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Exploitation, the most lethal of all killers

FdCA Statement on the latest outbreak of workplace deaths

Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici

6 March 2008

Graves. Industrial plants, building sites, farm machinery, tankers... all turned into grim graves imprisoning thousands of innocent workers. It happened with the flames at the Thyssen Krupp factory in Turin. It has happened again with the deadly gasses from a tanker in Molfetta.

But for capitalism, exploited lives and ruined lives are nothing but costs. The employers' federation's "no" to sanctions against employers who do not invest in workplace safety (a measure that is included in the government decrees that they would have us believe are currently being passed and that would in any event have almost no effect on worker safety) smacks of contempt and the primacy of profit. Indeed, the workers are nothing but the living figures of profit, redundancy figures, mobility figures, figures that need reducing, i.e. firing. Nothing but figures, even when they die on the job... The bosses move human resources around in the same way as they move financial resources around. If they can afford to

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lose millions of Euro on the stock markets, what problem do they have losing workers who are merely numbers, not physical bodies, who have no right to life, no right to a safe working environment?

Capitalism caused 1,341 workplace deaths in 2007? It's just a number.

What about the 928,000 workplace accidents in 2007? Still just a number.

Only 550,000 workers were compensated for injuries at work. And two thirds of them are in Northern Italy.

Workplace safety is incompatible with exploitation. This is one serial killer that nobody seems to want caught and stopped, even when it is right under our noses: it is the organization of labour and its de-regulation; it is the intensification of the exploitation of labour and the blackmail workers are subjected to, that ends up weakening or nullifying the regulations for workplace safety and the protection of workers, or even tries to de-penalize them.

When work kills, no amount of Articles or Laws will help or protect the dead workers. No last-minute decrees will protect us.

There are bigger interests behind these workplace deaths and accidents, interests that tend to offload the costs of death, injury and illness onto society. And it is society that is handed the bill for the material costs, but also the costs in human health and indeed life, the costs of pollution and the increasing exploitation of the environment. Long-term deaths, in other words.

The employers themselves must pay the costs of prevention, of protection and of safety in the workplace – not foist them onto the workers, directly or indirectly. The role of workplace safety monitors (RLS) must be strengthened and there must be RLS in every workplace, even if it is the workers who nominate them independently. These safety monitors must be allowed to operate and be protected and safeguarded from employer threats, from trade union compromises. They must be in direct contact with local health clinics, who in turn must be allowed to certify injuries and illnesses in the workplace, and set up an observatory for work-

place accidents which includes every local authority area and every workplace.

Organizing specific struggles for workplace safety – as demonstrated by the coordination of railway RLS's – is essential if we are to put an end to the causes of risk to the workers: from privatizations to outsourcing, to increases in workrates in production units.

We must remember that deaths in the workplace are not just tragic accidents, they are the victims of a system of exploitation which cares only about profit. And this is the real tragedy! And this is what we must fight against, starting today, so that we can save our lives, and work and live in solidarity and self-management.