

*Order of Business*

approached when their bill comes due, and, if they are ready to proceed, then the House proceeds with the bill.

I would like to take hon. members back to a similar debate which took place on November 14 and November 28, 1977, and was followed by a ruling made by myself on December 5, 1977. In that ruling I suggested to the House a procedure as to workings of our Standing Orders 18(1), 19(1) and 49(1) during private members' hour. At that time I suggested a practice which we have been following since then, and that is the practice of standing bills by unanimous consent if possible without requesting the government to stand an item of business during private members' hour. This, I think, has simplified our procedure, but at the same time it has allowed members to complain about the selection of bills.

Having said that, I would like to read to hon. members a question I had in my mind at the conclusion of the debate on November 28, 1977. It reads:

Is the fact that the government has been co-ordinating this recent procedure which has developed, bringing about some suspicion?

At that time I was referring to the procedure whereby the Privy Council Office organized and planned the work of the private members' business on a weekly basis. I was questioning the reason which prompted the hon. member for Vaudreuil to raise the question at that time. I went on to say:

Would there be a valid objective in suggesting that such programming of private members' business ought to come under the Deputy Speakership or the Chair in general? Should there be some kind of co-ordination by the Chair or Deputy Speaker who officiates at the drawing of the order of business for private members at the beginning of the session?

That point I think was touched by the hon. member for Pontiac-Gatineau-Labelle (Mr. Lefebvre). Without insinuating that this alternative would be the solution to our problem, the Chair is often found in a situation where it does not have all the elements to a problem. It could be a problem of procedure, planning, or the workings of the House. We hear members complaining that they have not been contacted by the Privy Council office when they were ready to proceed, but then perhaps they were not in their offices.

Part of the organization of private members' business is conducted in one place, while the procedural aspects are conducted around the Chair. Perhaps this is something which our committee on procedure could explore. We are at this moment discussing the matter around the Chair. I can tell hon. members that the Clerk of the House and the Deputy Speaker's office are setting up an office for private members' business which will scrutinize all bills, and it will have an appointed officer who will specifically examine all bills to be debated in this House during private members' hour. This office will be concerned with the private members' hour, and will accept complaints with regard to it. The question could be raised as to whether this office should co-ordinate all facets of the private members' hour. I do not know, and I will leave that matter to hon. members for discussion. I am prepared to listen to any hon. members who wish to act on what I have said.

**Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to indicate my support for the proposition you

[Mr. Deputy Speaker.]

have placed before us. It is in no way a reflection on the hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona (Mr. Kilgour) or on the Privy Council office, but it seems to me that what we are dealing with in this private members' hour is the business of private members and the business of the House of Commons. It should not appear that it is planned or arranged by someone who is responsible to the government. As Your Honour has just pointed out, the business of the order of the bills and resolutions is determined by a draw at the start of the session. I believe it is called an exercise in balloting. It takes place in the office of either the Speaker or the Clerk. In other words, it is done on behalf of all the members and is not under the auspices of the government.

Your Honour has wondered whether this would require a reference to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization. I would hope not. It is not in the rules, nor is it by direction of the standing committee or anyone else that the present practice is in effect. It has simply grown up. It is being done as a service, but it does leave certain questions. I believe that the idea of the Chair being responsible, through the Deputy Speaker, for looking after the arranging of these bills is a good one. In effect, Mr. Speaker, if you are telling us that you are going ahead with this procedure, it has my approval.

**Mr. Kilgour:** Mr. Speaker, certainly what the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) has said has a good deal of merit. Nobody in this House would object if that is the wish, really, of the hon. members opposite. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has said that the matter now works practically. If hon. members wish to stop the practice, there is a very simple method, and that is simply to deny unanimous consent.

● (1620)

Your Honour has raised a very serious point from the chair. Possibly all members present or elsewhere might consider the matter. Perhaps House leaders could meet to consider the question and get back to you, if that is acceptable.

The other point is that I understand the hon. member for Pontiac-Gatineau-Labelle and the hon. member for Vaudreuil believe that Mr. Robert Lay is being scrupulously fair. I think Your Honour is concerned about the possible appearance of the matter not being fair to all members. Hon. members on this side of the House would be open to a reconsideration of the matter if that is the wish of all other hon. members.

**Mr. Lefebvre:** I have listened to your words very carefully, Mr. Speaker. Rather than guarantee you the full support of the official opposition today, I would sooner wait until you can make a more complete report to the House on exactly the manner in which it will be organized. I agree with the parliamentary secretary that there are some who may think—not I personally, and not the hon. member for Vaudreuil—that there may be problems with private members' hour because it is in the hands of a government office. I think members are agreed that private members' hour, especially, should be in the