

May 2019

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

In the early morning of May 9, 1992, an explosion ripped through the Westray coal mine in Plymouth, Nova Scotia, killing all twenty-six miners working the night shift. This explosion not only took the lives of those twenty-six men but it changed the lives, forever, of so many more. Families, friends, co-workers and the communities around the mine collectively suffered the loss. Wives lost husbands, children lost fathers, and others lost brothers.

What will always stay with me is the story of a young woman who lost her father that day. Many years later, now a mother herself, she told me of how she was waiting that morning for her father to come home with a cake. May 9th is her birthday. Every year, as she celebrates another year in her life, she remembers the terrible day when her father was taken away from her. It is for her and all the other victims of Westray that we continue our fight for justice.

The Westray Mine disaster was a totally preventable tragedy. The inquiry that followed pointed to greed, incompetence and total disregard for the health and safety of the workers. The presiding judge, Justice Richard, pointed out that criminal law did not provide an avenue to properly punish those responsible, and that the law should change. After a decade of lobbying by the USW, the law did in fact change to allow for the criminal prosecution of employers who blatantly disregard the well-being of workers. The union continues to press for the prosecution and conviction of such employers.

It has now been twenty-seven years since that tragic day in Pictou Country, Nova Scotia. Since that time, around one thousand workers a year have lost their lives because of their work. Thousands more have suffered life-altering injuries, and the toll of occupational disease is often under reported.

On the National Day of Mourning, we say "Mourn the Dead, Fight for the Living". In reality, this is what we do every day. We will never stop our fight for justice, and we will never let the death of those twenty-six miners be in vain.

In Solidarity,



Ken Neumann
National Director

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