



April 30th 2015

Vol 12 No 3

A Manifesto that Matters

Introduction

To the cynics there is no real difference between the two major parties in terms of the essentials that concern working people. Now the performance of the Conservative led Coalition over the past five years with cuts to the HSE budget of 35% and a determined assault on regulations should make any voter who works acutely aware that they don't see workplace health, safety and welfare as a priority issue. Though it may be under the radar to many at least the shadow ministers with the H&S departmental briefing issued a statement for Workers Memorial Day.

What did the statement cover?

In the statement recognition on how the 40 years since the Health & Safety at Work Act (HASAW Act) had shown massive improvements, particularly in relation to workplace fatalities. This is due to a number of factors including changing industrial landscapes, new technology and improved working between employers and trade unions. They suggest that the risk based and proportionate approach was a success. The coalition called in two separate reviews, Lord Young and Professor Lofstedt, both of which failed to deliver their preconceived notion on health and safety regulation being a burden on business so they mostly ignored the reviews.

What has been the outcome of this?

The UK has started to see a rise in the number of people being injured and made ill through work, reversing the previous downward trend- in 2013/4 the numbers of self-reported illness increased to 535,000. In addition the government's belated attempt to exempt self-employed workers from the HASAW Act was confusing while not completely successful. From a perception that health and safety legislation is a "burden on Business" to David Cameron's speech on removing the health and safety culture in Britain there has been an attempt to trivialise health and safety and downplay its' importance in working lives. Labour will attempt to reverse both the ill conceived attacks and the exemption for the self-employed.

GMB SAFETY REPS

Making Your Workplace Safer

[Insert Name]
[Insert Address]
[Insert Address]
[Insert Address]
[Insert PostCode]

Are there any general areas they are looking to address?

As a key priority Labour pledge to ensure that the HSE is able to select, on the basis of its' own assessment, the workplaces to inspect and no workplace will be entirely outside the scope of inspections. Currently there are three categories of Inspection areas, high, medium and low with only the high risk sectors, Agriculture, Construction and Waste & Recycling being subject to proactive inspections. This therefore bizarrely excludes premises where asbestos fibres might be being released inadvertently such as schools. The statement recognises the key role that trade union safety reps play in helping to maintain a safe workplace and acknowledges that their training plays an important part in this. They will look to engage with the European Commission on a risk based approach and will commission a proactive research programme to provide evidence on policy, including on occupational carcinogens. This will be added to by making greater prevention in the area of occupational health and a commitment to establishing a strategy for removing over time asbestos from the built environment.

Is there any specific legislation they are looking to address?

They have pledged to reinstate the Tower Crane Register regulations and the Construction (Head Protection) regulations. They will review the legislation and guidance for protecting workers from excessive workplace temperatures. There is a commitment to look at the problems of self-employment and blacklisting, particularly in the construction industry. So they aim to tackle bogus self-employment and will set up a full enquiry into the scandal of blacklisting. They also wish to assess the impact of the abolition on strict liability and breach of statutory duty for health and safety cases, look again at the offence on Corporate Manslaughter and consider introducing Directors du=ties applicable to individuals responsible for fatalities at work. They also want to examine the extension of the Gang-master's licencing beyond the narrow scope of the food industry, something that trade unions have been after for years.

Conclusion

On Workers Memorial Day across the country Labour MP's and candidates spoke on H&S issues. Some confirmed those areas already mentioned, some went further. For example at Waltham Forest, in London, the local MP, John Cryer, said that the last Labour government had made a mistake on pleural plaque compensation and would seek to rectify this if elected. If you have other examples of pledges not mentioned please send them to the GMB Health & Environment department.

Of course there is no guarantee that those shadow ministers, Stephen Timms, Employment and Kate Green, Disabilities will be in those same posts if Labour are elected. However the paper lays out the promises and the events around the country, and the contents of the speeches, will have been noted and remembered by GMB reps and members. Is there a difference? Of course there is but we may have to hold them to account. For further information on this or othe health and environment matters please contact Daniel.shears@gmb.org.uk or John.mcclean@gmb.org.uk
