

April 25, 2019

**April 28, Day of Mourning for Workers Killed or
Injured on the Job**

Affirm the Right of All Workers to Safe and Healthy Working Conditions!



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- **The Anti-Social Offensive Endangers the Health and Safety of Workers**
- **Smash the Silence on Workplace Injuries and Death**
- **The Situation Facing Migrant Workers**
- **Join the Organized Fight for Safe and Healthy Working Conditions; Smash The Silence!**
- **Actions Across the Country in Defence of Workers' Rights**

For Your Information

- **Data on Workplace Fatalities and Injuries in Canada and Internationally**

April 28, Day of Mourning for Workers Killed or Injured on the Job

Affirm the Right of All Workers to Safe and Healthy Working Conditions!

On the occasion of April 28, the Day of Mourning, workers across the country are holding ceremonies and meetings, and observing minutes of silence to mourn fellow workers killed on the job and to affirm the right of the living to safe and healthy working conditions.

The organized actions are an expression of the deep desire of the working class to humanize the workplace. Workers realize that the fight of the living to ensure safe and healthy working conditions comes up against the aim of those who own and control the imperialist economy to expropriate maximum profit from the value workers produce. This means that without a change in the direction and aim of the economy to one that serves and guarantees the well-being and security of the working people, the workplace remains a battleground where workers themselves, organized into their collectives, must wage constant struggles to ensure their health and safety on the job, and for humane and compassionate care for those injured and made sick on the job and for the families of workers who have been killed.



Workers' Forum salutes and supports all actions workers take to affirm their right to safe and healthy working conditions and for humane and compassionate care for those injured or made sick on the job and the families of those killed. These initiatives in the present to humanize the workplace and care for fallen workers are crucial in preparing the subjective conditions to change the direction and aim of the economy to one favouring the working people.

Workers' Forum is a voice for workers and makes its pages available to all who are fighting to defend the rights and security of all and for a pro-social direction for the country. Let us together organize and make April 28 an even more powerful expression of the desire and right of the working class for safe and healthy working conditions and the most humane care for the injured and the families of workers killed on the job. Let us step up the work to elaborate, defend and fight for the implementation of working and social conditions that are fit for a modern society, and for a pro-social aim and direction for the economy.



The Anti-Social Offensive Endangers the Health and Safety of Workers

Workers are holding their activities on April 28 to mourn the dead and those injured on the job

within difficult social and working conditions. Decades of the neo-liberal anti-social offensive have put the assets of society at the disposal of the private interests of the most powerful global oligopolies in contradiction with the needs and well-being of working people.

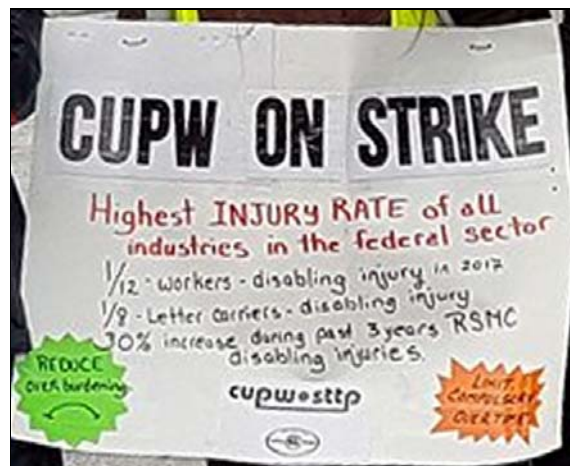


The anti-social offensive includes a wrecking of regulations and their enforcement which the working class has fought to obtain to protect their health and safety at work and to care for those injured on the job. Established standards of safe work have been eroded and even eliminated. They have fallen foul of the pursuit of the global oligarchs for greater private profit from the value workers produce.

The oligarchs have raised the banner of global competition as a pragmatic excuse to eliminate regulations meant to protect the health and safety of workers and care for the well-being of the injured. Making workers fair game for abuse, dictate, injury and death is inscribed on the oligarchs' banner to make Canada open for business. Open for business for the global oligopolies means that public monies should as first priority be given to them in pay-the-rich schemes to increase their competitiveness and not "squandered" in social programs such as caring for injured workers and enforcing standards at workplaces to protect the health and safety of workers.

