

House of Commons Procedures

Mr. Otto: I am not going to challenge that, either. In connection with this resolution he also said that there was something wrong about sitting through the lunch and dinner hour occasionally. Surely the hon. Member does not suggest that something spectacular happens apart from the dinner hour. Consider the time now, Mr. Chairman. It is not dinner hour. I am sure we will get as good an attendance as we have had on many occasions when there is no dinner or lunch hour. On top of that, it would not do us too much harm, some of us, to miss the occasional lunch and dinner hour.

Mr. Fane: Speak for yourself.

Mr. Lambert: Wear your own halo.

Mr. Otto: Specifically in connection with the private Members hour, Mr. Chairman, the hon. gentleman seemed to consider that the private Members hour should be at a more appropriate time. I want to challenge that, first. I think we should try to stick to the truth and with the knowledge that private Members hour is really of little use at the present time.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Otto: It is of very little use. Considering that a great number of Canadians are under the impression that a bill introduced by a private Member has some importance, I think it is about time we brought it to their attention that such a bill often cannot pass, and rightly so, because surely the hon. gentleman does not represent that a private Member's bill should pass without responsibility, and the Government have to take responsibility for it.

Surely no one can suggest that such a bill can always pass, and is it not just as well that, failing to do away with private Members hour completely, we should have it on some occasion when it does not interfere with the conduct of business in the House? I suggest we have come to the day when the time of the House is becoming very, very precious and it is time we dealt with the business of the Government rather than indulging in an exercise of elocution or debate. Having said that, Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to state to the Committee that I do not believe the arguments presented by the hon. Member really have much foundation in fact.

Mr. Peters: Mr. Chairman, I would expect that the remarks just made by the hon. Member are probably shared to a greater or lesser degree by most of the Members of the

Liberal Party. It is quite true that over the years this matter of the private Members hour, and bills introduced by private Members—although some consideration has to be given to what they really are—must be of such a legislative nature that there is no financial responsibility resting on the Government. A private Member is not allowed to introduce a money bill. A money bill, of course, has to be introduced by way of resolution. While some resolutions can be introduced by private Members, the financial responsibility attaching to them has to be worded in such a way that the Government will give consideration to the spending of money, not that the Government will spend it.

This has not always been true because there have been one or two exceptions. One that comes to mind is the bill passed recently for which one of the colleagues of the hon. Member who has just spoken has taken some credit, and rightly so, whether or not the credit is on the debit or credit side of the ledger. This bill involved the matter of a very simple change in the name of our major air line, from Trans-Canada Air Lines to Air Canada. There was an incidental expense in this connection that has amounted to something like three quarters of a million dollars already, and there will probably be much more expense in the future. This I presume, because the Speaker allowed it, was an incidental expense and was really not involved in the original bill. But I think it is a fact that many of the bills which have been introduced over the years have been introduced to give some expression to a new idea and have in many cases—I referred this afternoon to the one concerned with the abolition of capital punishment—become popularized throughout the country and have actually been acted upon by the Government.

It is true that there is this caveat on the abolition of capital punishment that it is going to be a free vote. But it has been my impression since I have been in this House that there is no such thing in parliament as a free vote; that parties do insist on a certain amount of loyalty, and that we in Canada are not grown up in the political sense to the extent that we can really have what could be called a free vote.

The other matter, Mr. Chairman, is the attendance in this House. I am inclined to believe—and I think there are other hon. Members who will agree with me—that the attendance is going to be very sparse between