and more leisure, and the importance of education relates to the quality of life. This is obviously of importance to the individual and the country as a whole, and is one reason, among many, why this and other programs are essential to the national development of the country. This matter must be included in any consideration of priorities.

The minister's budget indicates he is proceeding on the basis of his own judgment and opinion. Let the others get along as best they can. It is important that we have some consensus in this country about national priorities in respect of programs administered federally and provincially. Let me suggest to the minister that I am pleased someone suggested at the conference that the tax structure committee be used as the basis for this kind of consideration. This should have been done long ago, because that committee lends itself to this kind of study. Unfortunately the tax structure committee was ignored for a long time. It is being used now, but only after the government of Canada has made a decision to move unilaterally. This committee will now have to do whatever can be done on the basis of the decision taken by the Minister of Finance, without consultation. What will be the results? I suggest there will be many. Bitterness in respect of federal-provincial relations will develop, perhaps beyond precedent and beyond anything we have known. The minister is running the risk of creating chaos in tax collections methods, which federal and provincial governments have laboriously worked out over the years in order to avoid such chaos. He seems quite prepared to run the risk of compelling some provinces to run their own shows and challenge the minister. It is pretty clear that by his methods he is increasing the disparity in governmental services throughout the country; I will come to that in a moment. His policies are neglecting the basic services essential to growth, as emphasized by the Economic Council of Canada.

Some provinces may be able to get along on their own under this kind of régime, over which the Minister of Finance is presiding.