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Gary A. LEWIS : *News from Somewhere : Connecting Health and Freedom at the Workplace*. New York, Greenwood Press, 1986, 213 pp., ISBN 0-313-24869-9

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**News from Somewhere: Connecting Health and Freedom at the Workplace**, by Gary A. Lewis, New York, Greenwood Press, 1986, 213 pp., ISBN 0-313-24869-9

Books about workplace health and safety are of special interest to me, yet most have left me unsatisfied. This definitely is not the case with **News from Somewhere** by Dr. Gary A. Lewis. This is Lewis' first published book although he is at an age when many think of retirement. Perhaps, the author's biography has afforded him special insights into the matter of work and health which academic researchers might overlook. The author holds an M.A. and a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto. During his long and varied career he has worked as a writer, editor, production manager, corporate executive, janitor, and educator.

The details of the compromise between this and the employers' historical compulsion to control the worker are to be worked out gradually through legal enactment, collective bargaining, public opinion, and the worker/union encroachments in particular workplaces.

Ultimately what the employer is offered, according to Dr. Lewis, is higher productivity and lower costs in the form of less absenteeism, less lost time accidents, etc. In **News from Somewhere** we have a recrudescence of the ideas of G.D.H. Cole, especially in his advocacy of «partnership» as the proper organization of industry and production. The author maintains that a partnership rather than a dictatorship offers us a better way to live. Afterall, the Greeks placed slaves in charge of slaves because they knew full well the ignobility and degradation of applied domination. This truth was echoed by Rousseau when he exclaimed that the masters are the most enslaved of all!

Lewis does not let the matter rest here, but asks whether this thesis is, in fact, possible. He rejects the possibility of «revolution» as a delusion, and maintains that we can only proceed by discovering harmonies or congruities of need within present structures. He asks what can workers' self-management give capitalism that it needs and cannot get any other way? The author's answer is human efficiency as understood by Marx, Kropotkin, Bakunin and G.D.H. Cole. The Guild Socialists were very explicit in their notion that the utmost talent and potential of the worker brought to bear on the task of social production, express, in the first instance, potentially, as production for the individual enterprise. This proposition is found **News from Nowhere** by William Morris — who G.D.H. Cole admired enormously. And Lewis takes his title from that classic work.

The «somewhere» according to Lewis is found in Norway. The account of Norwegian industrial democracy experiments and their climax in the institution of worker-control occupational health and safety weaves the two strands of autonomy and well-being together in a political program which has practical application for the present. Throughout the book, however, evidence is adduced to show that health and self-determination are interdependent. This is the strength of the connection between worker participation and occupational health and safety. In Norway this substantial interdependence has been institutionalized in a national program of worker control over the health and safety factors in their work environment which is backed by positive law.

The **Norwegian Work Environment Act** offers the best possibilities for developing the next stage of workplace health and safety reforms. According to Lewis, the Act represents a break with legal traditions in the field of occupational health and safety by breaking with traditional or conventional health and safety matters by bringing worker participation to bear on the work environment. More specifically, the Norwegian legislation places occupational health and safety into a context of greater workplace democracy.

The legislation puts forth the idea that work must be redesigned to be more meaningful for the individual worker allowing him or her to discover their full potential as human beings.

According to the author, this legislation represents a «beacon» in the area of work environment public policy. It is therefore good news from somewhere for trade unionists and policy makers in the area of work environment matters.

Throughout the book the author raises insightful questions pertaining to the content of the freedom which he advocates for workers. How do we know what decisions to make? What is the substance and content of this control? How can we be sure that our autonomous actions will not destroy the conditions of our own freedom? What is the relation between wisdom and spontaneity, authority and liberty, expertise and autonomy?

I am most curious about Lewis' academic background and work experience because I believe **News from Somewhere** represents an important theoretical contribution to the area of occupational health and safety. I am uncertain as to what inspired the writing of this book which, I believe, will be a major force in overthrowing the present scholasticism and «conventional wisdom» of how we think about, regulate and enforce workplace health and safety today.

It seems to me proper to stress at the outset that Lewis' basic premise is that only the people can make themselves free and that they only become free by the practice of freedom. Throughout his book evidence is adduced to show that health and self-determination are interdependent and that this is the strength of the connection between worker participation and occupational health and safety. Part One is entitled «The Natural Basis of Self-Determination» and begins with a theoretical exploration of the question as to whether freedom is possible. This section is basically an inquiry into workplace democracy. The author asks whether self-governing democracy is, in fact, possible. And, is it possible in a modern centralizing, bureaucratizing, technological world? How can people regain control of their own destiny, their own well being?

