

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION
85/2008

14 August 2008

The Minister for Social Services Jaime Netto, in his press release of yesterday is repeating the same untruth that was used by the previous occupant of the post Mrs Yvette del Agua on the last occasion that the Opposition was told that a request for information was refused by the department on the grounds that there was a policy directive that any request from the Opposition should be addressed in writing.

It is not true that the reply given by the department was that they could not provide Members of the Opposition details of individual applicants and that any request for information would need to be addressed in writing to the Principal Secretary.

It would have been nonsense to have given such a reply since firstly no request about information about an individual claimant had been made and secondly the telephone call to the department was made on behalf of the claimant and in his presence and therefore if any information about him was requested he would have been there to provide it himself.

It will be recalled that in January 2006 the Opposition highlighted another case, that of a pensioner who was not in receipt of a social security

pension despite having paid social insurance stamps. When the Leader of the Opposition telephoned the department at the time he was told then that officials had instructions that Mr Bossano had to write to the then Minister responsible Yvette del Agua. The pensioner turned out to be correct and the department wrong and the matter was resolved.

However, exactly the same statement in relation to putting the claim in writing was made then as is being made now, even though in both cases this entailed purely administrative matters.

The explanation sought from the department this week was simply how could a person registered as unemployed, whose contribution record is in the possession of the Government, be denied unemployment benefit on the grounds that he was not able to provide the Termination of Employment Form because his employer had failed to issue it.

The civil servant who answered referred the matter to a senior officer explaining that since she had not been in the department for long she would seek confirmation that the situation was as she had explained, namely that the claim could not be processed until the termination form was produced.

The confirmation as to whether this was the policy being implemented never materialised because the reply given was that the Leader of the Opposition

should address the grievance or complaint in writing to the Principal Officer and the fact that it was merely a request for information made no difference.

In the light of the reply from the Minister, the Opposition assumes that the department will in future be prepared to provide information which does not seek any details about any individual.

Having said that, the Government itself in its own statement chose to reveal details about the circumstances of the individual such as that the person had lodged an appeal against his dismissal and that until last week there were ongoing negotiations. The Government has no right to put any of this into the public domain.

Whether there are ongoing negotiations or not between the individual and his former employer are details which were not sought from the DSS by the Leader of the Opposition. The question was quite simple, as explained above. How is such a person supposed to meet his family requirements with no income?

That is the issue which the Government should have addressed and taken action to correct instead of indulging in their usual tactic of throwing up a smokescreen of insulting language in order to hide their incomprehensible policy.

ENDS