



Regulating America, Regulating Sweden: A Comparative Study of Occupational Safety and Health Policy

Steven Kelman

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"This remarkable book...opens up new perspectives for the study of bureaucracy and the political institutions in which governmental bureaucracies are embedded.... This is one of those rare books that actually *compares* governments...rather than simply offering descriptive accounts of two or more regimes.... Not only are the differences [Kelman] observes between the United States and Sweden striking, they are also in a way counterintuitive."

—James Q. Wilson

The book undertakes a comparative examination of two government agencies—the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in the United States and the *Arbetarskyddsverket* or Worker Protection Board (ASV) in Sweden—that have the same mission: the prevention and control of work-related accidents and diseases. By exploring the differences between the two agencies by reference to the societies in which they operate, the study also compares American and Swedish societies themselves. This comparison illuminates the development of "adversary institutions" in American society.

Kelman contrasts the political environments of the two countries, noting that American unions are weaker than those of any other democratic industrial nation, while Sweden's are the strongest; that the United States alone among democratic industrial nations has no mass-based socialist or communist party, while in Sweden the socialists held power continuously from 1932 to 1976. And these differences are reflected in the attitudes of national leaders toward occupational safety and health. Thus, President Ford criticized OSHA as a dramatic example of "over-regulation," while Prime Minister Palme saw the fact that workers still risked life and health on the job as a dramatic example of "the failures of capitalism."

Nevertheless, some of the author's key empirical findings could not have been predicted on the basis of these broad differences in political outlook. For example, Kelman finds that rulemaking decisions of the two agencies were quite similar and tended toward more rather than less protective alternatives; that OSHA was far more punitive with regard to compliance than ASV and far more concerned with controlling field inspectors; and that lawyers and the courts were "highly involved in both rulemaking and compliance in the United States and virtually uninvolved in Sweden." The book seeks to explain these findings.

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