

*Private Members' Hour*

happened as a result of this long session and some of the problems that this has caused.

Hon. members will remember that when the Standing Orders were changed, they were changed on the basis of the fact that we had had a number of long sessions and many of the changes that were brought in were to assist the government to wind up the business of the House on an annual basis, which was not possible under the old rules. Originally, there was no limit under the Standing Orders as to the number of days when private members' and public business could be brought in under private members' hour.

One of the reasons the 40-day limit was put on private members' hours was to allow the government, in the last two or three months of the session, to be freed from private members' hour so that this extra hour could be used for government business. It was not, as I think the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) said, to take any of the privileges away from private members. It worked that way, but that was not the purpose of the change. The purpose was to assist the government. I have been here long enough to know that we never do anything in this parliament to help private members or to help the opposition. But I have never seen the opposition House leader go so far to help the government run its own affairs.

We have always made concessions which have resulted in the cutting down of rights of private members and have been to the advantage of the government. The new rule, under the Standing Order, to put the 40-hour limit on private members' hour was to help the government and it was certainly detrimental to members. It was never anticipated, when the rules were changed, that we would have a five-year session. There is some comment in the press that it may not only be a five-year session but that we may have seen our last election, that we may continue indefinitely until some other justification forces a change in the situation. I do not think that we have gone quite that far, and I doubt whether many hon. members will agree that we have, but if we have a five-year session, as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) has pointed out, it is only a matter of degree. When you waive the rules and you make changes of accommodation for a specific purpose, you should look very carefully at that purpose.

● (1230)

The system under which we operate is not just one word for the opposition and two for the government: it is considerably more than that. What are we really saying? We are saying that if we do like the "fighting opposition", which today appears to be a quiet little pussy cat, and if on the part of the backbenchers we agree to this small concession, it seems to me that we will also have agreed, without any discussion, that this session will continue and that there will be no throne speech.

What is the throne speech for? As I understand it, it gives the government an opportunity to come before parliament and to state its agenda for the months ahead, to indicate to him what direction it is going and to outline what kind of program it will have for the future, usually for a period of less than one year. The throne speech originally started out for sessions which were only a

[Mr. Peters.]

month or two long, but that period of time has grown considerably.

If the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton had been in the House for a considerable period of time, he would know that one of the greatest advantages a private member once had in this House was his opportunity to reply to the Speech from the Throne. In their replies to the Speech from the Throne, hon. members could air their own views and those of their constituents. I remember that when I first came here everyone was able to go on a tour of the riding of the hon. member who was speaking. They learned how nice the people were, how beautiful the scenery was, what type of industry there was, and in a social sense it was a helpful, geographical trip around and hon. member's riding. That was really the only time an hon. member could make a speech which outlined the direction in which he wanted to go. This has changed, but so have conditions. I think it would be very hard to find a time, with the exception of wartime, when a government has made the major changes in its philosophy that this one has in the last six months.

It is interesting to consider the direction in which the government was going in the last throne speech. At that time it was against wage and price controls, and very much against many of the things which have been implemented since. The country has a right to know what the government intends to do.

We will certainly miss my colleague, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. The history of parliament follows him back many years, many generations, and sometimes many centuries. He made a very astute observation a moment ago. The government House leader walked between Mr. Speaker and the member speaking.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Between Mr. Speaker and the mace.

**Mr. Peters:** More than that; he walked between the mace and Mr. Speaker. We have moved so far away from observing the rules of parliament that before very long it will be difficult to run parliament in a way in which we can depend on the rules and regulations. Parliament has in the past always been accustomed to altering the rules by unanimous consent only, but today we are not being asked for unanimous consent. We have a motion before us in which, in effect, the government asks for a very small concession, and in return for that we are to give up the right of having the throne speech. It has been pointed out that there has already been some concession made in this discussion, and I hope that very small concession which has been made will be repeated by the House leader and that he will give us an indication, before this motion is passed, that there is an intention at some point in time of having another session of parliament and another throne speech.

I believe that a throne speech serves a purpose. I believe that the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton, who initiated this concession, will agree that many members of his party would like to raise matters in the House which are not directly related to legislation which will be before parliament. They may be issues which greatly affect their ridings and which they would like to bring to the attention of the nation. The throne speech is one of the few