



Speech by

Hon. J. FOURAS

MEMBER FOR ASHGROVE

Hansard 6 August 1998

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

Hon. J. FOURAS (Ashgrove—ALP) (6.38 p.m.): I rise to support the amendment moved by the Leader of the House. In this debate we have heard Mr Horan arguing that, because there were more primary votes for the Nationals, Liberals and One Nation, they can therefore take over Government business in this place. He argued that they have a right to do so because they have different policies and philosophies. Then we have been told that we would get maybe only four or five private members' Bills debated in a term.

The member for Gladstone made an amazing speech in this House. She is not in the Chamber to hear my contribution, but she actually said that 60 days was very reasonable. We can argue about that. She then went on to talk about the possibility that the Notice Paper would be blocked up by the number of private members' Bills. She said, "You can use the guillotine. It is a small matter." That is one of the most ludicrous propositions that I have ever heard in my life. No Parliament could function and no Government could govern. There were two Wednesdays this year when we sat for five hours. We would see a number of private members' Bills coming in, and they would take precedence over Government Business. The Government could not govern. What would the polls be saying about the people's confidence in the Government's ability to govern? What would be happening to confidence in the economy?

Mr Mackenroth: Do you remember my policy on the guillotine—very late at night.

Mr FOURAS: Members opposite mentioned time. Let us compare the times that the Parliament sat during the terms of the Goss Government and the former coalition Government. The Borbidge Government sat 3.8 days per month. The Goss Government sat for 4.9 days per month. They complain about time, but what did they do? When they were in Government they never gave this Parliament any time. In relation to answers to questions, members of the former coalition Government took one minute and three seconds more per answer than our Ministers did. Not only did they do that; their members could say whatever they liked. Their Government was not accountable on the floor of this House, because Ministers could get away with not answering questions and saying anything they wanted to.

This is the most ludicrous debate that I have ever heard. No Government or Parliament could function on this basis. I find it amazing that we are having this debate. As other Government members have said in this debate: what a pointless exercise! We are having a debate to get some indication about how the House feels about a debate that will happen down the track. How ludicrous!

Before the member for Gladstone scuttled out of the Chamber, she stated that she found that proposition reasonable. Very reasonable indeed! She says, "Oh, there are 60 days." The members from One Nation have said that they will support this motion. However, if they really want people in their electorates to have jobs, if they want to see the important issues being addressed in this Parliament by a Government that has the authority of the Governor in Council and the Executive, if they want the business community and the electorate to have confidence in this institution, they should follow this advice: do not make it possible for members to flood this House with private members' Bills. We would lose the ability to govern after two Wednesday sittings of five hours' duration.

It is amazing that the Opposition is attempting to give precedence to private members' Bills over Government business. They could even take precedence over the Budget. The member for Gladstone said that we could use the guillotine. How ludicrous! The Government has the right at any time to

declare Bills urgent. The Leader of the House would then face the ludicrous situation of having to say that all private members' Bills are urgent. It is a joke to say that we can use the guillotine to throw them all out. Is that a process that we want in this Parliament? The guillotine is used at the end of sessions when Bills have to be passed. The gag motion can be moved at any time. I am sure Mr Speaker understands that he has the discretion as to whether he puts that question. We should not be using those devices to stifle debate.

We should have a sessional order that is fair dinkum, reasonable and would allow a process whereby we could pass private members' Bills. Ultimately, it is up to the Parliament. We will be judged by the people. Were we to filibuster during debates on private members' Bills, we would be judged accordingly. I am sure that Mr Beattie and Mr Mackenroth would not want that.

Mr Borbidge interjected.

Mr FOURAS: I am not worried about anything. I am worried about how stupid you are, Mr Borbidge, to come into this Chamber with such a ridiculous proposition.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! That is unparliamentary.

Mr FOURAS: I withdraw that. I change the word to——

Mr BORBIDGE: I rise to a point of order. It is very interesting to see a previous Speaker of this House breaching the parliamentary standards espoused by his leader.

Mr FOURAS: Mr Speaker, I withdraw. If the cap fits, wear it.

Time expired.
