Work shouldn’t hurt

When you go to work, you shouldn’t have to worry about whether you will return home at the end of the day; and you shouldn’t have to return home sick, injured or maimed because your job is unsafe or unhealthy. But that is what happened to more than 6 million American workers in 2000:

• 5.7 million were injured or became sick on the job.
• 50,000 died because of occupational illnesses.
• 5,915 died from fatal work injuries.

Ergonomic injuries affect CTs
Each year, more than 1.8 million workers are injured and crippled by ergonomic hazards—our nation’s biggest job safety problem. However, in early 2001, the federal legislature killed an ergonomics standard put in place to protect workers from hazards caused by heavy lifting, repetitive work and poorly designed jobs.

Scores of CTs have suffered from such injuries. The CTU has fought successfully to make situations better when they come to our attention. The MSU administration also has implemented some good programs, but a few managers and departments are not persuaded easily to do the right thing. Protecting workers from the nation’s biggest job safety problem should not be voluntary—at MSU or anywhere.

Instead of protecting workers, the Bush administration joined ranks with the most extreme elements of the business community, killing the OSHA ergonomics standard in early 2001. Since that time the administration has done nothing to protect workers from ergonomic hazards. One worker suffers an ergonomic injury every 18 seconds.

Since 2001, inspections and penalties issued by the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration have declined. The administration has halted action on dozens of new safety and health regulations, proposed budget cuts in job safety agency programs and backed a plan that relies on a voluntary approach to protect workers from ergonomic injuries such as carpal tunnel syndrome.

A bill to protect workers, the bipartisan Breaux-Specter Ergonomics Bill (S.2184), was introduced earlier this year. It would require the Department of Labor to issue a new ergonomics standard within two years. Unless Congress acts to pass this bill, workers will not be protected. Any politician claiming to be pro-worker should support such legislation.

When safety falls short
When we are injured by our jobs, CTs, like other workers, turn to workers’ compensation for income and medical benefits. Unfortunately, workers’ compensation is often inadequate and difficult to obtain.

There have been many changes in Michigan’s workers’ compensation law over the past two decades, most of them reducing protections for workers and lowering costs for employers.

These attacks came despite the fact that Michigan’s workers’ compensation costs are not out of line with other states. In fact, workers’ compensation insurance premiums continue to decline, year after year.

We need reform. Reform should extend protections, raise benefit levels and keep levels current with inflation. Reform should also provide a remedy to workers injured while in the employ of employers operating illegally without workers’ compensation insurance; they should have a remedy for their claims, and the legislature should re-enact provisions requiring the director of workers’ compensation to over

It pays to vote union!

Position paper #6 in the 2002 Elections Series
The Issues and Education Committee of the Clerical-Technical Union of MSU
Ergonomics standards and workers' compensation

continued

attempt to collect benefits from the illegal employer and pass them on to the injured worker.

Instead, two “reform” bills (HB4809 and HB4512) introduced in 2001 would limit workers’ compensation even more. Both bills are currently in committee.

Fighting back
The CTU is part of a union movement that leads the fight for job safety protections that improve the lives of all workers. That fight continues every day in our workplaces.

The Issues and Education Committee believes that workers also should take that fight into the political arena where the laws are enacted and to the regulatory offices responsible for enforcing the regulations meant to keep workers safe.

When workers are injured on the job, they should not have to fight every step of the way for the benefits to which they are entitled. Those benefits should be adequate to keep injured workers “whole.” CTs need to find out which candidates support the health and safety of working families and vote accordingly.