

THE OMBUDSMAN PLAN. ESSAYS ON THE WORLDWIDE SPREAD OF AN IDEA. By Donald C. Rowat. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited 1973. Pp. 148 and appendix 167 pp. \$3.95.

This is a collection of previously published writings of a well-known protagonist of the Ombudsman approach, who wryly observes that we are lucky that the Swedish word has been used and not the Finnish word: *Oikeusasiames!* Some revision and adaptation of the writings has been attempted and the book is presented in four parts dealing with the history, the need, the North American experience, and generally, the worldwide spread of the idea. The extensive appendix includes a selected but substantial bibliography and focuses on the period since the publication of *The Ombudsman: Citizens' Defender* (2d, 1968), which the author edited. Recent Ombudsman Acts throughout the world and other similar proposals are also included, as are difficult-to-obtain 1971 statistics for the Nordic Ombudsmen.

The book achieves its aim to be a "short, up-to-date review of the subject for both laymen and scholars" in that recent worldwide trends and arguments in favour of the Ombudsman system are set out. The book has performed a valuable function in making the materials so readily accessible.

From a purely Canadian point of view, however, the work is disappointing. Only about one-third of the text is devoted to Canada and there is precious little detailed information in respect of the actual operations of the various Canadian Ombudsmen. The time for philosophical debates is now over in the vast majority of the Provinces of Canada and the acid test is whether or not Ombudsmen are effective. We need to know whether sufficient resources are being devoted to our Ombudsmen and what practical drawbacks and problems there are. We need to know whether or not Ombudsmen and civil rights and civil liberties agencies are complementing each other adequately to provide sufficient redress for administrative bungling and abuse. It is difficult to argue with the author that Canadians seem unduly complacent about the protection of the citizens' rights and, faced with the explosion of administrative powers, we can no longer live on our past reputation for the "rule of law". The author quaintly suggests that we are like the dog in the anonymous rhyme:

"There was a dachshund, one so long
He hadn't any notion
How long it took to notify
His tail of his emotion;
And so it was that, though his eyes
Were filled with tears of sadness,
His little tail went wagging on
Because of previous gladness."

To extend the metaphor, it is frustrating that the author has, in the main, only been able to dig up his old bones and it is apparent at several points in the book that the bones are of different vintage. It is to be hoped that the author will find the time for a really detailed investigation of the actual operation of the various Ombudsman schemes in Canada and that we should not be left to scavenge for juicy tidbits: such as his suggestion that Provincial Ombudsmen should allow complaints to be made by telephone; his remark that the proposed Federal Commission for the Protection of Human Rights might not be able to handle minor complaints of Departmental delay in answering mail or paying cheques; and his warning that the increasing tendency to call grievance officers of every description "ombudsmen" might obscure the fact that a genuine Ombudsman is a politically independent officer of a legislature.

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