



# DAY OF MOURNING, APRIL 28<sup>TH</sup>



Some 23 years after CUPE's National Health and Safety Committee recommended the creation of a remembrance day for workers killed or injured on the job, we are still demanding health and safety justice in our workplaces.

The Canadian Labour Congress and affiliated unions quickly adopted the day across Canada. The American labour movement observed its first workers' memorial day in 1989. April 28<sup>th</sup> was chosen because it marks the anniversary of the passage of the first Canadian Workers' Compensation Act on April 28, 1914, in Ontario.

CUPE chose the canary in a cage as the internationally recognized symbol fitting for April 28<sup>th</sup>. In the 1800s, miners took a caged canary with them into the mines

(canaries are more sensitive to airborne hazards and the absence of oxygen than humans). If the canaries were overcome, it was a sign to quickly evacuate the mine.

Today, different levels of government recognize the day. The federal government passed legislation in 1991 declaring April 28<sup>th</sup> "A Day of Remembrance for Workers Killed or Injured at Work." Each year more Canadian municipalities and provinces recognize April 28<sup>th</sup>. In some instances, employers also participate in the activities that mark the Day of Mourning.

But, let's not forget how the day originated and why workers come together. The Day of Mourning was born of the values of unionists. It was created to stop the needless injuries and deaths that occur each and every day, when employers are negligent or governments fail to enforce laws. It is a powerful symbol of workers' ongoing struggles for decent, safe working conditions and basic human rights.

This April 28<sup>th</sup> please take part in your local's activities to mark the day. We must mourn the dead and continue to fight for the living.

## CUPE WORKPLACE FATALITIES IN 2006

Kim Weitzel	CUPE 873
Shawn Currier	CUPE 873
Jason Negrich	CUPE 857
Alain Simard	CUPE 957
Frederick Michael Bonvie	CUPE 281

Five CUPE members died at work in the last year. It is always with great sadness that our union reports these deaths because we know that all fatalities are preventable.

Sister **Kim Weitzel**, 44 years old, was a paramedic in Kimberley, B.C., who died on May 17 while trying to save two mine technicians who had collapsed at the Sullivan mine.

Brother **Shawn Currier**, 21 years old, also a paramedic in Kimberley, B.C., worked with Weitzel. Currier died while trying to save Weitzel and the two mine technicians. Both paramedics died after collapsing in an oxygen-deficient sampling shed.

Brother **Jason Negrich**, 32 years old, was a seasonal labourer with the City of Dauphin, Manitoba. Negrich died on August 14 from severe head trauma due to a fall.

Brother **Alain Simard**, 28 years old, was an electrical technician with Hydro-Quebec who died on October 12 while servicing a turbine at Hydro-Quebec's Rapide-7

power plant at a dam in the Abitibi region. Simard died after allegedly falling into the turbine.

Brother **Frederick Michael (Mike) Bonvie**, 40 years old, was an operator with New Glasgow and Westville's public works department in Nova Scotia. Bonvie died October 26 while installing a sewer line after the walls of the trench he

was working in collapsed. He had only been on the job for four days.

CUPE calls on governments to enforce their respective health and safety legislation and we call on employers to respect the lives and dignity of CUPE members and all working people.

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## FIVE A DAY: WORKPLACE DEATHS INCREASE

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A report published by the Ottawa-based Centre for the Study of Living Standards (CSLS) shows workplace fatalities are up 45 per cent from 1993 and 18 per cent from 2004 compared to 2005. The statistics point to glaring failures to protect workers' lives.

The report, *Five Deaths a Day: Workplace Fatalities in Canada, 1993-2005*, gets its title from the fact that there were 1,097 workplace fatalities in 2005 or five deaths per workday, according to the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada (AWCBC).

The CSLS report provides detailed analysis of these fatalities, based on factors such as industry, age, geography, trends in fatalities, as well as a comparison of Canada's record internationally.

Some key findings include:

- Asbestos-related workplace deaths accounted for 31 per cent of all workplace fatalities.
- The incidence of workplace deaths for men was 30 times higher than for women in 2005.
- The incidence of workplace deaths for older workers (60-64) was 10 times higher than for young workers (15-19).
- Canada had the fifth highest rate of workplace fatalities of 29 OECD (Organization for Economic

Co-operation and Development) countries, according to the International Labour Organization.

- Half of all workplace fatalities are attributed to occupational disease.

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The report states an obvious fact that CUPE has been declaring for many years: workplace fatalities are preventable and unacceptable.

"Unfortunately, the CSLS report shows only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to workplace fatalities," said CUPE's Health and Safety Branch director, Anthony Pizzino.

"These statistics only take into account deaths recognized by compensation boards. They do not consider the many other deaths that go unreported or uncompensated," said Pizzino.

"For example, the occupational disease statistics – particularly with respect to asbestos – are surely grossly underestimated as many deaths are attributed to factors other than the workplace, when, in fact, asbestos exposure at an early age may be the real cause for a worker's death decades later."

The report also points out the failure of training and enforcement. Workers are not being properly trained, properly informed of their workplace rights, and properly equipped with the tools and techniques to work safely. Enforcement of existing health and safety laws that protect workers is also failing based on these fatalities.

