

Statements by Ministers

possible be done to enhance the availability of organs for transplantation.

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[Translation]

LABOUR

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Hon. Pierre H. Cadieux (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak of a Canadian tragedy, a tragedy which is daily affecting thousands of workers injured, killed or made ill in the workplace.

In Canada every year one out of every nine workers, in all industries and occupations, suffers a work-related injury. During 1985, the latest year for which full statistics are available, 768 of our fellow Canadians were killed on the job, and 16.2 million work days were lost due to injury. The cost of this loss, in direct and indirect terms, is estimated at some \$14 billion, a tremendous human and financial price for our nation to bear.

[English]

However, today is not a day for statistics. It is a day for people to recognize the pain, hardship, and loss suffered by our fellow Canadians because of workplace illnesses and injuries. Today is a day to remember the loss of life and the human price which has been paid in building this great country.

This day was conceived by the Canadian Labour Congress as a day of mourning to draw greater attention to the serious and continuing problem of workplace health and safety. In this we applaud the CLC and its leadership.

On this day I think it is important that we all renew our commitment to addressing this Canadian tragedy as a national priority. We must commit ourselves to raising the awareness of Canadians to this serious problem, for this is not just a responsibility of Government. It is a responsibility we all share—labour, business, industry, the provinces; indeed, all Canadians.

[Translation]

It is true that progress has been made in the field of occupational safety and health over the past number of years. And we have come a long way since the first Workmen's Compensation Act was passed in Ontario 73 years ago today. We still have a long way to go, however. Much remains to be done by us all if we are to meet our goal: ensuring a safe and healthy workplace for all Canadians.

I want to stress the Government's commitment on this matter and my firm determination to improve the situation. Indeed a number of initiatives attest to this commitment.

We have amended the Canada Labour Code in order to improve its provisions with regard to occupational safety and health. We have strengthened three fundamental rights set forth in the Code: The right to refuse dangerous work, the

right to know, and the right to participate in safety and health committees.

We have extended the safety and health provisions of the Code to the air, marine, and rail industries and to the oil and gas industry. We have developed the new workplace hazardous materials information system. These are a few of the things we have done in hopes of protecting Canadian workers. Let me add that all these actions have been undertaken in close cooperation with representatives of all the parties involved. We strongly believe that this is the only approach that can be successful.

I wish to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to bring this important matter to the attention of Members of this House.

• (1120)

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment on the Minister's statement. We of the Liberal Party certainly wish to join the government in helping Canadians appreciate the sacrifices being made every day by Canada's workers.

[English]

The Minister deplored the situation that workers face in the area of occupational health and safety. In his statement he suggested there is \$14 billion in human and financial terms lost as a result of work accidents. We cannot let it escape public attention that this same Minister and Government cut the budget of the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety by 10 per cent over the last year. In fact, there has been a reduction in staff in the centre that was created by the very people he suggests are going to solve the problem. It was a tripartite centre. It was a dream launched in Hamilton which included input by Government, management and workers, both union and non-union, who would have an opportunity to get information to prevent occupational hazards on the job.

As a result of this Government's cut-backs, a 10 per cent cut-back which occurred this year alone, the number of small companies, the number of small unions and workers who can be served from coast to coast is being affected. The Minister will know that in the Estimates for the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety it is said that it was not able to deal with the same number of inquiries, that the Centre was affected by the Government's budgetary restraint and the cut-back is pointed out.

If the Minister has had a chance to visit the Centre, as I have, he will know that it gets information directly to the people who need it. In the last fiscal year the Centre dealt with 20,000 inquiries from coast to coast. They were not all from big companies that have access to their own information concerning occupational health and safety. A worker in a small plant wanted to know what a chemical reaction would be if the chemical came in contact with the skin and what a particular hazard on the workplace meant.