The oligarchs have invented ugly concepts and practices such as "risk management" to eliminate regulations and standards meant to protect workers, the public and environment from hazards arising from modern production methods. Those modern forces of production bring with them increasingly serious and complex health and safety issues, including mental health. Recognizing and eliminating dangers and compensating workers when affected have become problems to resolve. The resolution of these problems conflicts with the aim of the oligarchs in control who see all measures to ensure the well-being of workers and the public as a drain on the private profits they can expropriate from the value workers produce.

Under the imperialist banner of being open for business and defeating global competition, legislative and regulatory arrangements that are supposed to ensure the involvement of workers in the development of standards for recognition and resolution of health and safety problems have been replaced by the unrestricted power of global private interests. Negotiations to resolve problems and even to come to terms of employment with collective agreements meeting the approval of workers have been replaced with overbearing monopoly dictate backed up by state-organized decrees, court orders and legislation.



An example is the situation in the post office. Canada Post is now the federal employment sector with the highest number of disabling injuries per year. Canada Post refuses to recognize the problem and negotiate a solution with postal workers. During the recent rotating strikes of postal workers waged in part to resolve this situation, the Trudeau government introduced back-to-work legislation, which effectively gave Canada Post management a way to refuse to negotiate and solve any of the outstanding issues including those involving health and safety.



Smash the Silence on Workplace Injuries and Death

Instead of coming up with concrete measures to humanize the workplace, which is in contradiction with the aim of the rich for private profit, the oligarchs concoct slogans and watchwords such as "Workplaces without accidents" and "Risk management" to hide and distort the reality of workplace death and injury and silence the voice of workers.

An example from Canada is an official statistical aberration of an increase of workplace deaths within a context of a decrease in officially reported injuries. It must be remembered as well, that the number of reported workplace deaths does not include many workers who die from occupational diseases. The oligarchs applaud the statistical anomaly of more deaths and fewer reported injuries as some sort of victory. Of course, a decrease in injuries is not the reality workers face. The statistics are meant to excuse inaction and ignore the unresolved problems and even get to the bottom of why suddenly workers are reporting far fewer injuries on the job. The fight to smash the silence on the reality of workplace injuries, the lack of care workers face when injured, and the poverty and state-organized indifference and abuse injured workers suffer has become a constant and difficult struggle.



The Situation Facing Migrant Workers



The United Nations defines a migrant worker as "a person who is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national." Their number is estimated by the International Labor Organization at about 164 million worldwide. This number does not include those seeking asylum as refugees or undocumented workers who work in anonymity without any official rights or protection.

Migrant workers face a most untenable situation regarding their health and safety on the job and for care when injured. For these workers, the struggle is not only for healthy and safe working conditions, but also for the basic right to humane, healthy and safe living conditions and treatment when injured or sick and for assistance for their families when killed. They form a global pool of actual and potential labour that is subjected to the most inhumane treatment. The imperialist globalization of the labour market is used first to exploit migrant workers, sometimes called "guest workers" and deny them basic rights, and secondly to lower the living and working conditions of all workers.

One of the most blatant examples is the shameful activities of the human traffickers sent out into countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as Europe, to recruit or conscript cheap labour. The traffickers burden migrant workers with recruitment fees and other abuses, which in Canada are supposed to be illegal but are silently "tolerated." The migrant workers are not in a position to challenge the fees or any mistreatment although the onus is on them to take action because the companies that eventually buy migrants' capacity to work see enforcement of any regulations as an attack on their right to exploit the global labour market without rules or restrictions.



Even when obviously and grossly abused, the burden is on migrant workers to reveal the situation and for doing such they know that their situation may and most probably will become even more untenable. Certain conditions they face such as housing are often appalling. Migrant workers are cramped into small apartments or worse and forced to pay unaffordable rents, which are deducted from their pay. Yet all this occurs with impunity for those organizing the abuse because of lack of enforcement and the inherent vulnerability and desperation of migrant workers for employment, which often includes sending money back home to support their families.

The global monopolies are exploiting this situation to the hilt, expanding the categories of precarious, irregular and migrant workers through outsourcing, contract work, and the use of temporary foreign workers including foreign students. The big companies are now geared to take advantage of the global labour market and human trafficking as a means to increase their expropriation of the value workers produce as private profit. They even encourage imperialist state and private militaries to cause as much destruction as possible worldwide and sabotage of economies through war, blockades and sanctions to guarantee a constant and growing supply of migrant workers.

