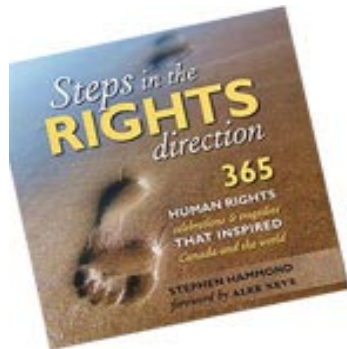


MHR *Connections*

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Rights Book Reveals Struggles and Victories

In the foreword of Stephen Hammond's book, *Steps in the Rights Direction – 365 Human Rights Celebrations and Tragedies that Inspired Canada and the World*, Secretary General of Amnesty International, Alex Neve writes, "...these 365 snapshots underscore that so many of the great triumphs and heart-wrenching tragedies in human rights protection come down, in the end, to a single day that may reflect the very best and the very worst of humanity."

Within the pages of this book, Mr. Hammond has documented, beginning January 1 and ending December 31, human rights facts, events or celebrations.

The first day of the year, Mr. Hammond writes that on January 1, 1919 women finally got the right to vote in federal elections. He adds that by this time, a few provinces such as Manitoba already allowed women the right to vote. He concludes with, "The right to a provincial vote spread slowly but steadily after that, with Quebec women finally clinching it in 1940."

Another example he uses is on June 15, 1988 when three Manitoba women found their case of discrimination based on sex before the Supreme Court of Canada. The court decided that the women had been discriminated against due to their pregnancies. At the same time the court overturned another ten year old case and declared that discrimination based on pregnancy would be considered discrimination based on sex.

Other events and people he documents include; the story of Manitoba Métis Leader Louis Riel, who was found guilty of treason on August 1, 1885; Winnipeg's Glen Murray, who became Canada's first openly gay Mayor when he was elected on October 28, 1998; the assassination of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968; the Manitoba Court of Appeal ruling on April 25, 1979 that English-only laws were unconstitutional; and Manitoba's MLA Elijah Harper's refusal to support the Meech Lake Accord on June 23, 1990.

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The Rights Connection by Jerry Woods - Chairperson A call to action

From students and seniors to academics and office workers, the *Into the Future Human Rights Conference* attracted a vast array of people, despite howling winds and a December snow storm. Some speakers were trapped in airports and yet the celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights remained on track. Not that the Declaration and its history weren't scrutinized by both the speakers and participants; almost all admitted that with every promise of hope, there are successes and failures.

Keynote speakers spoke about the gains and losses as well as the impact of those who stood up for human rights, when others did not.

Dr. Lloyd Axworthy opened the day by praising the Universal Declaration and acknowledging its impact on Canadian human rights law. He also talked, however, on how the progress of human rights has been seriously compromised around the world in the last ten years. He cast a critical eye on the lack of rights for people in Peru, many of whom don't even legally exist in their own country; the treatment of Omar Khadr, the sole Canadian citizen in Guantánamo, who was seized in Afghanistan when he was just 15 years old; the refusal of the Canadian Government to sign the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and most regrettably, the public's lack of indignation. Dr. Axworthy concluded with a call to action.

Keynote speaker Stephen Hammond closed his amazing presentation about people's perceptions of Canadian society with the many steps forward human rights have taken over the years. He reminded us how precious our human rights are and that great things have been, and still can be achieved, even in the face of the most daunting obstacles.

As we look to the future of human rights, now is the time to make sure our house is in order. The power to ensure safeguarding human rights and moving them forward rests with us. We can no longer be complacent and allow human rights achievements to be undermined. As Dr. Axworthy stressed, it is time to fight back and remind ourselves, and the world, that our respect for human rights defines us as Canadians.

Settlements

The following are examples of pre-investigation settlements negotiated by the Commission mediators. It is important to note that during mediation no assessment of the validity of the complaint is made.

Employee terminated same month as scheduled heart surgery

The complainant was born with a congenital heart defect. After one and a half years of employment he informed his supervisor that he required open heart surgery within the next six months.

That supervisor retired before the complainant's operation, and a new supervisor was hired. According to the complainant, the new supervisor was on the job for about two weeks when he advised her that he was scheduled for surgery in April and would need to take medical leave. He says that in early April he received a voice mail from the supervisor informing him that "his services were no longer required." He filed a human rights complaint. When contacted by the Commission, the respondent was interested in a voluntary resolution.

A Commission mediator used shuttle negotiation as a means of resolving the complaint. The parties entered into an agreement with the complainant receiving \$10,000 in damages.

Criminal record forms basis of complaint

In the early 1990's the complainant was sentenced to five years in jail for robbery. He served his time and has not been involved in any incidents since that time.

He began his employment with the respondent in December, and in June he says he was called in to meet with his supervisor. She informed him that someone heard he had been in prison. According to the complainant he advised her that was his past. Later that month he says he was terminated and no reason was provided. He filed a complaint of discrimination on the basis of a criminal record, and not on a *bona fide* and reasonable requirement or qualification for his employment or occupation contrary to *the Human Rights Code*.

Both parties expressed an interest in a voluntary resolution and met with a Commission mediator. The complainant received \$3,500 as general damages.

"Different path" leads to age discrimination

The complainant is a woman in her early 40's. She applied for a part time job and says the interview went well. A few days after the interview however, she says she was informed that the company had decided to go on a different path and would be hiring someone younger. The woman filed a complaint believing that she had been discriminated against on the basis of her age (too old).

Voluntary mediation took place and an agreement was reached. The complainant received \$3,000 as general damages.



Stephen Hammond proves he appeals to all audiences. He was the keynote speaker at both the Manitoba Human Rights Youth Conference and the Into the Future Human Rights Conference held in Winnipeg on December 9th and 10th.

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This book reaffirms human rights struggles, as well as victories, and encourages readers to continue to push ahead. As Mr. Hammond says, "There is a lot to celebrate, but still a lot to do."

Mr. Hammond is a lawyer turned speaker and workplace consultant. Despite his experience of being thrown in jail years ago in Communist Poland, he attributes his passion for human rights to his feminist mother and sister. Mr. Hammond's first book, *Managing Human Rights at Work: 101 Practical Tips to Prevent Human Rights Disasters* helps supervisors and managers prevent human rights disasters and build a welcoming workplace.

Born in Winnipeg and educated in Winnipeg and Toronto, he now calls British Columbia his home.

America's new President plans to empower Americans with Disabilities



U.S. President Barack Obama's comprehensive agenda includes empowering individuals with disabilities.

In a video available on the Internet, President Obama states that, "Everyone

deserves to live with dignity and respect." He acknowledges that since Congress enacted the Americans with Disabilities Act 17 years ago, America's leadership has faded. "As President," he says, "I plan to restore it."

During the video, President Obama explains that he learned about the experience of living with disability from his father-in-law Frazier Robinson, who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at the age of 30. "Frazier's story re-enforces that we must build a world free of unnecessary barriers, stereotypes and discrimination."

In addition to reclaiming America's leadership by becoming a signatory to, and having the Senate ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, he has outlined a four part plan for equalizing opportunities for American citizens as follows: First, provide Americans with disabilities with the educational opportunities they need to succeed. Second, end discrimination and promote equal opportunity. Third, increase the employment rate of workers with disabilities. And fourth, support independent, community-based living for Americans with disabilities.

<http://www.barackobama.com/issues/disabilities>