

A MERRY PROTEST



On December 9, injured workers across Ontario will stage demonstrations to mark their ongoing struggles for justice. The annual Christmas “Day of Protest” began in 1991. This is a tale of their past, present and future.

CHRISTMAS PAST

It was a dark and stormy night. The Minister of Labour was sleeping calmly when suddenly a loud tapping on the floor woke him. As his eyes cleared, he saw before him a man with cane, a woman wearing wrist guards, and a child licking a candy cane.

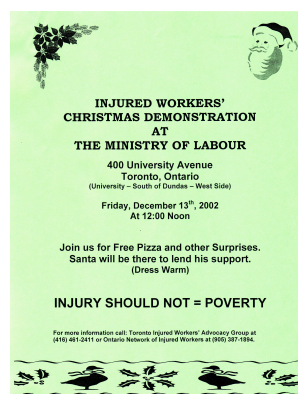
“What do you want?” the Honourable Minister asked somewhat fearfully. “Come with us,” they said together. “We have miles to go before you can sleep.”

In an instant the four figures were transported to December 1991. As they floated to the ground they could see men and women walking around carrying banners and posters.

“Why, that’s you!” the Honourable Minister said, pointing to a man with a cane.

“You’re right,” Mr. Minister. “I was there demonstrating about the new compensation law that deemed me into a job that I could not do because of my injured back and that deprived other injured workers of a lifetime pension. I’m still here because de-indexing of permanent pensions, experience rating and Bill 99 have only made things worse. We have demonstrated every December since then. The Christmas season is a very difficult time for injured workers and their families”

“But, other governments made those changes and those laws,” the Minister stated firmly, now wide awake. “We are not responsible for...”



CHRISTMAS PRESENT

The words of the Honourable Minister were lost in the gusts of wind and a loud thud as he landed on a wooden chair inside a Committee Room of the Ontario Legislature. As he regained his composure, he looked out upon a room filled with injured workers. Seated directly across from him was the woman with the wrist guards.

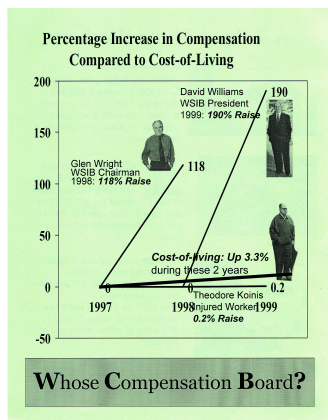
“I got repetitive strain from my job in the office,” she said. “The WSIB and my employers sent me back to work too early. I was not fully healed. Now, I can not work at all and I get no compensation.”

“I got a \$2.57 increase in my Canada Pension and the WSIB cut my disability pension \$3.18,” added another upset and angry injured worker.

“Hi,” said a soft voice. It was the girl with the candy cane. “My Mummy could not come today. She is at home laying down. She is resting. She is tired from her pain and looking for a job.”

“What is she trained to do,” the Minister asked the girl?

Injured Workers' History Project



"She used to work in a hospital helping people get better," the girl told the Minister. "But, after she got hurt the Government, or somebody, sent her to school to retrain. Now, they say she has to be a parking lot attendant.

"Mr. Minister," the girl said. "My Mummy is sad.

"Why," the Minister asked.

"Because she can not work and sometimes we do not have enough to eat. And, we have to move a lot. And, because she can not hold me for long because of her pain."

"Our Government is committed to making changes," the Minister said firmly. "We just need more time."

"The other Governments made changes. Your Government can too," one injured worker declared. "You have the power. Show some leadership. We gave up the right to sue. We will be watching you."

CHRISTMAS FUTURE



At that moment, the Legislature seemed to dissolve into thin air. The next thing the Honourable Minister knew he was sitting upright in his bed. He looked around and he was alone. He looked out his window. There was no sign of a storm.

"It must have been a dream," he said to himself. But, at that moment he saw a sheet of paper on his bed. He picked it up and started to read.

THE 2006 ONTARIO WORKERS' COMPENSATION ACT

It is the mission of this Act:

1. To provide injured workers with compensation for work injuries in a thorough, unbiased, timely and non-adversarial manner.
2. To ensure access to ongoing therapy including physiotherapy, chiropractic, alternative therapies and other therapies.

3. To give time to heal and Real work to do.
4. To understand that families can be destroyed by injuries. An injury to one family member is an injury to all.
5. To hear injured workers and treat them with compassion and respect.

To accomplish these goals, the 2006 WCA will assist workers with permanent disabilities by providing:

1. A pension for life for a disability for life.
2. Full cost of living.
3. Real jobs and job security or full compensation.
4. Full entitlement to CPP Disability and workplace employment benefits.

When the Minister finished reading he looked up. He was surprised to see the little girl standing beside his bed.

In a shaky voice he asked: "Did I, did my government do this?"

"Yes," she answered. "Thank you. My Mummy and our family are doing much better.

"What about the man with the cane and the woman with the sore wrists?" he asked.

"He turned 65 this year and is not as worried because now he can keep his pension. Her wrists still hurt but she is getting compensation. She is looking forward to working again."

"And, you know what, Mr. Minister," she said hopefully. "With better health and safety laws, maybe I will not get injured when I grow up."



"A Merry Protest" was written by members of the Injured Workers History Project (IWHP). The IWHP is a group of injured workers, advocates and researchers who are uncovering and writing the history of injured workers in Ontario. To find out more contact us at: The Bancroft Institute for Studies in Workers' Compensation and Workplace Health and Safety (416-461-2411; Robert Storey, Labour Studies & Sociology, McMaster University, 905-525-9140, Ext. 24693.