

Private Members' Hour

tionally acceptable as well as in the public interest, so they can receive second reading and be referred to a committee. Then, during examination by the committee, witnesses can give evidence with respect to particular bills.

Many good bills and excellent ideas are put forward during the course of private members' hour. It is generally the case that these bills are deliberately talked out. Every government does that. We did it when we were sitting over on that side. Nevertheless, the time has come, perhaps, when we should reassess the role of the private member in this House without in any way taking away from the principal responsibility of the government to legislate and manage the business of the House.

I believe that a reassessment, indeed a redefinition of the role of private members' hour on the part of the government, would be very productive and useful to the House. I hope the government House leader, who more and more impresses me with his patience—not necessarily with his wisdom, but with his patience—will give serious consideration to having this question referred to a cabinet committee, to a committee of the Department of Justice or to a committee of the House, to see whether the government can come up with a more useful and productive way of handling private members' business. This would be in the best interests both of the government and of the House.

[Translation]

Mr. Eymard Corbin (Madawaska-Victoria): Mr. Speaker, I shall be brief, but I should like to rectify some of the impressions hon. members may have got this morning from hearing certain remarks. There was talk of the unusual length of this session. Still, my own research reveals that though we are breaking all records in terms of the length of the session or number of days on which the House has sat, in fact as far as sessions are concerned, the second, third, fourth and fifth of the 19th Parliament lasted quite a long time.

The second in fact, that goes back to 1940-42, lasted 441 days, that is, over a year, the third of the same Parliament, in 1942-43, lasted 371 days, the fourth, in 1943-44, 364 days and the fifth, in 1944-45, 371 days. Recently, in 1964-65, the second session of the 26th Parliament lasted 411 days. The first session of the 27th Parliament, in 1966-67, 476 days; and there are the more recent examples that were mentioned earlier in the debate. For instance, in 1968-69, the first session of the 28th Parliament lasted 406 days and the third session of the same Parliament, 497 days.

To my mind, we should not be influenced by the length of sessions, or fear them as such. What counts, is that Parliament should continue to work productively as the case has been in this session. There is still much to be done. I feel the argument is totally false whereby we should have a new session because the session has lasted long enough or there is not enough work left to do.

[English]

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Would the hon. member permit a question?

[Mr. McGrath.]

[Translation]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member allow the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) to ask him a question?

Mr. Corbin: I shall try to answer him, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, is it not correct that the figures that the hon. member has now given regarding certain sessions relate to the total number of calendar days between the day the sessions started and the day they ended? On that basis, this session is well over 500 days.

[Translation]

Mr. Corbin: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right... I did say that it was the length of the session in days. I refer to the column "number of sitting days". I could have said for example, that in the second session of the 26th legislature, in 1964-65, there were 248 sitting days. Perhaps it is not a record but it is not far from being so and this is quite a lot of days.

In 1966-67, in the first session of the 26th legislature, we did sit for 250 days which was the record until this week. In the third session of the 28th legislature, from 1970 to 1972, there were 244 sitting days. So there is no reason for getting nervous or scandalized by the length of the present session.

[English]

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on behalf of my party in opposition to this motion. We think that all it is is a sop to those who previously argued for the need for a new session. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I am not persuaded by the argument that it has been the longest session in history and therefore we should depart from tradition. I have some Conservative elements in my bones, but certainly not to that extent.

Therefore, one has to look at the reasons for having sessions roughly of the order of 12 months; that is the crucial point. Why is it appropriate to have a new session of parliament with a new throne speech? I was amazed by the contention of the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) that a government could come in with a session lasting five years. Sure, they could from the constitutional point of view; there is no question about that. The question is, is it appropriate, in a parliamentary democracy, to do that? We most categorically say "No". We say "No" because of the changing circumstances in this country, particularly the country's economy, which require a government to come back at more frequent intervals to propose means for dealing with the country's problems. This is precisely why we think a new session is required, and required now. The last throne speech was delivered on September 30, 1974, nearly a year and a half ago. The problems of the country are substantially different now—I shall come to this point in a moment—or at least their manifestations are different. Part of what the government said in its throne speech has been denied—particularly what it said about wage and price controls—by the action the government has taken since then.