

# Smiley says you can fight city hall

One of the cynical, apathetic remarks of the 20th century is, "You can't fight city hall."

I think it's American in origin, as are so many of our colorful expressions, but it reflects a conception that has contributed to the skepticism that permeates many aspects of our life.

In essence it betrays a weariness of the individual spirit in a world that is growing ever more corrupt, violent and treacherous.

It means basically that the individual hasn't a chance against the burgeoning bureaucracy, the petty patronage, the you-scratch-my-back-and-I'll-scratch-yours philosophy that has always been with us, and always will but should be resisted stoutly and and sturdily whenever it rears its ugly head.

Jesus fought the city hall of His time, and won, though He lost His life.

Sir Thomas More fought the city hall of his time, which included his king, the nobility and the clergy, and refused to nudge an inch to save his life because he was right, and city hall was wrong.

Joan of Arc fought her city hall, in the form of her own king, traitors to her vision, and an opposing army. She wound up being burned at the stake, and became a saint.

Her opponents are mere footnotes in history.

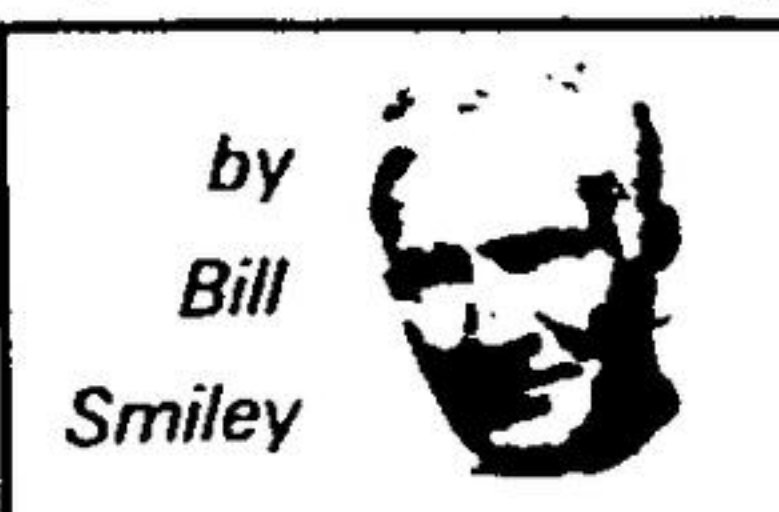
Oliver Cromwell fought his city hall, won his fight, and taught British royalty to mind its pees and quees, if you'll pardon the expression.

William Lyon Mackenzie took on the city hall of his day, and though his only battle with it was a typical Canadian charade, he left it smarting.

I could name a hundred others who cocked a snook at city hall, and lost many a battle, but won many a war. The United States is a classic example. Another is the Republic of France. Mahatma Ghandi practically had the British Empire begging him to go change his diaper and leave it alone.

Well, it's nice to be in the company of such, even if only for a little while, and only in the imagination.

The Fourth St. Fusiliers, of which I am a proud, wounded veteran, has fought many a skirmish, several sharp encounters, and a prolonged war of attrition against the local town council, and the will of the people triumphed to the extent of a dozen trees being uncut, a new sidewalk installed, and a desert of pot-holes turned into a paved street.



You've heard of the 30 Years War, the 100 Years War, the War of the Roses, the War of Independence, the Boer War, and The Great War, followed by that sickening euphemism, World War II. Not to mention Korea and Viet Nam.

Well, a lot has been written about them, and millions died in them, but for sheer intensity of emotion, I think the Fourth St. War outdoes them all. That's the reason for this bit of history. In three or four hundred years, the Fourth St. War may be almost forgotten, were it not for some humble scribe to get it down on paper.

It has lasted between seven and nine years, and the veterans will even argue hotly about the duration.

I do remember that the hundreds of children who were going to be slaughtered

by traffic if the town council achieved its insidious ends are now replaced by grandchildren in many cases.

I do remember that the first rush to the barricades was about as organized as the French revolutionaries' attack on the Bastille.

I do remember that one lady threatened to chain herself high in the branches of a maple tree if the town engineer carried out his plan of massacring maples. There were other threats of a similar but unlikely nature, such as everyone lying down in front of the bulldozers, blowing up the town hall while council was in session, or kidnapping the town engineer and giving him a cement-barrel burial in the bay.

Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed. After half the street was ruined, the works department ran out of money.

Over the years, they tiptoed around the potential explosion, filling in the odd pot-hole and letting the street turn into the semblance of a long-forgotten country lane.

But this spring, falsely feeling that the ancient hatreds had cooled, with new people moving in, and old people dying off, they foolishly raised the desecrative idea again. Cut down the trees. Tear up the

sidewalks, make it a one-block thruway to nowhere.

Like an old, dormant volcano, the people rose in their might and descended on the works committee like a disturbed hornet's nest.

The air was filled with vituperation, calumny and blasphemy. Council cooled off like a bull confronted by an angry elephant.

Another meeting was called. Again The People rose in their wrath. They formed a committee. It consisted of a brilliant mathematician, a contractor, a doctor, a lawyer, and an indomitable nurse. Not just a few angry people to be baffled by engineering jargon.

I don't want to go into the brilliant counter-attack, the superb tactics, the incredible strategy of The People. It's too exciting. You wouldn't sleep tonight.

But we won. The trees stay, the sidewalks will be rebuilt, the thruway will continue to be a residential street, thousands of children will not be cut down by thundering trucks, and the road will be paved.

You can fight city hall.

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