

Reforming Human Services: The Experience of the Community Resource Boards in B.C., by Michael Clague, Robert Dill, Roop Seebaran and Brian Wharf. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984. Pp. 335.

The hero in this study is Norman Levi, social worker and change-agent extraordinaire, from 1972 to 1975 the NDP Minister of Human Resources. He inherited a system in which Catholic and Protestant children's aid societies, municipal governments and the province were all involved in the delivery of family and social services. When he left office these services were delivered directly by his ministry through a network of community offices. In addition, he had initiated a radical plan to have each office supervised by a popularly elected Community Resources Board (CRB). As well as supervising, these boards were to dispense provincial funds to community groups and act as citizen lobbies. Only sixteen boards (most of them in Vancouver) of a projected sixty to ninety had been elected when the NDP government was defeated.

The problems Levi met in this ambitious restructuring of the social service bureaucracy and his "damn-the-torpedoes" approach to reform are described fully in this book. His approach is nicely contrasted with that of the Minister of Health, also bent on integrating services (ch. 10). The Health ministry's experience with five pilot Community Human Resources and Health Centres is thoroughly analyzed. The book is a rich source of material for anyone interested in the process of change in modern government.

Although the province had only a short experience before 1975 with Levi's CRBs, it was promising. Clague *et al.* offer this assessment:

By the end of 1975, community services in British Columbia were more coherent in both form and content. Their public visibility had never been higher. The community resources board provided an overview of social services activity in their communities. . . . Though it was still in the embryonic stage, a locally initiated and controlled social planning process was underway throughout the province. (p. 68)

It is significant that some of those who were bitterly opposed to the CRBs changed their position after seeing them in operation (p. 192).

Enter the villain, William Vander Zalm, the Social Crediter who replaced Levi as Minister of Human Resources. Exit the Community Resources Boards, but not direct provincial delivery of services. B.C.

was to have neither its former private agencies run by citizens nor its popularly elected boards.

How was Vander Zalm able to undo much of Levi's work? Why did he want to? In setting up the CRBs, Levi often acted arbitrarily and unilaterally. He gave scant attention to building a strong base of support for them, hoping that, once established, they would become "rooted" and difficult to dislodge (p. 68). Vander Zalm, possessed of the same power as Levi and every bit as headstrong, made short work of formal citizen involvement in welfare. The extensive personal authority of ministers, incongruous in a system of democratic politics, can be used for ill, as well as good.

Vander Zalm was able to justify his dismantling activities by citing the opposition of the Union of B.C. Municipalities and other groups to the CRBs, by repeating the canard that the CRBs were merely NDP front organizations, and, for the especially naive, by claiming that the election gave the government a mandate to eliminate the boards. The welfare bureaucracy in Victoria, forced to go along with Levi, did not resist Vander Zalm's zeal to eliminate citizen groups which posed a threat to its control (p. 208).

Clague and his colleagues recognize, however, that behind Vander Zalm's rather feeble justification of his actions was a recognition of the threat posed by the CRBs to Social Credit interests. In establishing his community boards, Levi was seeking to alter the balance of power in B.C. Historically, governments in B.C. and elsewhere have been pre-occupied with economic development, with creating a good climate for private investment. Given the powerful role business plays in electoral politics, and the superior resources it brings to pressure group activities, it is not surprising that direct services to people have been of secondary importance. Providing services to the "welfare constituency" has ranked even lower.

The CRBs were intended to disrupt those priorities. Middle-class board members were being involved in the social welfare field just as they had always been involved in education. A well-funded, firmly based, province-wide lobby was being created which viewed the provision of human services as a creative challenge rather than as an unavoidable cost of modern government. As he cut back people services in 1984, Premier Bennett must have patted himself on the back for turning Vander Zalm loose on Levi's creations in 1975.

The authors of this book are to be congratulated for telling this im-

portant story and following through with their own perceptive ideas about how the delivery of social services might be organized in the future. I'd be remiss as a reviewer if I didn't warn readers that this is an awkwardly crafted book; but then, as Norman Levi might say, the important thing is to get the story told.

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The New Reality: The Politics of Restraint in British Columbia, edited by Warren Magnusson *et al.*, Vancouver: New Star Books, 1984.

In December 1983, in the aftermath of the Bennett government's infamous July restraint program and of the November Kelowna accord between the government and the B.C. Government Employees Union and of everything in between, socially concerned faculty members of the University of Victoria formed the Committee on Alternatives for British Columbia which then brought forth this book.

Too often even decent academics sit on their hands and confuse praxis with bad-mouthing the world over coffee with colleagues. To their great credit the University of Victoria people did not do that; nor did a similar group at UBC which created the B.C. Economic Policy Institute and proceeded to issue a veritable plethora of research papers, of which some appear in this book. In a world in which the corporate-funded Fraser Institute publishes, as if it were objective research, the writings of academics with the appropriate ideological bias, it is for the social good that those not on the extreme right of the political spectrum be heard and heeded.

While the book ranges widely over the multitudinous crimes of the Socred government, one theme stood out for this reviewer, perhaps because I am an economist. It is that there never was a fiscal crisis in B.C. that required a restraint program. There was an economic crisis, but that is a different matter, and it was simply worsened by alleging a fiscal crisis and tailoring policy thereto instead of to the real crisis. The government got away with as much as it did and for as long as it did because too many people in B.C. deplored their own ox being gored but believed that goring someone else's was necessary. Would that this book had appeared earlier and been widely read!