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Federal Parliament Inquiry into Workplace Bullying
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Dear Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations Bill Shorten MP and colleagues

If you are looking for an example of bullying where the victim is atypical, you just found it. If you are looking for an example of bullying in the Queensland Public Sector, read on. My name is [REDACTED]. I'm a six-foot male, 100kg of solid muscle, a former body-builder and a former martial arts instructor. For fifteen years I was a career [REDACTED] with [REDACTED]. I was a senior operational Station Officer, a fire investigator and an acting Inspector with qualifications including two Diplomas, an Advanced Diploma and a Graduate Certificate. [REDACTED] sacked me on 25/2/2011 because I was able to use the WorkCover and Q-Comp processes to prove my immediate supervisor – [REDACTED] – was a workplace bully.

My sacking by [REDACTED] was brutal and traumatic. The bullying that I was eventually able to prove through Q-Comp had been going on for thirteen years and I had made my first formal complaint in 1999. [REDACTED] flatly refused to accept that a "Senior Officer" could be a workplace bully. They maintained that position even while they opted not to contest the Q-Comp decision. The [REDACTED] position was that Senior Officers do not bully staff or take unreasonable management action in an unreasonable way – regardless of any and all evidence to the contrary.

From the moment of the Q-Comp decision (13/11/2009) I came under direct and sustained attack by [REDACTED] management – most notably [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I was subjected to an ongoing series of escalating sanctions and punishments on the basis of "allegations" against me. Despite numerous requests under administrative access provisions, Freedom of Information and Right to Information I never did find any written mention of those "allegations."

The nearest I ever came to finding out the nature of the "allegations" against me was when, after the last time [REDACTED] inflicted bullying on me and I had walked out and gone home (8/4/2010), [REDACTED] went to the Police (four days later) and made an assault complaint against me. The Police did not consider it worthy of investigation so they passed it to the Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission. The CMC also did not consider it worthy and passed it back to [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] subjected me to a Spanish Inquisition-style 'disciplinary hearing' which concluded that I was guilty as charged despite the complete lack of evidence to support that conclusion. (I have done numerous FOI/RTI searches for this 'evidence' – without success.)

Later in 2010 I played a tape recording of that final bullying incident to a Department of Community Safety investigator, [REDACTED], who was acting on my own complaint to the CMC. [REDACTED] was astonished; the tape clearly proved – again – that [REDACTED] was a workplace bully and the complaint he made to Police was a complete and total fabrication. In turn, that meant the disciplinary process I was subjected to was completely unsound and my sacking was illegal.

My complaint to the CMC was based on my belief that [REDACTED] had breached their statutory duties under the *Workplace Health and Safety Act*, *Public Sector Ethics Act* and *Whistleblowers Protection Act*. The CMC are yet to complete their “review after” process of Bennett’s investigation, which apparently identifies “procedural issues” – code for illegal activity being covered up to protect the ‘Senior Officers Club.’ I have recently received my RTI copy of ([REDACTED]-approved) parts of the [REDACTED] investigation but I have not yet assessed it (due to my present state of health).

In [REDACTED] bullying is often used as a substitute for genuine managerial ability. When [REDACTED] was appointed to his Inspector’s position he was the only applicant for the position and his managerial background was limited and weak. He was out of his depth in the role from day one and used shouting and physical intimidation to cover for his lack of ability. [REDACTED] was easily panicked at fires and emergency incidents and used shouted abuse as a cover there as well. In my experience as many as a third of [REDACTED] Senior Officers are long-term in their roles, are grossly under-skilled and see bullying operational staff as a legitimate method of achieving organisational objectives.

While bullying methods are a common tool among Senior Officers it is not so prevalent amongst operational crews – Station Officers and Firefighters manning fire appliances. Operational crews are generally tight-knit and far more compassionate toward each other as they sometimes must rely on each other for their very survival at some emergency incidents.

At no time did [REDACTED] offer me any useful help or support despite overwhelming evidence that [REDACTED] was a persistent workplace bully. I have been suffering anxiety depression as a consequence of bullying by [REDACTED] since 1999. On 25/5/2009, the combination of a further bullying incident by [REDACTED] straight after a horrific emergency incident, (in which my crew and I were unable to resuscitate a local teenager while his family looked on), lead to me acquiring post-traumatic stress disorder on top of the depression. [REDACTED] dodged its responsibility by referring me to “Peer Support” – a group of [REDACTED] with very basic training who offer ‘a shoulder to cry on’ and access to trained counsellors. There is little that even the best-trained counsellor can do when the workplace bully is continually empowered by his superiors to continue his bullying behaviour.

