

Lawyers could argue over the Standing Orders endlessly. What we are trying to preserve is the opportunity for members to prepare to make the best case they can on a matter that means enough to them that they have put down a motion or a bill with respect to it, and on the other hand to allow the government time to prepare for the necessary argument.

I am amongst those who wish more private members' bills could be referred to committees, but even though that does not happen it does not mean there is not proper consultation regarding the advancement of business. Thus far the House of Commons is the better for that element of interpretation and consultation. I hope, in considering the point made by the hon. member for Vaudreuil, Your Honour will interpret on the side of generosity rather than on restriction.

**Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming):** Mr. Speaker, I have always been interested in private members' hour, and I probably use and abuse it more than any other member. We have been able to use the rules on occasion to do that, but I think the previous speaker is right in his indication of the desire to maintain private members' hour. It serves a number of functions, one of which is to give a member the opportunity to make a case for something that he feels strongly is in the interest of the constituents he represents. In my opinion this has worked very well.

● (2222)

If you go back over the private members' hour during the past 20 years you will find very few pieces of legislation, particularly in the social fields, that have not been pioneered in the private members' hour. I have been surprised at the government recently trying to take control of the operation of the private members' hour.

It was not very long ago, certainly since my time, or the private members' hour, particularly in the section under Public Bills that there were eight or 10, not more than 12 when I came here, and every one who placed one of those bills on the order paper knew exactly why they put them there and they were very interested at the drop of a hat to discuss them. The government, on the other hand, was very often just about as interested to see that they did not get any further than the discussion position, and when they went to the bottom, that was an accomplishment. The same was true with notices of motion, Mr. Speaker, when they were put down, they were put down because they were sincerely believed in, they were interested in putting them down, and it worked on a different basis than it does now.

The old timers, like the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) who has been around for some time, had those bills prepared probably before the election took place. They were all ready and as soon as the election took place, at the earliest possible moment, they were filed. They were all listed on the basis of which one was received at one o'clock, two o'clock or whenever it was received. That is how the decision was made.

### *Private Members' Business*

During my period, Mr. Speaker, and my interest in the private members' hour, we were able to help increase the number of private bills from roughly 10 or 12 to where they are now, 205. As a matter of fact in about two years we raised it from 10 or 12 to over 100, and it is now 205. I venture to guess there are some people that have not decided why they put those bills in in the first place, and secondly, they really did not decide whether they were going to be discussed or not. That is decided now because of the number by a lottery. You may have a bill at the top which you did not want and you may have a bill on the order paper you wanted very badly. For a little while we were allowed to switch them. If you had one on the top, you were allowed to decide which one went to the top. I think it is done more fairly now, if it is drawn, it is at the top.

What is happening is that the government is making the decision that they do not want to talk in these private members' hours on a specified subject. They are laid out very carefully, it is not like government business. On certain days, certain items are called and it must be that item, or by consent you can go on to something else. For a long time, Mr. Speaker, if a member was sick someone in his party speaking on his behalf, and he had to say at the time "with the permission of the hon. member I request of the House Bill so and so stand." I remember one case where it was requested, and because of the difficulties that member had, it was dropped. With one exception, I cannot remember any time when there was not an agreement when someone said—on the request of the member—the bill stood.

Then we got parliamentary secretaries and they really did not have very much to do. They started puttering around in the private members' hour. They did it conscientiously and with good intent. They did it not to stand at the request of the government but to find out whether there was going to be any requests to stand, and what bill was going to be taken. They were able to ascertain that, and they were able then to say that we understand there is an agreement, and we should proceed to bill so and so or motion so and so. However, it was by agreement.

All of a sudden the rules were changed. I sat in on some of the meetings which discussed rule changes. I do not remember agreeing to anything about "upon the request of the government." Maybe that is why it is in brackets. Maybe no one agreed to it.

● (2227)

Hon. members will recall that when we changed the rules, the fight was over Standing Order 75. The Standing Orders were temporary for some time. It worked very well.

If the government is going to control this hour, it will be able to stand the first ten bills because it wants to get to a particular one further on. As I understand it, that request cannot be refused. I agree the government does not request a member to do that if he is ready to proceed with his bill. To date it has not made such a request. However, there is no reason why it cannot make that request if it does not want to