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London began International Workers Memorial Day with a protest outside the Qatar Embassy.

UCATT General Secretary Steve Murphy & Gail Cartmail Assistant General Secretary of Unite the Union, handed in a letter demanding workers' rights. The letter is also a protest against the deaths and injuries that have sadly occurred on Qatar building sites, as the small nation prepares for the World Cup. During the rally that followed at the Building Worker Statue, Steve Murphy described his recent visit to Qatar where more than 600 migrant construction workers have died in the last year: Those who remain, live in abject poverty whilst working in the richest nation on earth.

Slavery

The two million migrant construction workers in Qatar work under the 'kafala system' which Steve Murphy described as slavery. Workers' passports are confiscated leaving them unable to leave the country without their employer's permission. Many arrive in debt having taken out high interest loans to cover the thousand pound fee needed to be allowed to

work in Qatar, despite these jobs paying as little as 45p per hour. UCATT's message is clear: "FIFA must not allow the World Cup to be played in blood stained stadiums."

Climate of fear

Unite the Union has heard from UK workers who are afraid to join trade unions because they fear being sacked and even blacklisted. Gail Cartmail said of Workers Memorial Day "Today we remember the dead and we also pledge to fight for the living worldwide because globally an injury to one is an injury to all".

Tony O'Brien, Secretary of the Construction Safety Campaign read out the names of each of the four building workers who have lost their lives on London sites in the last six months. CSC organised vigils at each of these sites and Tony O'Brien encouraged all present to continue the important work to highlight deaths in the construction industry. The Observer recently reported on workers being afraid to raise health and safety concerns, a fact that CSC have been aware of for years. Unjust practices such as blacklisting contribute

to this climate of fear. Tony O'Brien sent congratulations to the electricians who have taken a stand in the fight against bogus self employment and urged everyone to play a part in the Fight4PAYE campaign.

The London Hazards Centre (LHC) organised today's vigil and rally with CSC and expressed pride at having been able to do so, particularly following funding difficulties last year. LHC made an appeal for trade union branches to affiliate to enable the organisation to continue its vital work. International Workers Memorial Day has been a truly international event and Paul Street of LHC was keen to continue to show support for workers globally. In its view the four recent deaths on London sites demonstrate "we can't rely on companies alone to manage health and safety". David Cameron was accused of "creating a reckless culture within construction". LHC also looked to the future and noted that whilst it is sad to remember those who have died, this event "inspires us to go forward and step up our fight for health, safety and trade union rights in the workplace".



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London Action Mesothelioma Day 2014

Hailed as a success by everyone involved, the London Action Mesothelioma Day event at Leigh Day Solicitors in Farringdon, had a top-flight platform of speakers, addressing key issues like increased funding for research into a cure for Mesothelioma, and opposition to government plans to replace Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007.

Jointly organised by the London Hazards Centre and East London Mesothelioma Support (ELMS), the event is held annually in memory of those who have died from Mesothelioma and other asbestos related diseases.

The chair of the event set the scene by reading out some of the terrible statistics connected with Mesothelioma. Around 2,500 people a year are diagnosed with the disease and it can take anything from 20-40 years to develop. Exposure to asbestos is always the cause – there is no cure. Students and staff are at risk because asbestos is present in over 75% of UK schools and colleges. The British Lung Foundation estimates that around 60,000 people will die from Mesothelioma in the next 30 years.

The speakers:

Dan Shears, from the GMB National Health & Safety Office

Tony O'Brien from the Construction Safety Campaign

Rachel Thomas, from the Guy's and St Thomas lung cancer team,

Dan Easton from Leigh day Solicitors together with Phil Lewis of Unison
Vince Hagedorn from the Asbestos in Schools Group

After a question and discussion session the meeting expressed support for the following action:

- Signing the e-petition calling for the government to increase Mesothelioma Research Funding at <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/59014> or go to the e-petition website and key in Mesothelioma in the search box.

- Supporting the call for an international ban on the use of asbestos and banning the import and export of it

- Endorsing the TUC 10-point Manifesto of measures for implementation by a future government



- Setting-up a new London Asbestos Support Group
- Endorsing the Action Mesothelioma Charter
- Opposing government plans to replace Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007.
- For existing health and safety standards to be strictly enforced and increased workplace inspections.

The event closed with the release of a flock of white doves (below) to remember all those who have died from asbestos diseases. This was the ninth annual Action Mesothelioma Day and similar events were being held in Manchester, Liverpool, Dundee, Sheffield, Birmingham, Southsea and Leicester.

