

It is clear from this legislation and the government's anti-quitter rhetoric that the Conservatives are out of touch with the reality of the work place. Look at the demonstration in Montreal a few weeks ago. Forty thousand people filled the streets in minus 25 degree temperatures to protest against the government's neglect of the unemployed.

The people in Montreal were shouting *On veut travailler*. We want work. They were not protesting for more UI. They were asking for jobs from a government that has abandoned them.

Those were not lazy, freeloading people. They were not sitting home watching videos or skiing in the Laurentians. They were demonstrating against an unfair government that does not have a plan to help them get back to work.

We were shown the real world that day at the demonstration, a world of frustration, anger and hopelessness. The government's response has been scornful and insulting. The government called the demonstrators separatists. It threatened to create a UI police squad and a UI snitch hotline. Its behaviour throughout these past few months has resulted in a tragic comedy. For too long this government has ignored the real world.

On December 2, the finance minister said something which I found deeply ironic, and I would like to repeat it. In his economic statement, the minister said: "There are those who would follow policies based on the world as they would like it to be, not as it exists". I found that ironic because the minister was putting down the first group, those who would follow policies based on the world as they would like it to be when he and his government are so obviously members of that group.

Think of it in the context of the present debate. Think of the minister and his civil servants who designed these changes and you will see how removed they are from the real world. They sit in their offices in L'Esplanade Laurier, the closest thing to ivory towers in Ottawa. They develop these policies in safe, clean, air-conditioned offices, the ideal work place in many ways.

It is understandable that these people might not be completely aware of the larger reality, removed as they are from small factories, restaurants, offices and work sites where the majority of Canadians work. That is why

Government Orders

the minister of employment can say with complete conviction that the changes in Bill C-113 will not inconvenience anyone other than the quitters. He does not know any better.

Sadly in the world as it exists, to use the expression of the Minister of Finance, reality is quite different. Already employers are starting to use the proposed changes to the UI act to pressure their employees into more restrictive work situations. *Le Devoir* recently gave the example of *Litho Montréal*, a small printing company in Longueuil. Here the employer is imposing a 30 per cent salary cut on the older, better paid half of the work force. The people targeted by this move are highly skilled and were instrumental in computerising the business, one of the first to do so in the industry. They were well paid as a result. The president of the company has said: "I used to be at the mercy of their skills. Now it is a different situation".

Maybe people in such situations should quit and apply for UI. It is easy to say, but sometimes it is a difficult decision, especially if you are not certain you will qualify for benefits. Think about the typical person who quits his or her job or is fired. To begin with, he is under a lot of stress and probably does not have a very positive outlook when he goes to the CEC to apply for unemployment insurance. If he is required to justify his situation before a decision is made about his eligibility that adds more pressure.

What if he is not as articulate as he could be? Maybe he has difficulty convincing the employment officer that his claim is justified. Maybe his former manager is more persuasive. Maybe he does not get the benefits even though he deserves them.

What is there in Bill C-113 to guarantee that such a person will be treated fairly? What protection does such a person have against the perils of the world as it is? The fact is this bill does not and cannot protect everybody, and that is why it should be withdrawn.

Perhaps the government should listen to the Quebec Bar Association and the *Conseil du Patronat* which have both expressed serious reservations about the changes proposed. Perhaps the government should pay attention to the human rights commissioner, Max Yalden and Senator Solange Chaput-Rolland who have both expressed concern about the effects of this bill.