

Employment and Immigration

indicated to me the indignation of looking for employment under those kinds of circumstances. I was very pleased when in 1940 the national employment service was established and the government started to assist in providing employment.

Mr. Jones: They established a new bureaucracy.

Mr. Peters: I am not sure whether that was the reason it was established. That is when we started getting unemployment insurance numbers which became substitutes for names. That service later developed in to our social security system. Numbers were more important than names. A name could be given and a file could not be found; but if a number was given, it could be found. A bureaucracy developed, and that was part of the problem. There were two sections of the national employment service. In one section people lined up and asked the agent if there were any jobs. It really did not matter very much in those days what the job was. If the agent had a job for digging ditches, you were supposed to take it. If you did not want the job, you were not able to draw benefits because the agent would not give you a slip to go over to the other section to get your benefits. If the agent did not have a job for you, he gave you a slip and you went to the unemployment insurance section.

At that section there was a card of about six inches by eight inches. The card indicated all your payments and how much they were, and on the reverse side there was a record of withdrawals. When you made a withdrawal, that amount was taken off, and your balance was so much. You knew when you were running out. You knew all the factors, and you knew how much you had been paid. You could talk to the girl at the desk. She had all that information, and you could argue and discuss the point. You could appeal decisions, or you could accept them. It was not a bad system. I would be prepared to go back to that system.

For some mucky-mucks that system meant line-ups—and if there is one thing people in Canada hate, it is a line-up. Every day in my office I do not have a line-up of people but I have a line-up of unemployment insurance problems. People can no longer line up and ask about unemployment insurance. They just wait and wait. They get in touch with their member of parliament, with their northern affairs officer or with the Unemployment Insurance Commission. Those are unsatisfactory line-ups. They are 100 per cent more demoralizing than asking a girl to get your card to see whether you are entitled to any benefits. In days gone by, if you were entitled to benefits the girl at the counter handed the benefits over the counter in cash. You did not have to pay a premium at the local grocery store to have your cheque cashed. You did not have to pay a charge to cash your cheque at the local beer parlour or wherever you may have taken it. You got your money, and that was that. You were entitled to it, and you knew you were entitled to it. You knew how much you were entitled to, how much you paid in, what your balance was, and how long you could continue collecting.

Mr. Rodriguez: There were no computers.

[Mr. Peters.]

Mr. Peters: There were no computers and no civil servants in the gallery. They did not exist. They did not have to exist. There were only a few, and they were very competent. As the years went by, the bureaucracy got bigger, but the people in that bureaucracy became less competent to handle individual problems. It is not that the commission does not have some very competent people, because it has—but who is appointed to deal with my claim, my question, or my request for information? I telephone the unemployment insurance office because I live 150 miles away from it. I phone the district office and ask about my claim. Who do I ask? I ask a young girl who was picked up off the street two or three days before and who does not know which office she is working for. She does not have the faintest idea about benefits or anything else, because she was the last one hired. Her superiors have not had time to talk to her. However, she answers the telephone and says, “I don’t know” and hangs up. I ask for her name, and she says she does not have to give her name. She thinks I am asking for a date. Her mother told her not to make that kind of date, and the commission has not yet told her what to do. That is exactly what happens. We no longer have a situation where you can walk into the national employment office and be offered a job or not. In days gone by, if you were not offered a job you made a request for benefits. You either received benefits there and then, or you didn’t. This happened every week when you turned up at the office. Nowadays, people appear only to make their presentations once a month to Canada Manpower so that they meet the requirements and are not taken off the rolls. They may be looking for jobs, but in my area looking for a job is a stupid thing to do. In my riding there are little towns of 200 people 50 and 75 miles from nowhere.

Mr. Baldwin: What about their voting habits?

Mr. Rodriguez: Some vote Conservative.

Mr. Peters: Sometimes many people visit those little communities and some people work there, but in the winter season there are no jobs. The people know there are no jobs in those little communities. The tourist camps are closed, the restaurants are closed—everything in the community is closed, so people have obviously left.

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We could discuss some of the other things that affect small communities. Maybe it is only because the minister does not know about small communities that he made some of these changes. But Sarnia is not such a large city that he could not look at the surrounding area. Surely he could drive to Oil Springs, Petrolia, Dresden, or some of the communities that have the same problems as those in my area. The last time I was in Oil City there was a dance hall and a motel. My cousin ran both of them, but he was pretty well living on the pogy. Maybe the minister should go out and look at that community. Petrolia is not much better off. Dresden is a nice little tourist town in the summertime, but in winter I think they must just sit around the fire and talk about the days when it was the end of the underground railway for runaway slaves from the