# Why would anyone want to make the workplace more dangerous?

'If a builder constructs a house for a man but does not make his work strong, with the result that this house collapses, and so causes the death of the owner, the builder shall be put to death.' That was Hamorabi, Emperor of Babylon, in 1750BC. 'Health and safety' has come in for a bit of a battering in some quarters but, at its heart, health and safety is about preventing injuries and saving people's lives.

In Safe at Work (Spokesman Books, £15) Dave Putson, health and safety representative for the public services union PCS in the London Courts, traces the history of legislation in Britain since 1700 when there were no safety provisions or Acts of Parliament in place. As Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the PCS, says in his introduction, this book could hardly be more timely. 'It is a history of the struggles for rights; the right to form a trade union; the right to vote; the right for dignity in the workplace and fair pay; the right for education, welfare and health care. All fought for in the face of fierce resistance from those who felt their profits might be affected or their political power constrained.

Today, many bosses want to reverse these hard-won gains. 'Our Prime Minister echoes the worst of the 19th century's irresponsible industrialists when he says health and safety is an "albatross round the neck of British businesses" and he wants to "kill off the health and safety culture for good".

'Workers only got these rights and protections because they organised and fought for them. It is a depressing but familiar tale of history that, today, we need to fight those same battles again.'



Safe at work?

Dave Putson

Introduction by Mark Serwotka