

## WORKING FOR THE WHITE RIBBON CAMPAIGN (1994-96)

by Rutherford

From 1994 to 1996, I worked for the White Ribbon Campaign at its head office in Toronto.

I met [Jack Layton](#) in the early 1990s, while he was a Toronto City Councillor and I was the co-Chair of *TRAC*: the Toronto Recycling Action Committee which advised Toronto City Council on environmental and waste reduction policies. In April 1994, Jack offered me the post of Assistant National Director of the *White Ribbon Campaign*: a pro-feminist organisation he had founded with [Michael Kaufman PhD](#) in response to the 1989 massacre at Montréal's *Ecole Polytechnique*.

One year into the post at WRC, in preparation for his move into national politics, Jack offered me the post of his Executive Assistant: a position he described as 'a stepping stone' to the political career for which he tried to persuade me I was particularly well suited. Although flattered by the offer, we decided that we hadn't worked so hard for so long to stay poor and anonymous just to throw it all away. (In 2003, Jack was elected leader of Canada's New Democratic Party and, following the May 2011 national election, he became Leader of the Opposition.)



Jack Layton with the representatives of the YWCA, YMCA and the actors Sonja Smits & Eric Peterson of the popular Canadian TV series *Street Legal*. Photo ©Rutherford 1995

After two years with the WRC, in June 1996, just before we left for our annual holiday in France, the Board of Directors promoted me to the newly created post of National Administrator – in order, they said, to “lighten the burden” of the National Director “to allow him to focus his energies on political issues”.

It was during this trip that we decided to move to Nice the following summer. At the time, we both had full-time posts (my wife was then an Educational Assistant with the Toronto Board of Education), and so, to prepare for the move, for the next year we planned to live on one salary and to save the other.

Seeing this promotion as an erosion of his power and therefore a slight to an already fragile and unhealthy ego, while we were on holiday, the National Director (aka ‘the Man with a Stick up his Bottom’) called a meeting of the Board of Directors and made my dismissal a condition of his remaining with the group.

On my very first day back in the office following our holiday, I was called into a meeting with National Director and two members of the Board of Directors (including one I had previously considered a friend) and was informed that I was to be let go, effective immediately. Throughout the meeting, the Man with a Stick up his Bottom sat silently, watching me intently while rocking back and forth in ‘his’ special chair – and was clearly disappointed that I did not react to the news. This was because I was not surprised; while the timing was unfortunate and posed a serious threat to our plans, this had been in the wind for some time.

Months later, I heard from a friend within the WRC that the Man with a Stick up his Bottom had brought the organisation to the brink of bankruptcy and then, resigning just ahead of the boot, quietly slipped into bed with the same (very) provincial Conservative government against whose regressive social policies and initiatives we had spent the previous three years vigorously campaigning.