

[Speech from Sherree Backus, UFCW Local 175, delivered at the Injured Workers Day rally, June 1, 2011 at Queen's Park]

Recently Mr. Hudak, leader of the Ontario Progressive Conservative party, made a comment to the effect that “work doesn’t hurt anyone.” Well brothers and sisters I don’t know where this guy has been for the past 25 years or so every June 1st obviously not here participating in this rally. He must be unaware of the fatalities caused by workplace accidents in Ontario and the deaths on Christmas Eve that initiated the Expert Panel’s Review, the largest revamp of Ontario’s worker safety system in 30 years and the passing of Bill 160.

Has he heard of RSI Day?

Is he aware of the 300,000 plus claims filed a year? Maybe he didn’t get the memo. Maybe he doesn’t care. Shame!

What he probably does understand is the 13 billion unfunded liability of the WSIB and the possible out come of the current Funding review and the impact it may have on employers He may view this as an opportunity to privatize.

The Ontario Conservatives have recently released their Change book. How can we forget the changes of Bill 99 and the cost of those changes to injured workers to date? Why would we allow another Conservative government in Ontario another chance to finish the job started by the Harris Common sense revolution?

Through our handling of compensation claims for our workers we see first hand the effect of the Funding Review on the Board and their current approach to case management and fiscal responsibility. Denials, workers benefits limited or reduced, cutbacks, all this even before the Review Panel has completed the process and submitted their findings.

It is always important to get the concerns of injured workers addressed by the elected members of parliament, to remain in their focus. With the upcoming fall election it is more important than ever to engage candidates in conversation, test their knowledge of the workers’ compensation, and ask about their intentions and party platform concerning changes or improvements to the system. Ask them bluntly if privatization is on their agenda, challenge their position, ask questions and then ask more. Don’t let the idea that business community is very strong right now deter our determination to fight for workers’ rights and justice. Workers succeeded many years ago. We can not allow all the hardship endured and gains made to go by the way side because of fear mongering. We can not forget.

Become even more active, write letters educate those around you, and take a stand. Let’s not return to the Mike Harris agenda. Make your vote count to stop the right wing attack on injured workers. Get involved. Vote!