HOW DID DISABLED PROTESTERS CHANGE AMERICAN LAW BY STAYING INSIDE?



WHAT'S HAPPENING?

In 1977, disabled protesters in the United States occupied a government building in San Francisco for 26 days. They were demanding rules to enforce Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, a law passed in 1973 to protect disabled people from discrimination in organisations receiving federal money. The law was important, but government officials had not yet explained how it should work. Judy Heumann and hundreds of other activists joined demonstrations across the country. In San Francisco, protesters stayed inside the Department of Health, Education and Welfare offices. Many needed medicines, personal assistants or special equipment, so simply remaining in the building was difficult. Protesters cared for one another while they waited. Their action helped pressure the government to sign the regulations. The sit-in is now remembered as one of the most important victories in the American disability rights movement. A new film about Judy Heumann has brought the protest back into the news.

WHY IS THIS INTERESTING?

The protest changed the way many people thought about disability. Disabled people were often treated as needing charity or sympathy, but the protesters argued that equal access was a civil right. Their success shows how peaceful protest can force governments to act, especially when people organise together and refuse to leave an unfair situation.

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

“Why was staying inside the building an effective form of protest?”

Source: Smithsonian Magazine

https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-real-story-behind-the-504-sit-in-for-disability-rights-the-longest-peaceful-occupation-of-a-federal-building-in-american-h