

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



### Don WELLS : *Soft Sell : "Quality of Working Life" Programs and the Productivity Race*. Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives, 150 pp., ISBN 088627-040-5

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an organization's time and materials to further his own enterprise. Why should the organization not allow him — even encourage him — to borrow its resources for a price, renting him time on its production equipment line or feeding his ideas into the corporation's computers?» (p. 208).

The development of fiddling needs measures that would be appropriate, and one of them would be sub-contracting of specific tasks to small companies willing and able to gain profit from activities difficult to control and make really effective in the depersonalized big companies. This is a very important point brought by the author of the book.

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**Soft Sell: «Quality of Working Life» Programs and the Productivity Race**, by Don Wells, Published by Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 150 pages, Paper ISBN 088627 040 5

*Soft Sell: «Quality of Working Life» Programs and the Productivity Race* by Don Wells is an important contribution to the growing literature pertaining to workplace co-operative «experiments» from the perspective of the workers experience. The book analyzes two QWL programs in Ontario and probes beneath productivity gains to examine the impact of these programs upon workers and union security and solidarity, basic power relations and social relations in production, changes in work organization and job design, and actual worker involvement and participation in traditional management decision-making which impacts upon the day to day activities of ordinary workers.

The author finds that the actual practice and worker experience with both QWL programs falls short of the QWL «ideal» or goal as a process which emphasizes democratic principles in the workplace «and as a process based on joint control and shared responsibility between union and management at all levels». (p. 74) Rather, the author states that «QWL is designed to adjust workers to jobs, not jobs to workers. More broadly, it is designed to adjust workers to their own continuing subordination in the workplace». (p. 74) Far from enhancing the ability of workers or their unions to influence the decision that affect them, the whole tendency of QWL has been to undermine worker's power. (p. 75)

Mr. Wells describes just how both QWL initiatives, in fact, undermine the union and workers ability to influence management's right to dispose, layoff, introduce labour-saving devices, schedule production, and whatever to maintain what they deem to be appropriate levels of productivity and efficiency. The author further states that «management hopes workers will come to act like bosses» and the proponents of QWL assume that worker and management goals are compatible while hired and paid by management who «has a total monopoly of the purse». (p. 118) Mr. Wells warns workers and unions that «the QWL expert could not be neutral since he was an agent of management, hired by management, paid by management, and had no authority independent of management», (p. 118) and the effects of the program are, therefore, predictable: «Q.W.L. poses no challenge to management control» (p. 117) (emphasis mine) and that «there is nothing in the problem-solving techniques that teaches workers how to make their jobs into «good» ones with «enjoyment, accomplishment, and pride» or any other benefits QWL consultants talk about». (p. 104)

One cannot help but to conclude that it remains necessary for unions to pursue a genuine form of worker participation which would shift the focus of decision-making power to workers

and unions in matters, at least, of the work environment which is directly linked to worker health and safety — a tantamount value. While QWL does produce «partial» benefits through an improved «human relations» style of management, it becomes evident that you cannot have full «humanization» without *democratization*. Only through a genuine democratization of industry will the primary work group have its own interest, not necessarily coincidental with the goals of shareholders and managers. In this regard, workers ought to meet with managers and their professional agents as free and equals in an industrial partnership. This organization of industry would have enormous benefits for society in terms of productivity and efficiency and more importantly for worker health, safety, and moral and spiritual development. *Soft Sell: «Quality of Working Life» Programs and the Productivity Race* by Don Wells contributes enormously toward this end. The author, I am certain, will be in the gratitude of Canadian workers for his inciteful analysis and expose of a growing management development. I recommend «Soft Sell» as required reading for workers, trade unionists, and students of industrial relations and management studies.

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**Technological Change: The Tripartite Response, 1982-85**, par Bureau international du travail, Genève, 1985, 355 pp. ISBN 92-2-105162-5

Cet analyse est composé d'articles parus dans la revue *Social and Labour Bulletin* du Bureau international du travail (B.I.T.). Il a pour objet de compléter et de mettre à jour les renseignements contenus dans *New Technologies: Their Impact on Employment and the Working Environment* qui fut publié par le B.I.T. en 1982.

Il illustre de façon plutôt «télégraphique» comment les secteurs public (les gouvernements) et privé (les industries) font face à «l'explosion» de la technologie nouvelle.

Plusieurs sujets sont examinés: les conventions collectives, le phénomène du travail à domicile, la vie privée, le transfert outre-frontières des données, etc. Aussi, une attention particulière est accordée à un secteur qui en préoccupe plusieurs: l'impact de la technologie sur les pays en voie de développement et d'industrialisation.

Il se dégage un thème central voulant qu'une relation nouvelle s'établisse entre les travailleurs et les nouveaux «outils» technologiques dont ils devront se servir. Bref, le lecteur découvre un ensemble d'études, relié à l'avenir de l'emploi, qui permet de dégager des éléments essentiels devant être considérés lors des ententes employeurs-employés.

Le point fort et fascinant de ce livre est qu'il offre des perspectives nationales et internationales.

Tel que mentionné, il s'agit d'un ensemble d'articles du *Social and Labour Bulletin* (SLB) qui tente de démontrer comment les problèmes reliés à la technologie nouvelle ont évolué, ont été étudiés et quelles solutions ont été proposées en fonction des différents contextes nationaux. Les deux côtés de la «médaille» technologique sont présentés: d'une part, les technologies nouvelles peuvent améliorer la qualité de vie; d'autre part, elles peuvent aussi occasionner le chômage et élargir l'écart entre les pays industrialisés et les pays en voie de développement.