

SUPREME COURT OF OHIO

State ex rel. Schack v. Industrial Commission

93 Ohio St. 3d 247 (Ohio 2001) · Decided September 26, 2001

SUMMARY

The Ohio Supreme Court held that a workers' compensation claimant who left his former employment pursuant to a negotiated settlement and later obtained another job had not abandoned the labor market. Because medical evidence showed that his industrial injury prevented him from performing the new job, the court held that he remained eligible for temporary total disability compensation under State ex rel. Baker v. Industrial Commission. The court reversed the court of appeals' judgment.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Ohio
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Moyer, C.J.; Douglas, J.; Resnick, J.; F.E. Sweeney, J.; Pfeifer, J.; Cook, J.; Lundberg Stratton, J.
JURISDICTION	Ohio
DECIDED	September 26, 2001
DISPOSITION	reversed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Claimant appealed as of right from a court of appeals judgment upholding the Industrial Commission's denial of temporary total disability compensation and denying his mandamus complaint.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Whether the Industrial Commission abused its discretion in denying temporary total disability compensation; mandamus relief was appropriate only if the commission had a clear legal duty to provide the compensation and its decision constituted an abuse of discretion.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published Ohio Supreme Court opinion; binding precedent in Ohio.
PARTIES	Gerald K. Schack v. Industrial Commission of Ohio

TOPICS

workers compensation

administrative law

remedies

PRACTICE AREAS

workers compensation

administrative law

remedies

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether a claimant who leaves a former position of employment pursuant to a negotiated settlement, later obtains other employment, and then becomes medically unable to perform the new job is eligible for temporary total disability compensation.
2. Whether State ex rel. Baker v. Industrial Commission applies when the claimant's departure from the former position was not motivated by an immediately available better job.

HOLDINGS

1. A claimant who leaves the former position of employment for a reason other than an intention to abandon the labor market, later obtains other employment, and becomes medically unable to perform the new job because of the industrial injury remains eligible for temporary total disability compensation.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“When a claimant who is medically released to return to work following an industrial injury leaves his or her former position of employment to accept another position of employment, the claimant is eligible to receive temporary total disability compensation pursuant to R.C. 4123.56(A) should the claimant reaggravate the original industrial injury while working at his or her new job.”

“Baker returns the focus of analysis to the disabling effects of a claimant’s injury rather than upon — as it has been over the last several years — a claimant’s decision to leave the job at which he or she was injured.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Gerald K. Schack injured his lower back in 1990 while working for the city of Geneva and received workers' compensation benefits. After surgery, he returned to his former job but later resigned pursuant to a negotiated settlement, effective August 31, 1994. He obtained other employment as a tow motor operator in 1995, and both his attending physician and an examining commission physician concluded in 1999 that his industrial injury temporarily prevented him from performing that job.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The Industrial Commission denied Schack's request for temporary total disability compensation, finding that he had voluntarily removed himself from his former employment and had not quit because of his allowed industrial conditions. Schack filed a mandamus action in the Franklin County Court of Appeals, which upheld the commission's decision. The Supreme Court of Ohio reversed.

DISPOSITION

reversed

CASES CITED

- State ex rel. Baker v. Industrial Commission, 89 Ohio St. 3d 376, 732 N.E.2d 355 (2000)

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

Per Curiam. Appellant-claimant, Gerald K. Schack, injured his low back in 1990 while working for the city of Geneva. His workers' compensation claim was allowed, with claimant missing approximately a year and a half of work. He was, however, eventually able to return to his former job after surgery.

On May 2, 1994, claimant gave to his employer a formal letter of resignation, listing his "official retirement date" as August 31, 1994. All agree that claimant resigned pursuant to the terms of a negotiated lawsuit between claimant and his employer.

In 1995, claimant got another job as a tow motor operator. On January 22, 1999, he moved appellee Industrial Commission of Ohio for temporary total disability compensation ("TTC"), alleging that he was no longer able to do that job because of his industrial injury. Both claimant's attending physician and an examining commission doctor agreed that claimant was temporarily unable to operate a tow motor.

A Staff Hearing Officer ("SHO") denied TTC, writing: "The claimant voluntarily removed himself from his former position of employment when he submitted his formal resignation dated 5/2/94 effective 8/31/94. "In summary, the Staff Hearing Officer finds and orders that claimant did not quit his employment due to the allowed conditions for which this claim has been recognized and is no longer eligible for temporary total benefits." Further hearing was denied.

Claimant filed a complaint in mandamus in the Court of Appeals for Franklin County, alleging that the commission abused its discretion in denying TTC. The court of appeals upheld the commission's decision, prompting claimant's appeal to this court as of right. Urban Co., L.P.A., and Anthony P. Christine, for appellant. Betty D. Montgomery, Attorney General, and Dennis H. Behm, Assistant Attorney General, for appellee.

After the court of appeals' decision issued, we decided *State ex rel. Baker v. Indus. Comm.* (2000), 89 Ohio St.3d 376, 732 N.E.2d 355. Baker modified the longstanding principle that voluntary abandonment of the former position of employment foreclosed TTC.

The case at bar involves the syllabus language highlighted below: "When a claimant who is medically released to return to work following an industrial injury leaves his or her former position of employment to accept another position of employment, the claimant is eligible to receive temporary total disability compensation pursuant to R.C. 4123.56(A) should the claimant reaggravate the original industrial injury while working at his or her new job." All agree that claimant did not depart because he had a better job waiting in the wings.

He left pursuant to a negotiated settlement agreement. The commission asserts that because other employment did not motivate claimant to quit, Baker does not apply. Claimant contends that so long as his decision to leave his former position of employment was followed by another job — as opposed to abandonment of the entire labor market — Baker controls.

We agree with claimant. Baker returns the focus of analysis to the disabling effects of a claimant's injury rather than upon — as it has been over the last several years — a claimant's decision to leave the job at which he or she was injured. This is consistent with the purpose of the workers' compensation system — to compensate employees for the disability incurred by workplace injury.

In this case, claimant obtained other employment after leaving the city of Geneva. Medical evidence is consistent in certifying that claimant is medically unable to return to his new job due to his industrial injury.

Because there was no abandonment of the labor market, we hereby find that Baker preserves claimant's TTC eligibility. The judgment of the court of appeals should be reversed. Judgment reversed. Moyer, C.J., Douglas, Resnick, F.E. Sweeney, Pfeifer, Cook and Lundberg Stratton, JJ., concur.