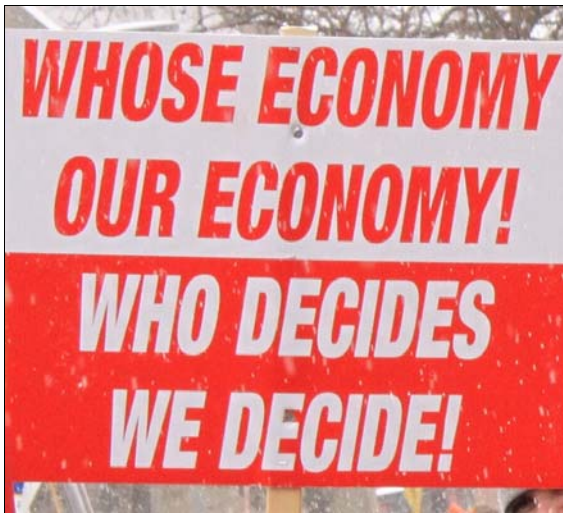
An example of destroying existing arrangements that exerted some control over a national labour market occurred in Australia. The global oligopoly Alcoa obtained a ruling from the state Labor Relations Board to cancel a collective agreement covering 1,500 of its workers. This enables Alcoa to outsource workers "under global market conditions" without restrictions imposed by a collective agreement to protect workers' rights either within national boundaries or globally. Massive private empires and their state representatives are organizing and sanctioning forms of modern wage slavery encompassing workers across the entire globe.

The situation is an open wound on the body politic and society. The social force capable of changing the situation is the organized working class.



Join the Organized Fight for Safe and Healthy Working Conditions; Smash The Silence!

The struggle of workers for safe and healthy working conditions is waged to guarantee this as a basic right for all workers. For this to occur, workers must have a say and control over their working conditions. Workers reject the dictate that they have no role to play in determining their conditions of work. They reject the state-organized view of the ruling oligarchs that because workers sell their capacity to work to them, workers lose any right to a say over the conditions at the workplace and how work is organized. The oligarchs want a free hand to do what they want with the human being from whom they buy their capacity to work. Workers reject and will never accept this slave mentality.



Workers are organizing to smash the silence about their conditions, both amongst themselves at their workplaces and in public as well. They are explaining what their issues are and how they are fighting for themselves and the broad public and society. They oppose the disinformation of the monopoly-controlled mass media and are putting forward demands that will change the situation in their favour and open a path towards a society fit for human beings.

The participation of all is required in actions with analysis to build a united and organized force in defence of workers' rights. Within the situation, activists are increasingly conscious of the need to

avoid being caught in various traps designed by the monopolies and governments in their service to paralyze their initiative. One such example is confining and tying up workers' organizations in the endless filing of grievances, fighting arbitrations and appealing to the imperialists to change their ways.

Aside from keeping issues hidden from co-workers and the public, the confining of struggles to traditional methods drains the finances of unions. In the current atmosphere of monopoly dictate and refusal to negotiate, organized workers are increasingly taking their fight into the arena of public opinion, to affirm and defend their rights such as the right to safe and healthy working conditions as well as their right to compensation at a Canadian standard in the face of increasing workplace injuries and work-related illness.



Actions Across the Country in Defence of Workers' Rights

Injured workers in Ontario are waging an intense campaign of mass actions under the theme "Workers' Comp Is a Right." This campaign includes an Ontario-wide day of action on May 14 in several cities and an Injured Workers' Day with events at Queen's Park and elsewhere on June 1.

Quebec nurses are affirming their right to working conditions without the organizational violence of mandatory overtime. They organized a successful day of action to refuse mandatory overtime on April 8. They are continuing their work to abolish mandatory overtime except in case of unforeseen

emergencies.

Steelworkers in Newfoundland and Labrador are saying "Lest We Forget," keeping in mind their successful Labour Day action in 2017. In 2017, Glen Nolan, the President of USW Local 9316 who suffers from cystic fibrosis, traveled 150 kilometres on foot and by bicycle from the Come By Chance refinery, where his local represents the workers, to the province's House of Assembly in St. John's. He was accompanied by his vice-president in a car. On behalf of the refinery workers, he denounced the dangerous conditions that prevailed at the refinery.

