



CLC's Day of Mourning Statement April 28, 2014

Think Workplace Fatalities are a Thing of the Past? Together, we have made progress but we must keep fighting for safer workplaces

Unions are about more than decent jobs for workers. The labour movement also works to make workplaces safe for everyone. Yet, each year thousands of Canadians are killed or injured on the job or die from work-related diseases. In 2012, 979 Canadians died because of their work, but we know the numbers are higher because official figures only capture those who received workers' compensation benefits. Hundreds more die from under-reported illnesses and occupational diseases that go unrecognized in the compensation systems.

Despite the frequency and tragedy of these deaths, negligent corporations that kill workers face little public, political or legal scrutiny. While police routinely investigate and lay charges related to homicides, different rules seem to apply to workplace fatalities. We should not tolerate a situation where companies willfully neglect health and safety measures that would prevent injury and death. For example, nearly two years after a Burns Lake, B.C., explosion and fire took the lives of two workers, it was announced that neither criminal charges nor charges under the provincial workers compensation or occupational health and safety legislation would be laid. Justice is not being served. We must have thorough scrutiny for potential criminal liability on the part of those employers who are negligent.

Governments have a responsibility to properly enforce health and safety laws and the criminal code. Yet the same politicians who claim to be tough on crime are soft on corporations responsible for workers' injuries and deaths. This amounts to unequal treatment before the law, with different rules for investigating fatalities in workplaces than for those occurring elsewhere. Fairness works only if corporations and their representatives are held accountable – in the same way perpetrators of other crimes are held to account.

On April 28th we mourn those who have died. However, the deaths of these workers are also a reminder that all levels of government must do more to enforce our health and safety laws and vigorously prosecute violations when a worker is killed or seriously injured. It is time for fair and equal treatment before the law for workplace injuries and deaths. Together we have made good progress protecting workers' health and safety but we have to keep fighting for safer workplaces for everyone.