While operational crews do resent bullying by Senior Officers, it tends to be accepted as ‘normal’ within the organisation. The culture of bullying by senior staff establishes a culture of fear of reprisal amongst operational staff; operational staff will support a bullying victim until the Senior Officer shows up, then they will bolt from the room to avoid any consequences or repercussions for themselves personally. That was what I experienced as a junior [REDACTED] in 1999 making my first complaint about [REDACTED] bullying.

At times, however, crews do jack up against Senior Officer workplace bullying. By 2009 I was a highly-respected senior operational Station Officer, known for my high-level skills, abilities and

experience as an emergency incident commander and my calm competence on the , so I had a lot of support from my operational colleagues. My belief is that they thought I had a good chance of winning the fight against persistent bullying. The following is the text of a letter from the Union to AC about ;

At its meeting of 20/7/09, the Tablelands Branch of the United Firefighters Union passed the following motions;

“The Union shows full support for in his dispute with . The Branch need to see evidence that resolution strategies have commenced to rectify the abusive incompetent management style that continually displays in our workplace. If this is not evident by 17/8/09 the will meet and a vote of no confidence in will be considered. It is out of respect to you in your position as AC that this Union has not already acted.”

“A formal apology be sought from to all crew that were present on 25/5/09 for the inappropriate time of the meeting and the manner that it was conducted and the agenda/format of the meeting.”

The Union comprised all of permanent staff and some of his part-time staff . Some weeks later had his human resources officer, , draft an apology which then read out to those of us present at that meeting of the 25th of May. continued his bullying behaviour afterwards despite this minor (forced) act of contrition.

As someone who sustained repeated psychological injuries in the workplace from a serial abuser I found that the Queensland workers' compensation system was geared to automatically reject any claims made on the basis of psychological injury due to workplace bullying. In 1999 I had reports from a Queensland Health psychiatrist as well as a private psychiatrist that said I had received a psychological injury at work as a consequence of workplace bullying. WorkCover got their own psychiatrist who blamed my father, and therefore me, for any problems - even though my interview with him did not discuss my father! WorkCover also rejected my 2009 claim but, as stated, I won at the appeal stage at Q-Comp. Medical professionals I spoke to were amazed that I had won a Q-Comp appeal single-handed and without a lawyer – that was seen as a particularly uncommon result.

had anti-bullying policies in place but only gave them lip service. actually bullied one crew about an anti-bullying poster that had been “interfered with” in a humorous fashion. could effortlessly parrot anti-bullying dogma but his behaviour was one-hundred percent bully.

Senior Officers went to extraordinary lengths to protect and defend one of their own and to marginalise and isolate me as a victim and complainant. When investigated my 2009 complaint against , Commissioner Senior WH&S Investigator, , wrote two reports. One was for us and it clearly revealed pattern of abusive behaviour – the other was for my WorkCover claim and it denied any wrong-

doing by [REDACTED]. That was a classic example of systematic dishonesty designed to minimise liability and protect the guilty - if they happen to be Senior Officers.

The end result for me is that I am now highly-trained and skilled in a very specific area for which there is only one employer in my part of the world and that employer got rid of me because I exposed collusion and dishonesty at the highest levels of [REDACTED]. I did nothing illegal, immoral or unethical – yet I was sacked. I stuck to my guns and defended my right to a safe and abuse-free workplace in accordance with the organisation’s stated policy and the law – and was dismissed for my efforts. In my direct personal experience the existing regulatory frameworks provide zero deterrents against workplace bullying if the bully occupies a managerial position and is a member of the [REDACTED] ‘Old Boys’ Club.’

After I was sacked [REDACTED] promptly settled out of court for the maximum unfair dismissal payout provided for under Queensland law – six months pay. Part of the process associated with this gave me the option to take the matter to the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, however the rules are written so that even if I won I would be liable for [REDACTED] legal costs – and Commissioner [REDACTED] doesn’t go anywhere without his six lawyers and two barristers.

To get the settlement cheque I was forced to sign an ‘agreement’ whereby I would not make “derogatory” public comments about [REDACTED], nor would they about me. So far I have stuck to that ‘agreement’ out of fear of hordes of taxpayer-funded lawyers hounding me so I have not given my daughter, senior [REDACTED] journalist [REDACTED], consent to write a story. [REDACTED], however, has already breached its side of the ‘agreement’ by poisoning my chances with other employers.

In essence, the system in the [REDACTED] is run by workplace bullies for the benefit of workplace bullies and is designed to suppress and disenfranchise any worker who dares challenge the status quo.

Please feel free to call me for further detail or supporting documentation. Obviously I would like to be reinstated and reimbursed for my losses but I won’t hold my breath. Without the hundreds of thousands of dollars needed for a proper legal challenge I can’t expect any sort of justice.

Yours Sincerely

[REDACTED]

PS

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]