

every country that has had a national ombudsman, complainants have remained altogether free to go to court, write their legislative representative, use political influence, resort to formal administrative remedies or take any other step they might think best suited to their particular problems. The ombudsman has not supplanted, but has supplemented.

When discussing the possible utility of an ombudsman in an urban setting, one need not contend that the ombudsman will produce happier results than anyone else possibly can. It suffices to say that he may be able to add to the sum total of happiness, not as a competitor against others who now concern themselves with governmental operations, but as their collaborator.

III

Does the ombudsman's success abroad plainly persuade that equal success would occur if an ombudsman were appointed in an American city? I myself am persuaded, but I cannot truthfully say that the answer should plainly be the same for all. The chief accomplishments of foreign ombudsmen have been at the level of national administration, usually well structured and strongly professional in spirit. Municipal administrations in this country do not invariably exhibit those qualities. Whether an ombudsman who possesses only the power of rational persuasion would be able to communicate effectively with local civil servants and political appointees has not been clearly established.

The uncertainty on this score—an uncertainty, I say again, that does not give me qualms—would justify experimentation with other means of grievance handling. Added machinery of some sort seems plainly needed in most large communities. Those who doubt that the ombudsman system would fill the need should cast about for something else that will in their opinion more effectively heighten governmental response to individual complaints. This has occurred here and there. St. Louis, to seize on one current example, has recently set up a central complaint bureau as an immediate adjunct of the mayor's office and, simultaneously, has approved a plan for retired business and professional men to act as impartial observers during police department investigations of civilian complaints against officers.

Whether these steps will build citizen confidence in the city's government cannot be foretold in advance of experience. I see nothing to be lost and much to be gained by localized experimentation. The superiority of the ombudsman system is not so indisputable as to justify dogmatic insistence upon its country-wide acceptance to the exclusion of all else.

What I do deem to be indisputable, however, is the desirability of moving ahead—preferably, in my view, toward an ombudsman, but in any event in that same general direction. As Professor Robert Fogelson's recent masterful study of the disastrously style-setting Watts riot of 1965 has shown anew, one of the most searing urban discontents is widespread belief that citizens' grievances are not now being seriously evaluated. Changing that belief ought to be a major goal of all Americans. Creating a truly independent ombudsman could powerfully reshape public opinion. Nothing we can learn from abroad causes reservations on that score. In all five countries with substantial experience in this field, citizen confidence in governmental processes has been raised by the mere existence of the ombudsman.

Despite genuine enthusiasm for the ombudsman idea, I close on a renewed note of caution. The ombudsman will not overcome what Professor John E. Moore has called "the hypochondria of the body politic". He will not reshape urban social and economic patterns. He will not create jobs, build homes, improve public schools, destroy organized crime, clean up the parks, strengthen the mass transport system or eliminate rats, smog and marijuana. Taking care of grievances about maladministration will leave untouched the deeper problems we Americans must solve if we are to live happily ever after.

But let us at least try in a civilized way to take care of the grievances, while remembering to attack the other problems as well. If medical research were to develop a treatment of asthma better than any now known, would anyone delay using it because it did nothing to alleviate lung cancer and tuberculosis?