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Health & Safety at Work: Time for change

by Phil James & David Walters

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The world of work is changing. Fast. But the framework of law tasked with protecting the health, safety and well being of workers is now 50 years old and – according to the authors of this report – no longer fit for purpose. As a result, work continues to generate large and unacceptable levels of harm, despite the massive reductions of employment in high risk areas of work like manufacturing, docks, steel and mining. The authors conclude that the time has come to repeal the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act and to fundamentally reform the current framework of law governing workplace health and safety. To support this conclusion, the authors measure the appropriateness of the Act against four central issues: the Act’s application to today’s employment patterns and structures; the oversight and enforcement of employer compliance with their legal duties; worker access to representation on health and safety issues; and the overall governance and resourcing of our regulatory bodies. Looking to the future, the authors offer a number of informed policy recommendations based on good international practices.

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