He denounced the exclusion of workers from safety management processes by the company and the government. The workers report an improvement in conditions since their action and told *Workers' Forum* they are constantly vigilant to ensure that they remain engaged in actions to defend their rights.



Railway workers have been campaigning for several years, on the basis of scientific data and the living experience of workers, to establish an equilibrium that must exist between work and rest hours in order to work safely. This includes the elimination of the requirement to be constantly on call, a condition imposed on them by the major railways.



Once again this year construction workers in Quebec are holding a solemn ceremony at the National Assembly in Quebec City on April 28. They will plant crosses on the lawn of the building, one for each worker who died during the year, and make presentations demanding that the government take responsibility to end the carnage in their industry.

The Migrants Resource Centre Canada and Migrante Ontario are organizing a petition campaign, including a door-to-door campaign with three demands: that the Ontario government adopt a policy to require all foreign recruitment agencies

to obtain a license from Employment Standards; that the government insist that all employers wanting to hire foreign workers in Ontario must first register with Employment Standards; that the Ontario government advocate to the federal government to provide permanent residency on landing for all migrant workers coming to work in Canada.

Teachers who are members of the Autonomous Teachers Federation in Quebec are waging a campaign for the "Professional Affirmation" of their members. It aims to develop a collective stand and a collective voice determined by the teachers themselves. One of the goals is to build their capacity to say No! collectively to administrations or to the government that try to impose conditions on them through dictate.



For Your Information

Data on Workplace Fatalities and Injuries in Canada and Internationally

The most recent statistics available on fatalities and injuries at the workplace in Canada are from the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada (AWCBC) and date back to 2017.

The statistics indicate that in 2017 the number of workplace fatalities was 951, up from 905 in 2016, 852 in 2015 and 919 in 2014.

This translates into 2.6 workplace deaths every day. Sectors with the highest number of fatalities were construction (217), manufacturing (160), government services (93) and transportation and storage (70). Of these fatalities, 333 were due to traumatic injuries and disorders and 590 to various occupational diseases.

Amongst the 951 who died, 920 were men and 31 were women. Four were young workers aged between 15 and 19, 19 others were between 20-24 years old and another 19 were between the ages of 25 and 29.

The comparison between data regarding fatalities and claims accepted for lost time due to a work-related injury or disease is revealing in terms of an obvious discrepancy in the evolution of both sets of figures. In Canada, from 1996-2000, the average number of claims for accepted lost time was 600,000 per year. From 2013 to 2017, it fell dramatically and some would say surprisingly to 240,000 a year.

Meanwhile, the average number of work-related fatalities between 1996 to 2000 was 805 a year, rising to 905 per year between 2013 to 2017.

This indicates a likely high number of unreported injuries even amongst unionized workers, but also a high number of claims that were either contested or rejected, as well as a massive shift of the workforce towards precarious employment of all kinds. Precarious employment continues to rise even amongst the workforce the monopolies employ. More and more work is being contracted out or in other ways made irregular.

Precarious or irregular workers by definition are considered disposable. They can be swiftly replaced when they complain, are injured and file injury claims. Any action threatens the employment of the irregular worker. Many injuries and of course occupational diseases are unreported. The precarious nature of the work becomes part of the consciousness at work. The monopolies even exert pressure on subcontractors to the effect that their contracts may be lost if "their" workers complain, file injury claims or otherwise "cause trouble."

Often, a company will deny that it has any link with hired workers altogether. They may claim that they are just unknown people sent by agencies and the real "boss" is the company handling the contracting, which operate in ways similar to human traffickers.

Not reporting accidents has a financial incentive for companies in certain provinces. Employers in Ontario are given government "rebates" if they reduce the number of injuries "their" workers report.

In 2017, 251,625 claims were accepted for lost time due to a work-related injury or disease, up from 241,508 in 2016 and 232,629 in 2015 although these statistics are a far cry from the average 600,000 a year from 1996 to 2000.

The current sectors with the highest number of claims accepted for lost time were health and social

services (45,001), manufacturing (33,893), retail trade (27,392) and construction (26,510), the same sectors as in recent years, but with a higher level of accepted lost-time.

