

### **David Cameron made a speech to the right-wing think tank Policy Exchange.**

Trade unionists and workplace death campaigners have attacked David Cameron for "playing politics with the safety of workers" after he proposed tearing up health and safety legislation. The criticism was sparked by a speech made by the Tory leader to right-wing think tank Policy Exchange in which he claimed existing health and safety laws were "a straitjacket on personal initiative and responsibility."

Mr Cameron said people who acted in "good faith" could be given greater protection from being sued or prosecuted, while small businesses and voluntary organisations could have their health and safety responsibilities reduced. He said: "I think we'd all concede that something has gone seriously wrong with the spirit of health and safety in the past decade when children are made to wear goggles by their headteacher to play conkers, when trainee hairdressers are not allowed scissors in the classroom."

At the party's conference in October, shadow business spokesperson Ken Clarke announced proposals which would effectively allow companies to self-regulate along the lines of the US "earned autonomy" policy.

Construction union UCATT general secretary Alan Ritchie condemned the speech. "The Conservatives must not play politics with the safety of workers in their quest for votes," he said. "By trivialising the issue of safety, the Conservatives are deflecting attention away from reality. Many workers, especially construction workers, are regularly placed in danger because there are simply too few inspections and too little enforcement activity on construction sites."

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said of Mr Cameron's examples: "They are either distortions of the facts or misunderstandings. People expect political parties to develop policies based on facts, not on half-truths and myths culled from newspaper headlines. The idea that employers are being over-zealous in their application of health and safety regulation is simply not true. The reality is exactly the opposite - last year 246,000 people were injured at work."

And Families Against Corporate Killing (FACK) spokeswoman Hilda Palmer said "Mr Cameron's comments should be treated with the contempt they deserve. Cameron is completely bankrupt and his comments are absolute populist nonsense, he has used apocryphal examples, many of which are highly dubious and have nothing to do with safety in the workplace. As far as FACK is concerned he obviously has no understanding at all of the issue. All the models the Tories are proposing come from America where they have been shown to have failed. The timing of his speech was also scandalous. It is an absolute outrage that he has come out with this just two days before the anniversary of the Bhopal disaster," she stormed. "This was the biggest example of corporate crime in history, which killed tens of thousands of people and is continuing to poison hundreds of thousands of others and for which absolutely nobody has been held responsible."