

Congress notes that the government has continued with its onslaught on the health and safety of workers, with the Prime Minister calling health and safety a “monster” and wishing to “kill off the health and safety culture for good”.

Congress is worried about the implications of the Löfstedt review of health and safety legislation published in November last year. Inspections save lives, as shown by Prospect’s celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Robens report 40@40: health and safety stories from the frontline.

Congress is alarmed by the HSE’s move to abolish the tower crane register, as recommended by the Löfstedt report. The register has only been in place for two years and is low-cost. Since the register was set up, there have been no more fatalities in relation to assisted-erected tower cranes, the only type of crane the register covers.

Congress believes that austerity and de-regulation will undermine the protection of workers – particularly in hazardous sectors. In this regard, Congress notes that UK fire services have failed to address the lessons identified from recent firefighter fatalities and that the UK government completely abdicates all responsibility for this appalling failure.

Congress condemns the HSE’s move to repeal the Construction (Head Protection) Regulations. Löfstedt recommended repealing these Regulations only if their revocation would not result in reduced protection and if the awareness for head protection is maintained.

Congress holds the view that the Regulations have been the key driver to bringing down the number of head injuries and fatalities and that their repeal would without doubt lead to reduced protection and less awareness.

Congress condemns the exemption of self-employed workers from health and safety laws if they “pose no potential risk of harm to others”, as recommended in the Löfstedt Report Reclaiming Health & Safety for All. Despite finding the UK’s safety regulations to be “broadly fit for purpose”, the report singled out the self-employed – a growing but vulnerable proportion of the UK workforce who already suffer intimidation, and even blacklisting, when they try to exercise their employment rights. Congress believes that this exemption will be widely abused, leading to self-employed workers being expected to take ever-greater risks. Each year there are 1.2 fatalities per 100,000 self-employed, a death rate more than twice as high as the permanently employed, yet unions continue to face major obstacles nominating safety representatives from casual and atypical workforces.

Congress rejects the government’s pursuit of a weakened health and safety regime in which workers can be denied full protection depending on their employment status, or the arbitrary definition of their workplaces as “low” or “high” risk.

Congress asserts that the coalition government’s assault on health and safety laws puts profit before workers’ safety, will increase social and economic costs and is a massively retrograde step and calls on the TUC General Council to actively oppose all current and future moves by the coalition government, in particular those arising from the Löfstedt report, that lead to a deterioration in the

protection and health and safety of workers. Congress also notes that Löfstedt himself expressed concerns over misuse of his report for political purposes and resolves to guard against this in the imminent implementation review.

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