



Speech by

Mr BRUCE LAMING

MEMBER FOR MOOLOOLAH

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PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

Mr LAMING (Mooloolah—LP) (6.45 p.m.): This debate tonight should be about the value of private members' Bills and allocating adequate time to debate them. Why should we have private members' Bills? There are some members even on the Government side who will spend their parliamentary career on the backbench. I am sure that they would like to have the opportunity to be involved in introducing legislation. There are members who will always be in the Opposition, and they are in a similar situation. At the moment, we are witnessing more and more Independents being elected to the Parliament. Their role has to be seen and valued and they have to be given the opportunity to express themselves.

Some members think that there is no place for private members' Bills in Parliament; that they are just a product of disgruntled or frustrated people. Some people call them crackpots, but I do not subscribe to that description. Let me put that fallacy to rest. The House of Representatives Practice states—

"Bills initiated by private Members represent a small proportion of legislation dealt with by the House. One hundred and four private members' bills were introduced into the House between 1901 and 1988."

There were significant Bills to do with compulsory voting, matrimony and the site for the Federal Parliament. I will now read the names of the members who introduced private members' Bills into the Federal Parliament. Government members should listen to this. They are as follows: Mr Groom, Liberal; Senator Needham, ALP; Senator Payne, United Australia Party; former Prime Minister Curtin; Mr Joske, Liberal; Senator Murphy, ALP; Mr Johnson, ALP; Senator Rae, Liberal; Senator Colston, ALP; Senator Evans, ALP; and Senator McClelland, ALP. There is some pretty good company for Government members to support private members' Bills. By now I should have convinced Government members of the value of these Bills.

Let us now consider the procedure. What time should be allocated to private members' Bills? A little research of the Commons indicates that it devotes 21 days a year—Fridays—to private members' business, 12 days to Bills and nine days to motions. There is a ballot for positions. Obviously, it is very competitive to get on the list. Sometimes the Government even provides some of its time.

Times are changing, and there is a lot of frustration in the community about what we do in Parliament and how we go about it. It does not matter which side sits where. It is time for change in the way we do things. The Sessional Orders have improved over the two Parliaments that I have been here. We have better procedures for question time. We have questions on notice and private members' motions. I point out to the Leader of the House that it is my understanding that the Opposition in the previous Parliament could have moved private members' Bills during the 6 o'clock debate. That opportunity was available to it.

We must accelerate change for the better, and we have to be fair dinkum about it. Is the time allocated in the way that Mr Mackenroth suggests in his motion adequate? No! New members may not be aware of the time that it takes for Bills to go through this House. May I advise them—and it is good for Independents and One Nation members to be aware of this—that the Workplace Relations and Industrial Organisations Bills took 24 hours to debate! The criminal law amendment legislation took 19 hours to debate. The Public Service Bill took 17 and a half hours to debate.

Were we to see just one serious private member's Bill today and if the Government was reluctant to debate it—as it could well be—it would not be put on the Notice Paper to be debated until 11 November. Unless we sit in December, we would have only five hours of debate for private members' Bills. This one private member's Bill would not emerge from Committee until April 1999 at the earliest. It would take until April 1999 before we saw our first Bill. Under Mr Beanland's amendment, debate would commence on 21 October and be completed on 11 November, which was the date it would start under the Government's suggestion.

But wait, there is more. We cannot expect just one private member's Bill; we can expect half a dozen at least. They would not get debated, under the Government's proposal, probably in the life of this Parliament. I suggest that all honourable members think very hard about this motion and do the mathematics. I mention again the Premier's letter to the member for Nicklin. The Premier is not in the Chamber. He did not repeat all of it. He just said "move private members' Bills and have them debated". The wording preceding that was "to ensure Standing Orders allow adequate opportunities for all members" to move private members' Bills and have them debated. What is being put to the Parliament does not fulfil the terms that the Premier put forward in his letter to the member for Nicklin. We have to have adequate opportunities for all members to introduce private members' Bills in this House.

Time expired.
