

United States. Maybe the minister has never been there. I am sure that if he had, some of the rules made for unemployment insurance benefits would make no more sense to him than they do to me.

It has been decided that over a three-year period these two departments should come back together again. The people in my area are asking who is going to be bumped, red-circled, downgraded. Are the staffs to be integrated? Maybe one section should be eliminated.

Mr. Rodriguez: Which one?

Mr. Peters: I do not want to say that, because it is "damned if you do" and "damned if you don't." Maybe we could just lay everybody off and start again, hiring the good ones and leaving the bad ones out. I have a list of bad ones, if anybody wants it. I would start pretty high up the ladder, because every time I phone either the Manpower office or the unemployment insurance office, they are off on a coffee break. It is called a business meeting, but it lasts from Monday morning until late Friday afternoon.

When an individual wishes to deal with a government agency, we have a situation much like the saying that not only must justice be done but it must be seen to be done. If the minister were to take a survey of how many people in the country are satisfied with the operation of the unemployment insurance scheme and Manpower, I think unemployment insurance would come out on top. There are two Manpower offices in my area. One could have been eliminated a long time ago because most people do not even know it is there. In combining the operations of these two departments, the minister has not been very fair with the staffs in letting them know who will be redundant, and so on. I am asked questions about this quite often; but of course I do not have the information.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that this wedding has taken place. I was violently opposed to the divorce. In my opinion, the split did not make any sense and I am pleased that the minister has suggested combining the agencies. The operation of the unemployment insurance fund should be viewed in a light different from the operation of other departments of government. Money contributed by the individual and the employer, with some from the government for administration costs, is entrusted to the UIC. These moneys are handled rather loosely. I think we have an obligation to handle them better.

I have always had a good relationship with the top management of the Unemployment Insurance Commission, Mr. Speaker, because I am interested in what they are doing. I know some of the practical difficulties that can arise from legislation and many times modifications and changes have been as a result of my suggestions. I am sure this is also true in respect of other members. We are directly involved in the business of the commission and are obviously in a position to assist. I think it is safe to say that over the last ten years at least three or four hours each day have been devoted by one member of my staff to unemployment insurance problems. If that is true for other members as well, it means that approxi-

mately 150 people, in effect, work for the Unemployment Insurance Commission at no expense to the commission.

● (1250)

It is apparent, Mr. Speaker, that the new legislation will make the collection of unemployment insurance a complicated process. Under the previous act a man knew exactly where he stood. Under this act, a claimant will go for benefits and will confront a situation like this, "Mr. Jones, you are not entitled to any money because you have used all your benefits, you have not worked long enough, or your contributions were not large enough", and so on. Or, if the worst comes to the worst, the claimant will be called to apply again, or will be told he can appeal his case or submit a new application, and so on. He will return to square one.

Mr. Speaker, the old system was not so complicated, and I suggest members of parliament are out of their cotton-picking minds when they make this process so complicated. Under the old system, you were not accused of not looking for work. The UIC people did not say to you, "Do you have transportation?" These factors entered into the question and were given their due weight. You were interviewed, and at the interview it was determined whether you were eligible for UIC benefits. If you were eligible, you were given a slip which you took to the benefits section and collected benefits. The process was relatively simple. Now it is to be a puzzle.

What is more, you came face to face with the employees of UIC, and if they did not treat you politely you could threaten them with a poke in the nose. Occasionally some of them got a poke in the nose because people got mad. It seems to me that we are now complicating this process beyond all reason and without justification. Or perhaps the government wants to create more employment for unemployment insurance, Manpower and Immigration civil servants. Perhaps it wants to expand the civil service and can justify the expansion only by making this bill more complicated.

The minister has not thought through the ramifications of certain variables included in the bill. The minister comes from an area where times have been good. The government Crown corporation, Polymer, prospered. It was located in Sarnia where jobs were plentiful. Polymer was a good Crown corporation.

Mr. Rodriguez: But Polysar is in deep trouble.

Mr. Peters: I grant you that. Nevertheless, Polymer was good for Sarnia. It employed many people at high wages. Perhaps there was little unemployment in the minister's area. Let me ask him this question: Will a small pocket of unemployment in an area otherwise prosperous affect the over-all unemployment rate of the region? I suppose the bright young executives the government likes to hire would feed such questions into the computer. If you ask it the right questions, the computer can answer in seconds. On the other hand, if things go wrong the computer could take weeks or even months to answer.