

Statements from Labour MPs to Hazards 2012 Conference

Stephen Timms, Shadow Minister for DWP Employment with responsibility for health and safety
Twitter: @stephenc Timms

“Thank you for the opportunity to make a statement to this important conference.

Labour recognises the importance in a fair society of sensible and effective management of risk in the workplace. We reject Coalition Government rhetoric to the contrary. The TUC estimates that at least 20,000 people die prematurely each year as a result of injuries, illnesses or accidents caused by their workplaces. The shocking Health and Safety Executive figure of 173 workers fatally injured at work excludes a large number of other work-related deaths.

In his important report commissioned by Ministers, Professor Ragnar Löfstedt concluded that there is *“no case for radically altering current health and safety legislation”*, and that *“there is a view across the board that the existing regulatory requirements are broadly right, and that regulation has a role to play in preventing injury and ill health in the workplace”*. This is not the conclusion that Ministers wanted. They have had to accept the conclusion on paper while acting as if the conclusion had been different – for example, setting an arbitrary target of a 50% reduction in regulations through sector specific consolidation, instead of the 35% reduction recommended on the basis of careful analysis in the report.

We are also baffled that the Government has decided to designate workplaces such as Docks and Agriculture as ‘low risk’, so that they will no longer be subject to proactive inspection.

Reducing the number of people hurt, killed, or made seriously ill at work is not only good for those immediately affected. It is good for businesses and good for the public purse too. Professor Löfstedt is right to make clear that: *“proportionate risk management can make good business sense.”*

We will firmly oppose Government policy that increase the number of deaths from workplace cancer, penalises conscientious employers, and threatens workers’ lives by removing regulations if insufficient alternative protection is in place.”

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Ian Lavery MP Secretary of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Occupational Health and Safety, and Chairman of the Labour Group of trade union MPs

Tiwtter: @IanLaveryMP

“Since being elected as an NUM safety and health representative at Ellington Colliery at a relatively young age I have always admired the sterling work carried out by the Hazards Campaign. Now as secretary of the APPG for Occupational Health and Safety and Chairman of the Labour Group of trade union MPs that admiration has grown.

Since the 2010 general election the ConDem coalition government has waged war against safety and health in the workplace classing good regulation as a "Burden on Business", with the prime minister saying safety and health regulation as monstrous.

Report after report has been commissioned with the direct aim of massive deregulation, the young report was followed by the report of professor Lofstedt which proved very disappointing for the government as he agreed that health and safety regulation was about right. Professor Lofstedt was also very positive about the effective and efficient role of workplace reps, this of course did not sit well with the ConDems.

These attacks will continue therefore it is absolutely essential that Labour politicians, trade Unions and safety campaigners, Join forces to oppose these attacks at every juncture, the myth pedalled by business leaders that regulation is not needed is ludicrous. Here in the UK fatalities in the workplace stands at around 1300 per year with as many as 50,000 people dying due to work related illness and in addition tens of thousands of workers are made ill by work.

We have less regulation now than we had forty years ago and this government is hell bent on destroying protection in the workplace for ordinary people.

The HSE the body charged with policing the safety and health of individuals in the workplace is still reeling from a massive 35% cut to their budgets which impact hugely on their ability to effectively police the workplace, hence reducing the current protection offered to workers. Proactive workplace inspections have been cut by 33% and fees imposed for HSE intervention which inevitably will result in more fatalities and serious incidents at work something we have campaigned against for decades.

It is a well recognised fact that good safety & health in the workplace saves the country much needed finance. Poor safety & health costs the UK at least £ 40 billion not to mention the social impact on those killed, injured and affected by poor regulation.

Is it too much to expect to return home to your family after a days work in good shape.

I can assure the hazards conference that my colleagues and I will continue to oppose any detrimental changes to the current safety and health regulations and indeed campaign to strengthen what we have in place. As always it's an uphill battle against Governments who seek maximum profits in the workplace before the well being of the workers the individuals who produce the wealth.

The role of the work place representatives is also under close scrutiny. The fantastic work of these committed people should never be underestimated. That's the very reason why the ConDem coalition look to attack these valuable workers. Don't let them grind you down.

In concluding can I express my support for the " we didn't vote to die at work Campaign" and as always the Hazards campaign who I hold in the highest of regard.

I wish all participants at the 2012 Hazards conference the very best of luck, and remember the work carried out by the safety reps in workplaces across the length and breadth of this nation is not only essential but vital and invaluable” Yours in safety solidarity

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John McDonnell MP Convenor of the Trade Union Co-ordinating Group TUCG, supporter of Blacklist Support Group and others.

Twitter: @johnmcdonnellMP

“This year’s Hazards Conference will play a vitally important role in laying out the plans we need for our campaign over the coming year against the concerted attack on health and safety launched by the Coalition Government.

It is critical that we alert fellow trade unionists and the general public to the threat to people’s lives and their overall safety.

Make no mistake, if the Government gets its way people will die, be maimed and be exposed to serious life changing illnesses.

Our role in the coming period is to expose what the Government is doing and to mobilise the trade union movement in leading the campaign against the Coalition’s plans to undermine our safety regime.

It cannot be left to the families of the victims of these policies.

The responsibility falls on us all.

The Trade Union Co-ordinating Group has set Health and Safety as one of its top 4 priorities for the coming year.

This means that in Parliament we will be monitoring Government plans and policies, exposing the implications of these policies and harriving the responsible Government ministers at every opportunity.

We will also be calling for a much firmer response from the Labour frontbench.

Outside of Parliament we want to ensure that health and safety becomes a central issue in all our campaigns.

For example it is pointless arguing for more jobs if the jobs that are created put our people at risk. It is no use calling for investment in infrastructure projects if our people continue to die and be injured on the sites of these projects because health and safety has been ignored.

Hazards and FACK will play a vital role in advising and supporting us with their expertise in our coming year of campaigning and fighting back against this Government’s plans.

I want to pay tribute to both organisations and thank them for the work that they do so valiantly and effectively.

When others have wavered Hazards and FACK have stood firm in reminding us that there have been too many compromises in health and safety.

What we need now is a movement wide commitment to making this issue a central element in our fight back against this Government.

I give you my pledge that I will do all I can both in Parliament and outside to make this a reality.

Solidarity and have a successful and productive conference”