AFFILIATE AND HELP KEEP US GOING

We are asking you to affiliate to the London Hazards Centre so that we can continue the work we was set up to do in 1985 – provide advice, information and training to make London a safer place in which to live and work.

Arguably the work of the London Hazards Centre has never been more important as a result of huge cuts in the Health & Safety Executive's budget and the scrapping of key pieces of health and safety legislation by the conservative-led government.

The London Hazards Centre is also a campaigning organisation that takes a lead on issues like safety reps rights, as well as working closely with trade unions and other organisations, for example, to fight against blacklisting.

We need your support. We are asking individuals, trade union branches and regions, along with community organisations – to affiliate to us. The annual affiliation fees set out below remain the lifeblood of the London Hazards Centre.

£10 for individuals

£30 small groups

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£200 National Organisations

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Asbestos in schools: a problem too big to handle?

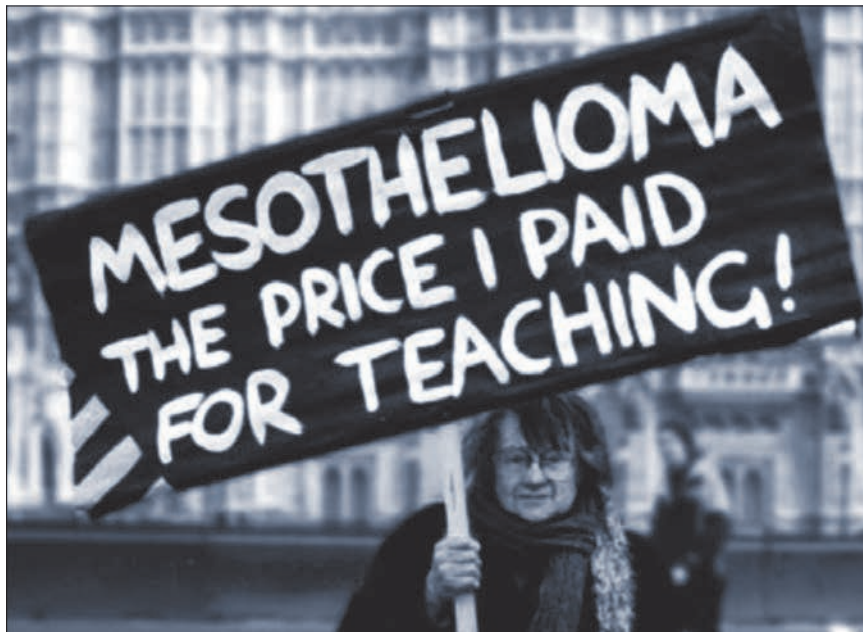


Photo: Eve Barker

More than 75% of our schools contain asbestos. This major problem of our schools, has never been properly addressed because successive Governments have felt that the problem is too big to handle.

Teachers, support staff and former pupils are dying of mesothelioma, with more than 140 school teachers dying in the last ten years.

Last year the Committee on 'Carcinogenicity (CoC) concluded that children are 'vulnerable to exposure to asbestos, the younger the child the greater the risk'. With the life time risk to a five year old child being more than five times greater than an adult aged thirty. Evidence was given to the Education Select Committee that between 200 to 300 people will die each year because of their asbestos exposure as a child at school during the 1960s and 1970s.

Exposures continue

But the problem has not gone away as most of the asbestos remains in our schools. That is because Government policy is that, so long as the asbestos is in good condition and not disturbed or damaged, it is safer for the occupants to leave it in place for the remaining life of the building and manage it than it is removing it. But schools contain children, and, even

with the best system of asbestos management, any asbestos in a place accessible to children is liable to be disturbed and damaged. The exposures therefore continue and people will inevitably continue dying.

Asbestos is everywhere

Britain has the worst incidence of mesothelioma in the world, and it is considered that the reason for this is because we imported more amosite than for any other country. Asbestos Insulating Board (AIB) contains amosite and large amounts were used in schools, in the walls and ceilings, door and window surrounds of classrooms, corridors, toilets, halls and gyms. Tests have shown that slamming doors can release significant levels of asbestos fibres into the rooms, as can taking books out of a stationary cupboard or children jostling down a busy corridor that has AIB walls. Heating systems can also contain asbestos and tests have shown that they can blow amosite fibres into the classrooms.

So what is the solution? In the 1980s the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and the Inner London Education Authority had a policy of identifying the most dangerous asbestos materials and progressively removing them, because they consid-

ered that it is not only safer but in the long run it is also cheaper. But, when the organisations ceased to exist, the policy was dropped.

