

Warning: this government could seriously damage your safety

Lord David Young's report on reforming health and safety laws is due to be released as The Socialist goes to press. Young has said that health and safety has been turned into a 'music hall joke'. A health and safety officer explains that this report, rather than encouraging 'a return to common sense' is more likely to be a serious threat to workers' rights.

BEHIND ALL the headline cuts that are hitting workers day after day is a less noticeable attack. Lord Young, a hatchet man in Margaret Thatcher's Tory cabinet, is being used by David Cameron to roll back the advances, made by trade unions, in making workplaces safer.

Bosses have always hated health and safety (H&S); at best they pay lip service to it.

The newspapers try to rubbish it with headlines such as "Clown cannot wear giant shoes due to health and safety" (Daily Telegraph 23 April 2009), "Now pin the tail on the donkey falls victim to health and safety fears" (Daily Mail, 10 May 2010) and "Health and Safety chiefs ban candy floss sticks" (Click Liverpool, 30 May 2010).

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) now produces "myth of the month" to debunk the lies put out by the papers.

The Tories have attacked the "compensation culture", which has reportedly gripped the country. Liberal Democrat Vince Cable will chair the Reducing Regulation Committee and says that "the cost of employing people clearly needs to be reduced".

As a full time health and safety officer, my time is spent managing how H&S is carried out and inform-

ing senior management and supervisors how to keep the company compliant with all H&S law and regulations.

I have to ensure staff and contractors appreciate hazards and workplace risks with regular training and 'permits to work' for dangerous activities.

I have to get the risks identified and actions taken to reduce them, ensuring they are continually reassessed to check that all agreed actions have been carried out.

When I started at the company it was only 40% compliant with the law. Before that it was only 10% compliant despite having someone in charge of H&S. However, he had no training. Prior to my time, he was replaced by someone with little experience and training. Outside consultants had to be brought

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Too much red tape?

in. The H&S culture hadn't changed and compliancy stayed at 40%. This is typical of small to medium size companies.

Due to years of campaigning, unionised workplaces are much safer than the rest. Most employers see H&S as a 'ticking the box' exercise that costs them money. My job is to change that culture.

The safety campaign group Hazards recently reported that workplaces can expect to see a HSE inspector once every 38 years, compared with once every eight years a decade ago. This means that serious criminal safety breaches are going unseen and unchallenged.

The accident rate has fallen as H&S has changed the way we work. No longer do large projects like rail-

ways and skyscrapers get measured in terms of how many workers died during construction.

As Thompsons Solicitors points out: "health and safety legislation does protect millions every day from being injured or killed at work. Deaths at work, though still unacceptably high at 151 in the last year, are at an all time low."

HSE figures show that recorded major accidents have fallen in recent years in manufacturing and construction. But in public services they have risen as cutbacks have set in.

Thompson's statistics show a fall in the number of union-backed personal injury claims of between 19% and 36%. This shows up the lie of Cameron and co who say that

we live in a "compensation culture". Government statistics from the Compensation Recovery Unit (CRU) show that employer liability claims have fallen by 69% - from 219,183 in 2000/1 to 78,744 in 2009/10.

Outside of work the same is true, despite the continuous adverts for 'no win no fee' legal firms. The only exceptions to this trend are road traffic accident (RTA) cases. They have risen significantly. RTA cases are 70% of the personal injury market.

So why the hype? The Con-Dem government wants to systematically attack gains made over the last 30 years. Every union member must take up this attack on our rights and fight back against these threats to our health and safety.

Labour councillor's contempt for care centre users

ON 30 September Ealing Labour councillor and adult social services portfolio holder Jasbir Anand was invited to the Albert Dane Centre (ADC). The service user committee and staff wanted to ask her questions on the proposed closure of the centre. The ADC is a day centre for adults with a physical disability or sensory impairment.

Lydia Dalton

Ealing Unison children and adult services convenor (personal capacity)

Councillor Anand was greeted at the centre's gates by service users holding up banners. They had been instructed not to place them on council property. They chanted slogans including "hands off our centre" and "no cuts to frontline services".

Service users, carers, staff and independent people from the community packed the hall to question and listen to Councillor Anand. Service user group chairperson Val Garrard read out a series of questions that other users had asked her to put forward. Anand was attacked for ducking several questions.

