

Inquiries of the Ministry

but in his absence perhaps one of the parliamentary secretaries could answer it. Has the Canadian government received an invitation from trade and industry minister Takeo Miki of Japan to become a founding member of an "Asia-Pacific sphere" and to accept greater responsibility in that area?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I doubt whether this is a question of immediate urgency. I do not think the question is in order at this time.

FINANCE**INQUIRIES AS TO PROPOSED REDUCTION
IN GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES**

On the orders of the day:

Hon. George Hees (Northumberland): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a question to the Prime Minister. In view of the opinion of the Canadian Economic Council that taxes will have to be raised if the present rate of government expenditures continues, and the contribution these expenditures are making to inflation, is it the intention of the government to reduce its expenditures and bring them more in line with its income?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I would think this question is much too large in scope and cannot be asked at this time.

Hon. E. D. Fulton (Kamloops): Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a related question to the Minister of Finance. Could the minister tell the house when we may expect to be provided with a list, or when he may be in a position to make a statement outlining the various items of the estimates which have been reduced in accordance with the survey to which the minister recently referred?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, in any statements I have made either in this house or outside I have been referring to the study that is under way of the spending estimates for 1968-69. Those will be submitted to the house for study as soon as they have been approved and presented, in the usual manner. Our endeavour for this year is to stay within the financial program that I outlined in our budget.

Mr. Fulton: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I take it from the minister's answer that there is no attempt to reduce the spending as outlined in the estimates for this year?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I suggest to the hon. member that the supplementary question is argumentative.

[Mr. Johnston.]

Mr. Fulton: I assure you, sir, that I am just seeking information. I will try to phrase my question in another way. I would like to be certain about this in order that there may be no misunderstanding. May we take it from the minister's statement that the efforts to reduce expenditures do not apply to this year's current estimates?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. gentleman that to keep our expenditures within our program as outlined to this house will require considerable economies. But our main effort is to see that in the coming fiscal year we are working toward a closer balance between expenditures and revenues, because I think that will be appropriate to the circumstances we will face in that year, and to reduce our borrowings as far as possible so that we do not make excessive demands upon the market.

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question arising out of the minister's answer to my colleague from Kamloops and the statement made last night by the minister. The minister said that the allocation of priorities would be not from the top but through the reduction or dropping of programs. Could the minister indicate to the house whether there will be any dropping of programs in order to keep expenses within the budgetary provisions of this year?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, there are some expenditures the government is not undertaking this year that we had otherwise planned to undertake.

Mr. Lambert: A further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister, in the next few days during the budget debate, indicate to the house which programs and expenditures have been pared?

Mr. Sharp: I expect I shall be participating in the budget debate at the opening. My colleague the Minister of National Revenue will be dealing particularly with the efforts, the very successful efforts, that have been made during his term of office at least to keep expenditures under control and to eliminate those that are now obsolete or unnecessary.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.