The compensation system remains litigious and difficult, injured workers say. Their compensation benefits are routinely cut or reduced by the provincial or federal agency responsible. This takes place in some jurisdictions under the hoax of reviewing pre-existing conditions or through the cruel practice of deeming, when the agency assumes that a worker has been hired to a position even when this is not the case, or under the general watchword of eliminating the unfunded liability of the system and other schemes.

Internationally, according to recent estimates released by the International Labour Organization (ILO), each year around 2.78 million workers die from occupational accidents and work-related diseases.

An additional 374 million workers suffer from non-fatal occupational accidents.

Globally 1,000 people are estimated to die every day as a result of occupational accidents and a further 6,500 from work-related diseases.

The aggregate figures indicate an overall increase in the number of annual deaths attributed to work from 2.33 million deaths in 2014 to 2.78 million deaths in 2017.

Estimates suggest that circulatory system diseases (31 per cent), work-related cancers (26 per cent) and respiratory diseases (17 per cent) contribute to almost three-quarters of the total work-related mortality. Diseases are the cause of the great majority of work-related deaths (2.4 million deaths or 86.3 per cent), in comparison to fatal occupational accidents (which make up the remaining 13.7 per cent).

According to ILO estimates, the burden of occupational mortality and morbidity is distributed in the following way.

About two-thirds (65 per cent) of global work-related mortality occurs in Asia, followed by Africa (11.8 per cent), Europe (11.7 per cent), all of America (10.9 per cent) and Oceania (0.6 per cent).

Neo-liberal free trade agreements, which are now being supplanted with direct control by oligopolies of all trading arrangements outside of state to state agreements, and the anti-social offensive deregulating any rules governing workplace safety and increasing precarious work and the open exploitation of a global labour market are major factors in the continued deterioration of living and working conditions, including health and safety at work, in all countries.

The concentration of decision-making power in the hands of global oligopolies is on a supranational basis. The oligopolies consider health and safety regulations as impediments to their drive for profit and domination. Deaths and injuries take a particularly heavy toll on workers in the countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean as a result of their super-exploitation.

The International Trade Union Confederation reported a few years ago that global oligopolies such as Samsung, Apple, Walmart and others directly employ less than six per cent of the workers who create the value of their global empires. The other 94 per cent work for smaller companies tied to the monopolies or are supplied (trafficked) by employee subcontractors. These workers generally face even worse conditions within an atmosphere of insecurity, and are left with little or no support when it comes to health and safety at work and when injured or sick.

The situation is very similar in Canada where the working class has been divided into arbitrary categories such as "independent contractor," "temporary foreign worker," "undocumented worker," amongst others. Employers use such designations, along with the increase in short-term and casual

jobs and other forms of precarious employment, to impose increasingly unsafe and unhealthy conditions.

The ILO has now started to examine the impact of climate change, air pollution and environmental degradation on the health and safety of workers. For the moment, what exists are mostly projections. For example, it anticipates that a projected increase in global temperatures of 1.5°C by the end of the 21st century will render 2 per cent of all work hours too hot to work by 2030, and that the increase in the temperature will have an impact on the health of half of the world's population, which live near the Equator. These workers are amongst the poorest and work outdoors in sectors such as agriculture. It also estimates that premature death from exposure to air pollution will increase by up to five times by 2060.

ILO studies dedicate only a few paragraphs to the actual plight of migrant workers in terms of health and safety. They note that most migrant workers are employed in sectors such as agriculture, construction or domestic work and work under precarious conditions with little, if any, legal protection. Their number is estimated at 160 million.

The Canadian experience has shown that migrant workers are employed in the most difficult jobs with conditions similar to indentured labour imposed on them by recruitment agencies, the monopolies and governments. The conditions of employment are detrimental to their health and safety as well as to their overall living and working conditions.

For example, migrant workers are officially covered in Ontario by the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, which in theory gives them the right to refuse unsafe work and legally prohibits employer reprisals for workers exercising that right or any other issue contained in the Act. However, the onus is placed on the workers themselves to speak out, and activists working with injured workers say that migrant workers who become injured are routinely put on a plane and sent back home before government inspectors are able to examine their case.

Migrant workers are disposed of when not needed or are considered a problem even faster than non-migrant contract workers despite all the chatter from governments about human rights and looking after the well-being of workers. Activists and some of the unions working with migrant workers and others needing assistance are the ones that actually take care of them and attempt to meet their needs.



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