All the asbestos is now old and the school estate is generally in a dilapidated condition, so as the fabric of the buildings deteriorate, then so does the asbestos they contain. The last Government acknowledged that there was a problem and embarked on an ambitious scheme to rebuild or refurbish all the secondary schools in the country, as part of that asbestos would have been removed. This Government has a far smaller scheme and is only rebuilding a few schools in the worst condition. The asbestos will therefore remain in most schools and have to be managed long into the future.

In light of the conclusion of the CoC, the Government is currently reviewing its asbestos policy for schools. The Asbestos in Schools Group has proposed that:

- Data on the extent, type and condition of asbestos in schools is centrally collated so that financial forecasts can be made and those schools with the worst problem can be identified and priorities set.
- The Government should set a programme for the progressive removal of asbestos from schools.
- All governors, headteachers, teachers and support staff should be trained in asbestos management or awareness depending on their role.
- Proactive inspections by HSE of the standards of asbestos management in schools should be reinstated.
- A policy of openness should be adopted. Parents, teachers and support staff should be annually updated on the presence of asbestos in their school and the measures that are being taken to manage it.

Michael Lees

Crossrail: a culture of fear and spying



Photo: Eve Barker

Work started on the £15bn publicly funded Crossrail project, Europe's largest construction site, in May 2009. Since then there have been significant concerns about the way the project is being run.

In September 2012 UNITE Shop Steward, Frank Morris, electrician, was removed from the project for raising concerns about health and safety. To remove him Crossrail had to end its contract with EIS Electrical and 30 people lost their jobs. Following a yearlong campaign Frank was reinstated in September 2013.

In March 2013 the joint venture BBMV (Balfour Beatty, BeMa

Tunnelling, Morgan Sindall and Vinci Construction) commissioned a MindSafety report. This revealed a culture of spying and fear with workers too scared to report near misses and injuries for fear of being sacked.

Whistle blower "Tom" commenced work on the project in January 2013. He had immediate concerns about health and safety. He was expected to use a jackhammer for up to 7 hours at a time, in contravention of HSE guidance. This eventually led to him being signed off work in June 2013. He has not worked since.

Safety concerns

He made repeated attempts to alert BBMV and Crossrail to health and safety concerns, particularly in relation to the application of shotcrete. He witnessed men being required to work under freshly applied shotcrete in order to remove any excess that had been applied incompetently.

- On 3 July 2013 two men were seriously injured when an explosion occurred on the main electrical substation at the Pudding Mill Lane site. The cover plate of the inter connection chamber sheared off in the explosion and was later retrieved from the nearby DLR track.

- In September 2013 a Crossrail vehicle was involved in a fatal collision with a cyclist.

- In March 2014 a coroner's court heard that 2 of the HGV's 3 side sensors were not working and the driver had been using a hands-free mobile phone at the time of the collision.

- Rene Tkacik was fatally injured on 7 March 2014 when he was hit by a section of freshly applied shotcrete. Following Rene's death "Tom" compiled a list of accidents and near misses with the HSE and approached BBMV and Crossrail to seek assurances that steps would be taken to avoid any further injuries and deaths. They refused to discuss his concerns.

In April 2014 "Tom" leaked the

MindSafety report to make the public aware of the dangers that workers are facing on Crossrail.

Speaking to the writer on 16 June 2014, "Tom" said that working on Crossrail had ruined his life. He is suffering from significant psychological and physical injuries as a result of his work on site. The environment he was working in and the refusal of BBMV/Crossrail to listen to his concerns are a significant contributing factor.

Health and safety jeopardised

John McDonnell MP has stated that the "bullying management style is jeopardising health and safety". He has called for urgent action from the government, in a letter dated 21 May 2014.

Mike Penning MP, Minister of State for Disabled People, responsible for the HSE, advised that the HSE is planning further action over the summer and will take any necessary appropriate action.

Leigh Day, the Construction Safety Campaign and London Hazards Centre are preparing a response requesting a full enquiry into the accidents which have occurred and demanding that steps be taken to avoid further injuries and deaths,

Helen Clifford
Head of Construction Injury Team, Leigh Day



London Hazards Centre Management Council Members supporting the Blacklist Support Group demonstration outside Royal Courts of Justice on 10 July 2014

Photo: Mick Holder

Labour Party pledge on blacklisting

The Labour Party National Policy Forum meeting in Milton Keynes on 18-20 July 2014 made a manifesto commitment to hold a full inquiry into blacklisting if the current Conservative led government fails to do so.

The following form of words was agreed: "If the current Government will not launch a full inquiry into the disgraceful practice of blacklisting in the

construction industry the next Labour Government will. This inquiry will be transparent and public to ensure the truth is set out". Just a few days before David Cameron had refused to hold a blacklisting inquiry. Business Secretary Vince Cable has also rejected calls for a public inquiry on a number of occasions.

