

Editorial

Spotlighting the health impacts of work

Laurent Vogel

Director, ETUI Health and Safety Department

Health and safety at work gets little play in the media – and then often only at times of scandal or disaster. This sporadic attention leaves the routine here-and-now – the effects of work on health every day – in the dark. We get daily reports on stock market prices, but what about the price people pay for creating material wealth?

Going into work with muscle pain, or being made ill or worse by poor working conditions are commonplace. The different social classes are nowhere near equal where reaching pensionable age in good health is concerned. Not many building workers or hospital nurses last out a full career. There are also big health inequalities at the start of working life. Temps and other types of contingent worker tend to have higher accident rates, while immigrant workers are unexpectedly welcome when dirty jobs are to be done for a pittance.

Our aim with this new magazine is to give you specific, understandable and critical information on health matters in Europe. We'll be doing that in regular sections that you'll find in this issue, plus each issue will also carry a special report taking an in-depth look at a different topic.

This is a new magazine with almost twenty years of history behind it. In 1989, the European trade union movement set up Trade Union Technical Bureau for Health and Safety, staffed by a small team working to pool trade union knowledge and experiences. In 1995, we launched our *TUTB Newsletter*, which soon outgrew its modest title. The thirty-five issues published added up to a

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substantial and structured resource base of information and analysis on health and safety at work issues. The job of keeping abreast of moving developments was shifted to our website in 1999. In 2004, we expanded these information resources to include a monthly email update – *HESAmail* – while continuing to publish books, brochures and reports.

The merger that produced the European Trade Union Institute prompted us to look again at how we were putting out information. This magazine is the product of that re-think.

It will be showing that health and safety at work is not just something for specialists, but a matter of daily life and a big policy issue. Health and safety at work is about taking a critical approach to labour relations and techniques. It is about showing that health inequalities are all tied up with inequalities in the production and distribution of material wealth. It is about pointing out the

many types of harm that occur when workers have no control over their working conditions. It is about showing that not only is there nothing natural in the division of labour between “thinkers” and “doers”, between men and women, South and North, but that it can be extremely harmful and physically injurious. Coming from its own angle, health and safety at work is part and parcel of the societal debates on our model of development.

We are in a time when health and safety at work could go to the wall. It has fallen off the Community institutions' radar. It is often treated by employers as an “adjustment variable” of economic competition. The crisis is being wielded as a threat in strong-arm tactics to intensify work and make it still more flexible. We want this new magazine to be an information resource that can help get stronger action going by trade unions and all workers around these issues. ●