Anand said that the: "Private and voluntary sector would do a better job of providing the service they require than ADC staff." This was met by gasps from the staff who stood at the back of the room.

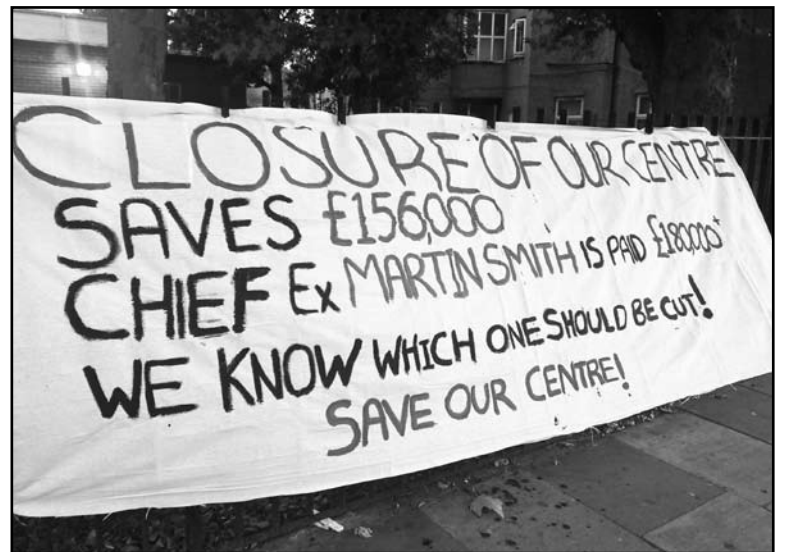
The local pastor put forward a financial proposal to keep the centre open. He spoke of the myth that the voluntary sector would have capacity to cope with the demand and said that the councillor needed to be more honest. To this Councillor Anand shouted at him and said:

"Don't you dare call me a liar. You have attended my surgeries in the past. I have tried to help you out. I won't help you anymore."

Anand's aggressive behaviour was met by a tirade of anger from users who spoke passionately about their need for the service.

Having had my hand up for 40 minutes, service users forced the council official who was chairing to let me speak. However, Anand heckled and said "I'm not interested in talking to the unions" while refusing to answer my question.

Councillor Anand's apparent contempt for staff, users and carers didn't end there. She was unfazed by the hostile reaction from the crowd and defiantly replied: "I own half of Southall. I'm very popular. I got voted in so at least a few people must like me."



One of the banners removed from council property.

photo London SP

Save Buttercups nursery

NHS WORKERS and parents are fighting the planned November closure of the Buttercups NHS Nursery at the North Staffordshire Hospital.

The staff are some of the hardest working and lowest paid in the NHS and many have worked at the nursery for many years, as opposed to the private sector where the staff are often less qualified and the turnover is high.

The nursery provides pre-school care for NHS staff and other members of the public.

Hospital officials say they can no longer afford £250,000 in annual

subsidies to keep it open. However, staff and parents have questioned this figure since they pay very similar levels for the nursery places as in the private sector.

In 2009/10 the hospital made a surplus of £5.3 million. £1.7 billion is being paid to 'rent' the new 'super hospital' from private owners. This is almost five times what it cost the 'owners' to build it.

Please help parents and NHS staff fight this decision. Email robert.bryan@unhs.nhs.uk to ask hospital management to reconsider.

Andy Bentley
Stoke Socialist Party

Fight the government's spending review axe

Protest against the Con-Dems' comprehensive cuts on 23 October

London Assemble 11am, RMT HQ, 39 Chalton Street, NW1 1JD. March to Bedford Square for a rally, then to the SERTUC rally in Congress House at 12 noon.

Cardiff All-Wales demo. Assemble Cardiff City Hall, 12 noon.

Manchester NSSF demo. Assemble St Peter's Square, 11am. Public meeting after the demo: 2pm, Peterloo Room @ Mechanics Institute, 103 Princess Street, city centre salfordtuc@hotmail.co.uk 07904 965 780

Bristol and district anti-cuts alliance demo. Assemble 11am, Castle Park, Broadmead. Rally: 12 noon, College Green.

Also on 23 October: demos in Lincoln and Wigan. For more details see www.socialistparty.org.uk
To publicise action in your area email editors@socialistparty.org.uk