Inquiry

The Blacklist Support Group issued the following statement: The Labour Party pledge to hold a "transparent and public" inquiry into blacklisting should be applauded by everyone fighting for justice on this human rights conspiracy. We have been calling for this for many years - fair play to them. A big thank you to all those who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to make this happen".

You can find out more about the Blacklist Support Group's fight against the blacklist by following this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jZegxaljmM>

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Photo: Mick Holder

Safety in laboratories



Laboratory environments whether in industry, education or research are fundamentally hazardous. They often contain diverse chemicals, solvents and acids.

However, our regulation of these environments has changed dramatically in the last 30 years. In the 1970s many labs did not keep tight records of what they held, the associated risks, and required routes of disposal of chemicals or methods for decontamination following spillage.

Regulated

This has changed significantly and these environments are now generally regulated and much safer places. Two forms of legislative regulation should be applied. First, all labs should have lists of the chemicals solvents and reagents that they contain. The control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH <http://www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/>) is a law that requires lists of chemicals/solvents to be held in labs and be available to those working in them with data sheets that provide product and safety information. If a new chemical is added to a lab, a new COSHH form should be provided.

Second, labs should have risk assessments for all hazardous procedures, which is a legal obligation regulated by The

Health and Safety Executive (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/risk-assessment.htm>). These forms should be in the lab and are written to identify the hazards associated with a procedure and then controls are put in place to remove the hazards. All staff must read the Risk Assessment before carrying out a procedure. While these can be the subject of much humour e.g. "Do I need a risk assessment to turn a tap on?" they do represent a very real attempt to try and inform staff of risks and routes out of trouble.

Safety officer

Risk assessments should be part of many work environments, not just those in the lab. These two regulatory procedures should be open to audit by a safety officer whose job it is to offer advice. The safety officer is also there to insure that labs have protective equipment including lab coats, gloves etc. and that there are suitable hand washing facilities that should be adjacent to the lab external door.

There are also wider changes to the culture of labs. Many toxic chemicals that could simply be purchased previously now need to be listed separately by institution/companies if they are brought into the environment.

Key issues

There is a much greater awareness of issues of toxicity, particularly to low level long term exposure. The consequence is that many chemicals have vanished from the shelf to be replaced by safer products. A key example here is the use of radioactive isotopes. These were not uncommon in biological labs 30 years ago, but are now rare and in some European countries have almost completely vanished in these types of labs. While there have been very significant improvements in health and safety in

labs, key issues remain. First, large institutions generally abide by these procedures and have the infrastructure to support and police them. That may not always be the case for some smaller companies where such issues can represent a cost that they may wish to avoid. Second, staff are now provided with a considerable amount of information that is important for their health and

safety, but that does not mean that they read it. You can take a horse to water but you cannot make it drink. In many cases staff do not read key items of information. Should they fail to do so, the employer has the right to say that they have complied with good practice when something goes wrong.

Professor Glen Jeffrey
University College London.

Why not volunteer with us?

We are looking for volunteers to help run and organise some of our activities. Perhaps you have skills and knowledge that could help organise events, produce promotional material, train others or assist in our campaigning work? If you are interested in volunteering at the London Hazards Centre, why not call 0207 527 5107 or email mail@lhc.org.uk We'd like to hear from you.



Photo: Eve Barker

M&S saleswoman negligently exposed to asbestos wins High Courtcase

Photos show Janice Allen and her husband Stuart Allen



A 53-year-old saleswoman from Middlesex, who was exposed to asbestos on the shopfloor whilst working for the retail giant Marks & Spencer in their flagship Marble Arch store, has won her case for compensation in the High Court.

Janice Allen, who now lives in Harrow, worked in two Marks and Spencer stores between 1978 and 1987, first in its flagship store near Marble Arch on London's Oxford Street and then at its Uxbridge branch as a supervisor.

In 2013 she was diagnosed with mesothelioma, a cancer of the pleural lining of the lung caused almost exclusively by asbestos. She has only months to live.

Court order

Her lawyer, Harminder Bains, from the law firm Leigh Day, applied for a court order that Marks & Spencer disclose documents, including surveys of stores. As a result of the application, Marks & Spencer admitted negligently exposing Mrs Allen to asbestos.

Mrs Allen's case is thought to be the first in which judgment has been given in court for a Marks & Spencer employee who was exposed to asbestos by simply working on the shop floor.