The author applies to Marxian theory the Marxian premise that action forms consciousness. He further traces how Bakunin and later Kropotkin took up the thread of individual liberty where Marx dropped it. He argues that both develop the ground for the theory of self-determination based on nature. The argument, however, set forth by the author is that people have lost control of their own lives, individually and collectively. The workplace is found to be the source of both the loss and the remedy. More specifically, the authoritarianism and structure of command in the workplace creates subordination and severity. The remedy is worker self-government. The effects of democratization has two essential features: the establishment of organizational mechanism or structures promoting and ensuring the exercise of worker «control» over their work environment and of equal importance, the acquisition of **competence** for exercising responsibility. This notion of the workplace becoming a place for workers doing and learning is congruent with classical philosophical thought, as well as consistent with modern concepts of learning and social change.

Lewis proposes a radical proposition which advances the thesis that social change is contingent, in part, by the practice of freedom by workers in their employment which produces new modes of behaviour acquired by the practice of freedom. Thus, the relations of production becomes the source of their own transformation, and when transformed, they will provide a base for the transformation of political and social relations.

In Part Two entitled «Road to Utopia: The Theory of G.D.H. Cole» the author in a concise and lucid presentation of Cole's Theory of Guild Socialism depicts how decentralized units of producers' control could relate to each other and to other political units in a self-governing society.

At this point two strands come together. Well-being is both a condition and a product of the self-determination required for human efficiency. Health and safety emerge as the focus of reorganized relations of production both logically and strategically, since (1) health and safety are socially valued goods even within the present structure, (2) they are understood to be prerequisites for good life (and ultimately of mere life) in ways that freedom from exploitation and alienation (which are assumed to be necessary costs of the good life) are not.

If health is a good both for the enterprise and society, and if self-determination is a condition and a component of good health (upon which safety depends), then there are practical grounds for workers' self-administration of their own health and safety, worker control of their own work environment.

The book's answer is a dialectical one which presumes that «none is wise enough to decide for all». Here there is a clear echo of William Morris' «no man is good enough to be the master of another». According to Lewis each individual possesses the immediate process at hand, the prospective which no proxy can represent, a worthwhile and necessary contribution to the decision-making process, especially to those decisions ordinarily relegated to «experts» alone. And that there must be a reciprocal flow of influence and information and judgement back and forth between specialists (where these are unavoidable) and ordinary worker-citizens for the practical, experiential judgement of the individual citizen in the necessary completion of expertise, as expertise is the sometimes necessary supplement to individual experience and intuition. The structural means for accomplishing this is to be worked out organically in the process itself at the individual workplace.

In Part Three Lewis introduces the thoughts of prophetic Bjorn Gustavsen who had an enormous influence on present-day Norwegian work environment public policy. Lewis also cites the empirical investigations linking occupational health and safety, worker participation and health. The empirical studies of Dr. Bertil Gardell provides us with this foundation for the theoretical propositions of this important contribution to the area of occupational health and safety.

This book cannot be excluded from the present-day discussions and debates pertaining to reforms and approaches to occupational health and safety in Canada, nor in the international arena as well. *News from Somewhere* provides a strong argument for full citizenship for workers in the area of work environment matters.

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**Les normes du travail**, par Jean-Louis Dubé et Nicola Di Lorio, Sherbrooke, Les Éditions Revue de Droit, Université de Sherbrooke, 1987, 442 pp., ISBN 2-920003-08-9

Ces deux auteurs nous offrent une analyse soignée et intelligente de la **Loi sur les normes du travail**. Il s'agit d'un ouvrage bien présenté, écrit avec clarté et simplicité et qui dépasse largement le seuil de la paraphrase. En d'autres termes, on rend compte de l'état du droit en ce domaine des normes du travail par la voie d'une étude critique de la jurisprudence.

Règle générale, le plan retenu respecte celui de la **Loi sur les normes du travail**. Celui qui connaît ce dernier se retrouve vite en ce volume. S'il s'agit d'un avantage pour les initiés, il l'est aussi, croyons-nous, pour fins pédagogiques. En effet, ce volume devrait être mis à la disposi-