

Sol Levine and Jonathan Mann: two pioneers of public health remembered

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The interviews of Sol Levine and Jonathan Mann conducted by Anne Brunner in the winter and spring of 1995 have preserved for posterity a remarkable moment in the history of the evolution of public health, as well as the Harvard School of Public Health (where both men worked). Jonathan Mann, who was at that time the founding Director of the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights, pioneered the worldwide movement to bring the field of human rights to public health. Sol Levine was the founding Co-Chairman (with Diana Chapman Walsh) of the Department of Health and Social Behavior at the Harvard School of Public Health, the first department of its kind in the United States to focus on the social determinants of health. Had these individuals been alive today, they would have been pleased to observe the astonishing speed and vigor with which their visions transformed public health. Together, they inspired a generation of scholars and their ideas have been disseminated to other disciplines and institutions around the globe.

Two simple examples will suffice to illustrate what I mean. In the fall of 2001, the American Society of Law, Medicine & Ethics hosted an international conference on "Health, Law & Human Rights". The conference not only honoured Jon Mann's contributions to the field, but it also brought together an unprecedented group of scholars and practitioners from diverse disciplines, including law, social epidemiology, medicine, and public health practice. The meeting represented the confluence of the two fields that Jonathan Mann and Sol Levine directly touched: the human rights tradition, and the nascent field of the social determinants of health. A book is presently being prepared,

edited by Professor Scott Burris of Temple University, which is both a tribute to the legacy of the two men, as well as the first attempt to integrate the field of health and human rights with scholarship on the social determinants of health.

The influence of Mann and Levine extends well beyond the United States, as exemplified by the recent publication of the textbook *Sozial-Epidemiologie* (edited by Andreas Mielck and Kim Bloomfield, Weinheim; München: Juventa, 2001) – the first of its kind in the German language – which also bears the strong intellectual imprint of both men (for example, the book concludes with a chapter on health and human rights by Manfred Wildner, Anne Brunner, and colleagues).

What is remarkable about the interviews by Anne Brunner is the overwhelming sense of humanitarianism and conscience, the concern for social justice, the intellectual breadth and curiosity, as well as the sparkling sense of humor, optimism, and deep humility that leap out of these pages. These are instantly recognisable qualities that colleagues and disciples of Mann and Levine (throughout the world) remember and mourn.

Above all, Mann and Levine were engaged in a life-long endeavour to make their ideas relevant to the improvement of the human condition. No one, least of all Anne Brunner, could have foreseen the tragic and untimely passing of these two lives. Yet her interviews remind us of why we became public health professionals, and what we need to do to fulfill their vision of the promise of public health.

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