

Claims, the system of apportioning land to American settlers. Another essay on the ten years of uneasiness between the settlers and the retired HBC servants reveals an interesting comparison with conditions north of the border. The remainder of the essays reveal a complexity of interactions and are a reminder that British Columbia's history does not stop at the forty-ninth parallel. Of further value are the extensive endnotes, many of which are drawn from local American sources.

The general mood and tenor of the essays is summed up in the preface in a quotation of one descendant, Cecelia Carpenter: "When the British had come, they had stated their goals of fur gathering and farming, had given the Indian people protection from their enemies, had offered them employment and, as single men, had married their daughters. A bond had been formed." The book is worth the price. Besides, it supports a worthy

*Citizens' Hall:  
Making Local Democracy Work*

Andre Carrel

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cause.

In *Citizens' Hall: Making Local Democracy Work*, Carrel lays out his proposal for establishing municipal charters – or constitutions – that recognize that government legitimacy resides in citizens rather than in other governments. He starts by considering the well known state of municipal government in Canada, where local government is the creature of a provincial government. Carrel laments the inherent colonialism involved in this situation, which ensures that, although citizens may have rights, they have no power. This is not a new lament, but Carrel approaches it from many angles. He argues that because municipal governments are structured to carry out the will of provincial gov-

ernments they are non-democratic. They are not so much governments as administrative arms of the province, unable to respond to citizens in a democratic fashion.

In fact, in British Columbia, local governments can behave democratically only if they brave the daunting Local Government Act. Carrel's example is Rossland, a community of about 4,000 in the West Kootenays, where he served as municipal administrator. There he and the team he centred brought Rossland a constitutional bylaw (bylaw no. 1728, entitled "A bylaw to regulate the use of referenda and elector initiatives in local government matters"), that gave citizens the right to challenge any proposed bylaw, put it to referendum,

and, with 20 per cent of the voting public agreeing, send it back to the town council to be fixed. This constitutional bylaw also gave the councillors the right (again with the consent of one in five voters) to initiate a referendum that, if approved, council would have to act upon within a year. According to Carrel, these approvals can be accommodated under the Local Government Act, thus rooting the political power of the council in its citizens.

Nevertheless, Carrel continually points out that many people consider the constitutional bylaw to be "illegal" because it refers political decisions to the citizens rather than to provincial statutes and regulations. He believes that it is the council's task to enable citizens to define the problem and empower them to contribute to its solution; it is *not* the council's task to "make the tough decisions" on its own.

In the constitutional bylaw's first decade, Rossland voted on thirteen referenda. The result, Carrel assures us, was an enhanced trust between the voters and their town council; a better understanding of, and more participation in, the affairs of the town; and council elections that depended upon the character of the candidates rather than upon the character of the issues. Rossland's constitutional bylaw cannot overcome all the town's problems; however, in many communities something like it could start a municipal evolution away from provincial domination.

Carrel, who was born and raised in Switzerland, where referenda are

frequent, has studied his subject widely, and he finds strong support for his belief that citizens have the right to differ and that centralization douses creativity. He critiques provincial folly, which he sees as the product of citizen apathy – an apathy that has come about due to provincial suppression of municipal aspirations.

The reader is asked to regret bungling and waste. For example, Carrel tells us how provincial authorities require only bookkeeping, not accounting, from local governments. Because of this, there is nothing on the books about the value of community-owned capital works. Sewers are recorded only as expenditures, and, in the cash-flow world of municipal politics, that means that the scarce financial resources used to maintain them do not show up on the books. Carrel is right in his description of the problem, but the problem is one of administrative requirements rather than one of democratic rights.

The value of Carrel's book is to be found in his idea of citizen participation, of how Carrel would draw citizens into intelligent discussion by making a referendum involve much more than a yes/no decision. What worked in Rossland would not work everywhere, and it offers only one step towards what Carrel and scores of others have been seeking for decades. But *Citizens' Hall* does propose a useful response to municipal powerlessness. It is an intriguing case study and, for those interested in governance at the local level, is worth reading.