Her case was listed for trial

on 25 June 2014. Prior to the court date, Marks & Spencer made an offer described to them as 'derisory' by her lawyers. However, at the doors of the court, Marks & Spencer asked to negotiate further and agreed to pay Mrs Allen a significant undisclosed sum.

Miss Bains, a partner in the industrial diseases team at law firm Leigh Day, stated that there were generally three phases of people have been affected by mesothelioma.

In the first phase were those, like Miss Bains' own father who died from mesothelioma, who worked directly with asbestos in industry.

The second phase concerned those such as electricians who, by undertaking their daily work, were exposed to asbestos.

The third phase concerns those, like Mrs Allen, who simply work in buildings, which have been constructed from asbestos.

Miss Bains said that she is concerned that members of the public may have been exposed to asbestos as she has acted for victims of mesothelioma who have died after being exposed in banks, offices and hospitals and is also aware of cases involving people dying from mesothelioma who were exposed in schools.

Describing Mrs Allen as an inspiration, Miss Bains praised her bravery in fighting the case 'to the court steps' despite her advanced cancer and explained that the exposure to asbestos can take many years before developing into debilitating, and often fatal, diseases such as mesothelioma.

Devastated

Miss Bains said: "It can take as long as 40 years for exposure to asbestos to manifest in those who have inhaled asbestos".

The case was aided by evidence from William Wallace, a Health and Safety Officer who had informed the HSE of the criminally unsafe work with asbestos at Marks & Spencer's Reading branch. The company was fined £1m, for unsafe handling of asbestos at that branch.

Mr Wallace also worked at the Marble Arch store in 1998, and acted as a witness in Allen's legal claim.

He told the High Court: "There were minefields – asbestos minefields, for want of a better expression. You could not have guaranteed the safety of anybody – the workers, the staff, the customers. You could not have given a 100 per cent guarantee that those people were safe".

Mrs Allen said she is "devas-

tated and distraught" by her diagnosis.

She said "I feel betrayed by Marks & Spencer"

"The company used to portray itself like a family, they engendered loyalty. I worked very hard; I met my husband there. But to think beneath the surface they were exposing people to deadly risks.

"My husband and I were looking forward to enjoying life in the coming years; instead I have to face the fact I will not live to see my grandchildren."

Miss Bains, a long time campaigner and advocate for victims of asbestos, pleads with the Government to stop cutting health and safety legislation and attempting to prevent victims of mesothelioma from having immediate access to the courts as this will result in injustice and prevent many victims obtaining their rightful compensation which results from unlawful work practices.

Watch her video on the following link:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFJ6ur_vRXo&feature=player_embedded

For further information please contact: Harminder Bains, partner at Leigh Day. Tel: 0207 650 1166, email: hbains@leighday.co.uk

Turkish mine disaster



301 miners were killed in an explosion in Soma, Turkey on the 13 May. This tragic loss was met with universal condemnation and widespread protest throughout Turkey in the days that followed.

The explosion seems to have occurred after mine officials neglected a long existing fire inside the walls of the mine. This was despite the requirements brought by the new occupational health and safety laws introduced in 2013 as part of ongoing reforms to meet the terms of EU membership.

Protest

Around 20,000 demonstrators in Izmir, the nearest large city to Soma, protested against the deterioration in working conditions of once state-run mines since leased to private companies. Major protests also took place in Istanbul and the southern cities of Mersin and Antalya.

Turkey's Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, said the accident will be thoroughly investigated. But trade unions and families of the dead doubt that anything of the sort will take place as Erdogan implied in a speech the following day that the blast was just one of those things that happen when he said "unfortunately, this profession has this in its destiny". Photos in the Turkish media also show Prime Minister Erdogan and an aide assaulting a protestor. Before the explosion at the

mine run by Soma Holdings, there had been a number of small-scale accidents in surrounding mines, and Erdogan's ruling party had voted down the main opposition party's call for an inquiry.

In the days following the worst mining disaster in the country's history 24 people were arrested including executives of Soma Holdings. Miners in Soma suspect the company may be sacrificed to protect the government, and that there will be no real change to the industry's terrible safety record.

Trade unions in Turkey have been under sustained attack by Erdogan's government. Anti-terror laws have been misused to arrest and imprison leaders of the public sector trade union KESK. The ITUC issued a statement last year condemning the attacks on the public sector union and false accusations against trade unionists.

Privatisation policies

In reference to the Soma disaster, KESK issued a statement that referred to workers being forced to work in brutal production processes in order to maximise profits. The statement went on to say "those who pursue privatisation policies ... who threaten workers' lives to reduce cost ... are the culprits of the Soma massacre and they must be held accountable". Paul Street

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