

## **PEI Federation of Labour's President's Speech for the 2008 Day of Mourning Ceremony**

Sisters & Brothers,  
Ladies and 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 here on PEI.

The theme of this year's Day of Mourning Ceremony is "Mourn the Dead, Fight for the Living - Now more than ever."

The PEI Federation of Labour has always firmly believed and continues to fight to ensure that all workers have the right to a safe and healthy work environment and we are fully committed to reaching the ultimate goal of eliminating all workplace fatalities and injuries on PEI including those that have not been recognized as having roots in the workplace; be it illness or occupational disease.

However as I look at the statistics across this great country of ours. You have to wonder what has gone wrong? where have we failed?.

Because between 1984, the year the Day of Mourning was established, and 2006, 19,805 workers in Canada including 50 in PEI have died on the job and over 18 million in Canada including 43,146 in PEI have been injured. Since 1998, workplace deaths in Canada have increased from 798 to 976 in 2006 with a high of 1,097 in 2005. In 2007 here in PEI there were 2 workplace deaths.

Once again I ask what has gone wrong, where have we failed. How do we finally reach our ultimate goal and ensure that no family has to face the emotional and economic challenges that come from the loss or injury of a loved one.

What must we do?

We must first and for most

**ENFORCE THE LAW!**

While there is always room for improvement, Canada has some of the best health and safety laws in the world. We know this because it was unions who fought for those laws to get passed.

While it is very important to have strong Occupational Health and Safety legislation, Our Governments must never think that their responsibility ends once that legislation is put in place. They must ensure that the penalties, resources, personnel, and political will are there to ensure that the Occupational Health and Safety Act is properly enforced and respected, and that workers and employers are properly educated on their rights and responsibilities. We are very concerned that PEI currently has only 5 Occupational Health and Safety Officers overseeing approximately 5000 Island workplaces and 69,300 workers.

While it is very important that we learn from and never forget the lessons that each tragedy brings us. Still it seems today that we are spending too much time figuring out “what happened” and fixing things after it’s already too late rather than educating, inspecting, and ensuring that injuries and deaths are prevented from happening in the first place.

We must also stop the reckless growth of foreign temporary workers as a source of cheap labour for greedy employers.

This is a recipe for disaster. All of the ingredients are there. Thousands of new workers. Many of them desperate to come and desperate to stay. Shipped into unfamiliar workplaces. Then poorly monitored because different levels of government can’t figure out who is responsible for their health and safety.

Despite the confusion. Despite the reports of abuse, and violence and exploitation, our government has chosen to accelerate this program.

Yes, these workers are getting injured. Yes, these workers are getting killed on the job. Oil patch workers have died in Alberta. Farm workers have died in British Columbia.

Federal and provincial governments must step forward and take responsibility for these workers and ensure that they are not brought into Canada as a way to allow employers to keep wages and employment standards low. Government must ensure that they are afforded the same wages and legislative standards and protections that all Canadians are afforded and expect when we go to work each day. They must also ensure that all temporary foreign workers are educated on their rights and responsibilities under Canadian and provincial laws before they ever step foot on a Canadian jobsite.

And finally at a time when the recommendations for the reform of our Worker’s Compensation Act is in the Provincial Government’s hands, we urge them to look at this as an opportunity to make sure that our legislation truly meets the needs of injured workers on PEI. The province needs to look at this review as an opportunity:

- To ensure that all Island workers have the right to be fully compensated if they are injured or become ill due to their work. No worker should ever be forced to continue working because they are denied fair compensation. The Three Day Waiting Period, currently in our Legislation, goes against this basic right and needs to be removed.
- To ensure that all work related disabilities, injuries, or illnesses, including repetitive strain and workplace stress, are covered under workers' compensation legislation and policy.
- and to ensure that the legislation provides all injured workers on PEI with fair and timely access to the benefits and rehabilitation they need as they recover from their injuries and work towards returning to their jobs. And if their injuries are too severe to allow a return to their job they should receive a pension that adequately recognizes and compensates them for their losses.

In the end there is something positive to say, this is the first year since I have been President of the PEI Federation of Labour that there have been no workplace deaths on PEI from last year's ceremony to this year's. With a lot work, dedication, and commitment to workplace safety from unions, individual workers, government, and employers it is my greatest hope that this is something I can say again on April 28, 2009.

Employers must know that creating an unsafe work environment will not be tolerated in P.E.I. It is all of our responsibilities to ensure safe working conditions not only now but in the future.

In conclusion, On this day, our thoughts and prayers are with the families of those who have lost their lives on the job. We mourn their loss and we pledge to continue to fight for the living so that these tragedies never occur again.

Once again I would like to thank everyone for their attendance today