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The President's Page: Who Speaks for the Average Citizen

Wilson Anderson

West Virginia Bar Association

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THE WEST VIRGINIA BAR ASSOCIATION

The President's Page

WHO SPEAKS FOR THE AVERAGE CITIZEN?

It has been said that the average American knows two Swedish words—"skoal" and "smorgasbord". A third Swedish word "ombudsman", is rapidly finding its place in the vocabulary of lawyers and students of government. In Sweden and other nations which have an "ombudsman" (Sweden (1809), Finland (1919), Denmark (1952), New Zealand (1962), Norway (1963), military ombudsman in West Germany (1956), he is the man to help you when you are having problems with your government.

The past four decades have witnessed a proliferation of agencies and bureaus at all levels of government, with corresponding increased governmental control over individuals. To whom does the average citizen turn when he has, or thinks he has, a grievance against the State? Too often he resigns himself to the philosophy, "you can't fight City Hall". In those countries which have an ombudsman, the citizen has a protector to whom he can voice his complaint, an officer of the state who is not beholden to the administrative or judicial branches of government and one with authority to command production of documents and records and to conduct investigations into all areas of governmental activity in its dealings with a citizen.

A thorough discussion of the "ombudsman" is found in the March, 1967 issue of the American Bar Association Journal (*We Can, Indeed, Fight City Hall: The Office and Concept of Ombudsman*, by Benny L. Kass, ABA Journal Vol. 53, Page 231). This article is recommended to all who share the concern of the writer for insuring the rights of the individual against his government.

We in West Virginia proudly repeat our state motto—"Montani Semper Liberi" but when so doing are we merely repeating hollow words? Do we need an ombudsman in West Virginia?

WILSON ANDERSON
President