

Notes for

National Day of Mourning

April 28th, 2007

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.

This year's theme for the National Day of Mourning is “**Safe and Healthy Workplaces for all Workers**”.

In 1984, when the Canadian Labour Congress initiated April 28th as the National Day of Mourning to honour Canadian workers killed or injured on the job, there were 744 workers listed as having died from workplace injuries. In 2005, the numbers listed by the Association of Workers Compensation Boards of Canada showed that there were **1,097** workers killed due to workplace injuries.

Unfortunately, the number of deaths from workplace causes was much higher. Many deaths do not appear in the statistics produced by the Association's report. Those deaths were either not accepted as workplace deaths or were deaths from occupational illness or diseases not yet recognized as having roots in the workplace.

We also know that workers in the agriculture sector are not covered by workers compensation and any deaths or injuries in that area would not appear in WCB reports.

We have made many improvements and gains through legislation and collective bargaining; however, it is sadly evident that our efforts have not been sufficient.

There has been a serious lack of commitment on behalf of governments at the provincial and the federal levels, to ensure that the legislative improvements we have won over the years, are enforced.

Strong provisions in laws or collective agreements 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.

Since 1984, more than nineteen thousand (19,000) Canadian workers have been killed on the job. More than twenty million (20,000,000) workers have been injured.

It has to **STOP**.

We have said for years that every employer must be held accountable for decisions they make regarding their employees health and safety.

Today we are also saying that every government must be held accountable for enforcing the laws of the land. Laws protecting the lives of Canadian workers are not voluntary. You don't get to pick and choose which parts to enforce or which parts to comply with.

On April 1st, 2004, **Bill C-45**, or better known as the Westray Bill, came into effect. Since this legislation came into effect, very few charges have been laid.

At the same time, more than 2,000 workers have died from workplace injuries or disease. Workers and their representatives will need to mount concerted efforts to demand charges be laid in those cases where we feel employer negligence was behind a serious injury or death at work. We must demand companies be directed by government inspectors to immediately act on hazards in the workplace.

We must demand that workers participate in developing health and safety programs for the workplace. We must demand that joint health and safety committees be functional in all workplaces. And we must demand that employers comply with health and safety legislation and the provisions related to health and safety in collective agreements.

Sisters and Brothers, ladies and gentlemen, honoured guests, the Canadian Labour Congress has been calling on the Federal and Provincial Governments for years, to put the financial and human resources into saving workers lives in this country. We can no longer create laws that are not enforced.

Governments that think a law on the books resolves them of their responsibilities must be made to understand otherwise.

If they 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.

Friends, let's not allow inaction by governments to kill workers. Let's go after those who have the power to **“Save Lives by Enforcing Health and Safety Legislation”**. **“Safe and Healthy Workplaces for all Workers” is not a option – it is a right.**

We went after them to create the laws; let's go after them to enforce them.

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

Thank You.

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