# SARS COMMISSION SAYS PROTECT HEALTH CARE WORKERS

The final report of Ontario's SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) Commission clearly points out that health care workers should have been better protected, and would have been if the fundamentals of occupational health and safety were followed.

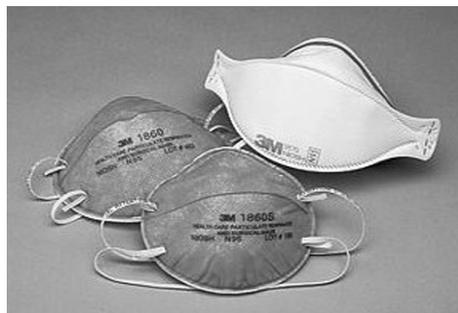
Justice Archie Campbell wrote the report, calling hospitals as dangerous a place to work as mines and factories because hospital workers have never been given the

same protection as workers in those sectors.

Campbell's report is filled with recommendations that aim to strengthen occupational health and safety by emphasizing the precautionary principle: actions to eliminate risks should not await scientific certainty. With all the uncertainty around SARS, more should have been done to protect workers.

"Most important, the problems include Ontario's failure to recog-

nize in hospital worker safety the precautionary principle that reasonable action to reduce risk, like the use of a fitted N95 respirator, need not await scientific certainty," wrote Justice Campbell.



## REVIEW OF B.C. MINE TRAGEDY SPURS CHANGES

Following the deaths of CUPE B.C. paramedics Kim Weitzel and Shawn Currier comes a report with several key recommendations from B.C.'s chief mine inspector, Fred Hermann.

The report, released in October 2006, presents Hermann's conclusions about the causes of the fatalities and recommendations to ensure the safety of emergency responders. It is aimed at the British Columbia Ambulance Service (BCAS), which is the employer of B.C.'s paramedics.

The recommendations include:

- Training for paramedics on how to recognize and safeguard against hazards they could encounter on a mine site.
- Accompaniment of paramedics by a qualified representative designated by the mine.
- Ambulances to be equipped with up-to-date emergency response guidebooks.

Hermann acknowledged that the deaths of the CUPE paramedics and the two mine technicians were unprecedented for occurring in a sampling shed. However, he pointed out that basic hazard recognition training could have helped save Currier, who entered the shed to aid Weitzel.

As hazard recognition training hasn't existed, B.C. paramedics have asked the BCAS to review policies, putting the emphasis on safety awareness. In response, the BCAS has set up an "implementation team" to put Hermann's recommendations into action.

It's worth quoting Justice Campbell on the debate around N95 respirators, protection that CUPE has been demanding for our members: "Part of the heated debate during the SARS outbreak was over whether N95 respirators were really necessary. Those who argued against the N95, which protects against airborne transmission, believed SARS was spread mostly by large droplets. As a result, they said, an N95 was unnecessary except in certain circumstances and a surgical mask was sufficient in most instances. They made this argument even though knowledge about SARS and about airborne transmission was still evolving. That more and more studies have since been published indicating the possibility under certain circumstances of airborne transmission, not just of SARS but of influenza, suggests the wisdom and prudence of taking a precautionary approach in the absence of scientific certainty."

For more information on SARS see <http://www.cupe.ca/sars/ART3fa0241b0685a>

# FRAN LUDWICK JOINS ONTARIO HEALTH AND SAFETY STAFF



Sister Fran Ludwick is the new bilingual national health and safety representative working out of the Sudbury office. Sister Ludwick, who has a long history of health and safety activism, is working with Sister Donna Wright – the two are covering the province with Sister Ludwick working mostly in Northern Ontario, Ottawa, Cornwall and with Ontario French locals. She started as health and safety representative on September 7, 2006.

Sister Ludwick worked at Extendicare in Kirkland Lake as a health care aide in the 1980s. She witnessed many co-workers get injured on the job with a lot of back injuries from heavy lifting and lifting alone. She also worked for the Association for Community Living (ACL) in Kirkland Lake as an instructor helping secondary school students with behaviour problems and mild intellectual disabilities.

Once the ACL was unionized with CUPE, Sister Ludwick became vice-president of her local for approximately six months and then became president in May 1990.

She continued to be re-elected until November 2003 when she became a CUPE staff representative. During her time as president, she was active on the health and safety front with harassment and bullying being key problems in her workplace.

**Health and Safety Update** is published four times a year by CUPE's National Health and Safety Branch. For more information please contact:

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## CONFERENCE LOOKS AT OCCUPATIONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CANCERS

Prevent Cancer Now will be holding a cancer prevention conference May 24 to 27, 2007 in Ottawa to raise awareness and foster a national movement to help prevent environmental and occupational cancer.

The non-profit organization has active participation from the labour movement and is pushing governments to adopt a cancer prevention model that looks at eliminating carcinogens from the workplace, environment and home.

The conference's four goals are to:

- Develop a proclamation of action for cancer prevention.
- Foster a Canadian movement of groups and individuals with common goals for cancer prevention at the local, provincial and federal levels.
- Heighten media awareness about primary prevention.
- Provide tools and strategies to assist local groups with public education campaigns.

See <http://www.preventcancer.ca/default.asp> for more information on Prevent Cancer Now and the upcoming conference.

**CANCER PREVENTION CONFERENCE - MAY 24-27, 2007 - OTTAWA**