

Workplace-related deaths in Canada show no signs of decline

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A spate of recent workplace-related deaths in Canada makes clear that conditions for workers in the country's industrial slaughterhouse remain unchanged. With advanced plans for imperialist war unfolding and stepped-up demands for increased corporate profitability from the Liberal government of banker Prime Minister Mark Carney, the working class faces a return to the brutal conditions that prevailed in the sweatshops of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Without exception, the deaths were avoidable. They speak to unsafe working conditions, inadequate safety regulations and a criminal justice system that protects employers whose practices lead to the injury or death of their workers.

On October 2, a 26-year-old construction worker from Mexico was killed in the town of Forest, Ontario, when he fell from a scaffold while performing restoration work on an exterior building wall. The worker has not been identified, and it is unclear what, if any, protective measures were in place.

Kulbir Kaila, a 61-year-old cleaning worker at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia, died of a heart attack on July 28 during her shift. Like many of her colleagues, Kaila was an immigrant from the Indian state of Punjab. Her employer, Best Service Pros, laid off 23 cleaners in April 2024, dramatically increasing the workload of the remaining 150 staff.

In January of this year, an unidentified forestry worker died in Saint-Côme-Linière, Quebec, when the skidder he was operating collided with a tree stump and ejected him from the cab. His vehicle lacked a seatbelt and a full door, violating at least one safety regulation.

These three are just a few of the over 1,000 workers who die of work-related causes every year. The 2025 Report on Work Fatality and Injury Rates in Canada cites 1,056 work-related deaths in 2023, the latest year for which data is available.

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collected from the country's provincial and territorial workers' compensation boards.

This number of over 1,000, equating to about three deaths every single day, does not remotely begin to illustrate the extent of injury and death occurring from workplace conditions. The report notes that a 2018 study titled Work-Related Deaths in Canada, headed by Steven Bittle of the University of Ottawa, estimates that the true number of workplace-related deaths is up to 10 times higher.

Myriad reasons exist for this phenomenon of underreporting, many of which will be familiar to workers everywhere. The pressures of precarious employment and fear of termination or loss of income, language barriers and a general lack of awareness, lead many workers to resist reporting injuries or illnesses sustained at work. Their premature deaths then get attributed to other, non work-related causes.

Carex Canada, an organization with expertise in carcinogens, estimates that 235,000 Canadian workers are currently exposed to asbestos, a known and deadly carcinogen present in many residential and industrial buildings and processes. The picture painted by corporate Canada is that asbestos has been phased out, even though legislation in 2018 only banned asbestos use in new construction.

Workplace-related deaths and injuries are thus far from rare and not something limited to developing countries.

Between 2020 and 2022, three workers were killed on the job at Hamilton, Ontario-based railcar manufacturer National Steel Car. The gruesome deaths, a result of well-documented workplace speedup and the corporation's brutish refusal to implement or enforce rudimentary safety measures, led to slap-on-the-wrist fines for the corporation, owned by the indicted financial swindler Greg Aziz.

South of the border, Ronald Adams Sr., a 63-year-old maintenance worker at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Complex in southeast Michigan, was crushed to death on April 7, 2025, while servicing an industrial washer. Proper maintenance lockout procedures were flouted by the

corporation in pursuit of speedier production, with the state's office of occupational health and safety, as well as the United Auto Workers union, whitewashing the corporate murder.

Most recently, a massive explosion at the Accurate Energetic Systems munitions plant near Nashville, Tennessee, killed 16 workers, completely obliterating their bodies. The plant had committed numerous health and safety violations over the years and was allowed to continue producing ammunition for American imperialism's war machine. The story was quickly buried in the corporate news cycle.

It is estimated that 5,283 workers died on the job in the United States in 2023, a vast undercount. The AFL-CIO union federation argues that there are instead around 140,000 work-related deaths in the United States every year, which includes deaths from work-related illness. This would put its per capita deaths on par with its northern neighbor.

What connects these tragedies across regional and national borders is the deepening crisis of the global capitalist system, which brooks no interference to the vast and increasing accumulation of wealth by the ruling class and preparations for war between the major imperialist powers and their rivals.

According to the logic of capitalism, workers must remain on the job and slave tirelessly to generate corporate profits and build instruments of death. If a worker dies during the course of their duties, they merely become grist for the mill. So much the better, because they will not become a drain on corporate profits in their retirement.

No better example of this reality exists than the treatment of the world's entire population by their respective governments during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which is estimated to have needlessly killed 30 million people globally since 2020. Countless workers were thrust into workplaces that became breeding grounds for the disease, infecting them, their children, and the elderly.

In Canada, at least 60,000 people have died of COVID-19. Governments across the country and the political spectrum, from the "left-wing" New Democratic Party (NDP) to the Liberals, Conservatives and Coalition Avenir Quebec, promoted the eugenicist line that "the cure can't be worse than the disease." The disease was allowed to spread unchecked and the vital public health science of vaccinations and quarantine subjected to attack.

What limited reforms and protective measures remain are being rapidly stripped away, or are at best a complete farce. The Westray Law, federal Bill C-45, was legislated in 2004 to establish criminal liability for organizations in cases of workplace death and injury. It took its name from the Westray coal mine in Nova Scotia, where 26 miners lost

their lives in a methane explosion in May 1992.

To date, only three individuals and seven corporations have been convicted under Bill C-45. The maximum fine levied was \$1.4 million. In other words, the cost of doing business.

Work-related deaths and injury are only one component of the rapidly deteriorating social situation facing Canadian workers.

Social inequality is soaring as the top 10 percent of the population monopolize the country's wealth and income. The ability to strike, a fundamental right won through bitter struggle, is effectively a dead letter, as illustrated by the federal Liberal government's outlawing of recent strikes of Air Canada flight attendants, Canada Post, railway and port workers. Long-held preparations for war against Russia and China are set to reduce tens or hundreds of thousands of workers to nothing more than cannon fodder.

In the face of the most severe social crisis since the Great Depression and the Second World War, the trade unions, in partnership with their allies in the NDP, have nothing to offer the working class but further poverty, hardship, and dangerous workplaces carrying the risk of injury and death.

For years, the leadership of the unions has collaborated with the NDP to maintain the big business Liberal party in power as they ran roughshod over workers' rights and slashed social spending in favor of corporate subsidies and the military.

When workers have rebelled by voting for strike action in numbers unseen for decades, the union leadership has straitjacketed their struggles, keeping them isolated from one another and starving them out on poverty rations. This parasitic social layer does this to maintain their privileges and prop up the capitalist system which affords them a seat at the employers' table.

Workplace-related deaths will not stop unless workers take their struggles into their own hands. To defend their lives and livelihoods, workers must break with the trade union apparatus and the NDP, which function as instruments of the corporations and the state. Rank-and-file committees, coordinated through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), must be built to wage a conscious political struggle for socialism.

To learn more about the IWA-RFC and help build democratic organizations of struggle in your workplace, click here.



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