

Notes for
National Day of Mourning
April 28th, 2008

Sisters & Brothers,

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Honoured Guests,

I want to thank all of you for coming here today to remember and honour those workers who have died or who have been injured on the job. I know many of you here today, have had to deal with the loss of a loved one, friend or colleague. We mourn with you, and we want you to know we will not let those lost lives be in vain.

This year's theme for the National Day of Mourning is ***“Mourn for the Dead, Fight for the Living - Now more than ever!”***.

All of us here today should be furious that once again in 2006, which is our last full statistical reporting period from the Association of Workers Compensation Boards of Canada, 976 workers lost their lives to compensable workplace events. We all know, however, the true figures are much higher due to exposure to toxins, carcinogens and other accidents such as in agriculture, that are missed by Provincial reporting systems.

In 1984, when the Canadian Labour Congress initiated April 28th as the National Day of Mourning, we hoped that bringing national attention to the carnage in our workplaces would be a major factor in having governments and employers take action to put an end to the outrageous numbers of deaths and workplace injuries. It appears we were wrong.

Oh, there has been great legislation passed by the various levels of government and many employers have health and safety accident prevention policies on the books, but how do they explain that 25 years later, they are killing and injuring more workers than ever.

In reality, it is not all that hard to explain. In fact, it is quite simple. Governments and employers can talk the talk, but they refuse to walk the walk. They love to talk about the great laws and regulations on the books or the great internal policies they have in the workplace, but what they are not saying is they are not committed to enforcing any of the written word. **It's just words if it's not making a difference.**

Strong provisions in laws or collective agreements or workplace policies, are only as effective as the commitment of those who are tasked to enforce or comply with them. There has clearly been a deadly deficit in both these areas.

Every year we update our statistics. It's a depressing exercise. Since 1984, more than **25 thousand** Canadian workers have died due to work related causes. Close to **25 million** workers have been injured.

The numbers are mind boggling. In a country considered to be one of the best countries in the world to live, how can we possibly be killing and injuring so many of our workers. It is more per capita than almost every industrialized country in the world.

Regulators (governments) are cherry picking which health and safety laws and regulations they will enforce. In the meantime, more of our family members, friends and colleagues are being injured and killed.

It has to **STOP**.

Laws must be enforced. The **criminal code** with the amendments from the Westray Bill C-45, **must be used to lay appropriate charges** against employers who are responsible for serious workplace injuries or deaths. As individuals, we must become involved in demanding workers be protected. As collective bodies, we must organize to take on employers and governments and force them to take action.

Irresponsible governments kill workers. If governments are not prepared to enforce the law, then they are just as responsible for workplace deaths and injuries as the employers who do not comply with the law.

“Mourn for the dead. Fight for the Living - Now more than ever!” cannot be just a slogan. “A Safe and Healthy Workplace” is not an option – it is a right.

Additional information can be found at www.ccohs.ca or www.whsc.on.ca.

Thank You.