

Community Response and Advocacy

Speaker # 4 – Joy Hamilton

Two inquests had been held after two workplace murders. Without public pressure, these inquests would never have been conducted.

Why doesn't the *Occupational Health & Safety Act* automatically call for an inquest when a worker dies on the job? Unfortunately, this only happens when a worker employed in construction or mining dies on the job.

Nine years before Lori Dupont was murdered on the job, at the inquest into the workplace murder of Theresa Vince, evidence was given regarding the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* addressing workplace harassment. After that, three Private Members Bills, Bill 78, Bill 55, and Bill 126 to amend the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* to protect workers from harassment in the workplace all died on the order table.

Coroner's inquests unfortunately have the habit of being quickly forgotten. Since the coroner's jury had no power to ensure that its recommendations were acted upon, the Dupont Inquest Action Group had the responsibility to make sure that the jury recommendations were implemented within the one year time frame.

Just how did our Group follow-up on the jury recommendations? We held monthly meetings to decide our plan of action. Our first issue was to ensure that violence and harassment be recognized as chargeable under the *OH&S Act* and to do that the *ACT* had to be changed! We designed a petition that demanded changes to the *Occupational Health & Safety Act*. In a short period of time we collected thousands of signatures! Just by asking people to sign the petition, helped raise awareness on this issue.

We attended seminars regarding Violence in the Workplace. We took training on prevention of violence in the workplace. We attended vigils and Day of Mourning ceremonies, and we participated in demonstrations against Sexual Assault. We attended pasta dinners and fashion shows to raise awareness of workplace violence and of course collect more signatures! We participated in walks against violence in the workplace. We wrote Opinion Editorials, and Letters to the Editor of our local newspaper, to keep the community aware of the changes to the *Occupational Health & Safety Act* that we are demanding. We took every opportunity to get radio and television coverage on the issue of workplace violence.

After the workplace murder of Lori Dupont, two more Private Members Bills, Bill 35 and Bill 45 to amend the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* to protect workers from harassment in the workplace, both died on the order table.

In December 2007 another Private Members Bill, Bill 29 to amend the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* to protect workers from harassment and Violence in the workplace was introduced by MP Andrea Horwath. Private Members Bills unfortunately seldom pass in legislation.

The Dupont Inquest Action Group lobbied Members of Provincial Parliament and worked to gain public support for legislative change to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. Our meetings with MPPs and MPs including Pat Hoy, Dwight Duncan, Bruce Cozier, and Maria Von Bommel were very encouraging.

MPP Andrea Horwath visited during one of our regular meetings to discuss her Private Members Bill 29.

Members of the Dupont family met with Windsor West MPP Sandra Pupatello, and the newly appointed Minister of Labour, Peter Fonseca.

The Minister of Labour released *A Consultation Paper on Workplace Violence* and invited a written response from labour, employer stakeholders, and the general public. The Dupont Inquest Action Group submitted a written response.

The good news is on that April 20, 2009, Bill 168 was introduced. This Bill, the Minister of Labour's own Government Bill is an Act to amend the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* with respect to violence and harassment in the workplace and other matters.

Minister Fonseca said "If passed, this legislation would help create a climate, in workplaces across the province that says, that workplace violence is completely unacceptable".

Most recently Minister Fonseca said " Ontario is committed to eliminating workplace injuries. All workers have the right to come home from work each day to their families, safe and sound".

So what's next for the Inquest Action Group? Our present task is to make recommendations to the Minister of Labour regarding his new Bill, and of course, deliver our petitions to Queen's Park.

Our future task is to define the issues that will guarantee our commitment, NEVER AGAIN, our tribute to the memory of Theresa & Lori, and others who died before them at the hands of violence in the workplace.