DEMOCRATIZING CLEVELAND
CHAPTER 8: “GIVE US A BILLION DOLLARS!”

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Chapter 8

"GIVE US A BILLION DOLLARS!"

It was symbolic of class war in a democratic society. 1

Harry Fagan, Commission on Catholic Community Action

The energy crisis was a hallmark issue of the 1970s and 1980s. The Mideast oil embargo, skyrocketing prices at the fuel pump, and a series of severely cold winters combined with economic recession, propelled the issue onto the national agenda. Public debates raged over the energy future of society. Debate over nuclear power was fueled by the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania and movies such as The China Syndrome. For the first time in our nation’s history, energy conservation and the search for alternative energy sources were taken seriously. This panoply of issues resonated in Cleveland’s neighborhoods, whose residents were being whipsawed by the forces of economic recession and skyrocketing energy costs.

The First Target: East Ohio Gas

The first campaign on energy policies launched in Cleveland was directed at the East Ohio Gas Company. Shortages in natural gas hit the nation during one of the coldest winters on record, the winter of 1976-1977. Across the country, but especially in the northeast and midwest, utilities curtailed service to their industrial and commercial customers, resulting in plant closings that laid off more than a million workers in Ohio alone. In Ohio, a state of emergency was declared.

Debates on energy policy focused on the supply of natural gas and what it would take to deliver gas to consumers. The American Gas Association claimed supplies of natural gas were adequate, but because of government price controls, it did not pay producers to take the gas out of the ground. Its solution was to decon-
trol the price of natural gas. The advocates of decontrol theorized that a return to natural market prices would moderate prices and would attain a reasonable level with new suppliers entering the market, producing amounts of gas that were denied the public by regulation produced shortages. Critics responded that the natural market in an industry dominated by a handful of producers, pipelines, and utilities with a legal monopoly in their service areas was a free market fantasy.

The old energy regime was dead, and the winter of 1976-1977 was its funeral. The gas industry held most of the cards. In February 1977, in one of his first legislative victories, President Jimmy Carter secured passage of the Emergency Natural Gas Act. The act mandated government oversight to guarantee delivery of natural gas to critical industries and institutions. It also suspended the cap on gas prices until July 31, 1977. For a few months, the natural gas industry could have the deregulated market it wanted.

A more long-term victory for the natural gas industry was the passage of the Natural Gas Policy Act of 1978. The act defined the policy world that the community organizations would dwell in. It set up a system for the decontrol of natural gas keyed to the type of gas being pumped. Gas drilled before 1977 would remain regulated as before. New gas from wells drilled above 15,000 feet was to be gradually decontrolled until it reached parity with the price of oil in 1985. New, deep well gas drilled below 15,000 feet would be decontrolled altogether. The resulting price spike lit the fuse on the energy issue at the grassroots level as the nation was asked to adjust to a new, more expensive energy regime.

While the shape of this new price regime concerned community organizations in Cleveland, their immediate demands were more basic than the mix of new and old gas coming into the homes and businesses of the neighborhoods. The groups agitated for a number of reforms for how East Ohio did business. They wanted a no-shut-off policy during winter, senior citizen discounts, an end to estimated bills, and funding for home weatherization programs.

East Ohio officials promised to attend meetings, but did not show up. When David Sweet, chief of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio, urged the gas company to help fund home weatherization programs, Dudley Taw, East Ohio’s CEO, responded that the utility was not in the home repair business.

In 1979, protests began against East Ohio’s request for a six point nine percent rate hike that reflected the spike in utility rates following the Natural Gas Policy Act. It also passed on to consumers a seventeen percent rate increase to reflect increased gas charges from its suppliers. The Senior Citizens Coalition (SCC) demanded that East Ohio’s executives’ salaries be trimmed to $50,000 per year, that the rate hike be withdrawn, and the EOG fund a lobbyist in Columbus for the coalition, as consumers had paid East Ohio lobbyists to raise their bills.

The Senior Citizens Coalition hit East Ohio on October 12, 1979 after meeting with EOG’s public relations person at St. John College at the Catholic Diocese’s complex down the street from East Ohio’s corporate offices. At the meeting, the
coalition's demands for a twenty five per cent discount for the elderly were rebuffed. Representatives of the coalition asked to speak with Dudley Taw. He was out of town. They tried to get into the utility's headquarters and were met by security guards and company employees, who blocked its doors. The utility wanted the groups to meet with David Talbot, head of public relations for the company. They wanted Taw. The group's frustration resulted in a hit on a Rocky River Presbyterian church, of which Dudley Taw was a member. The event included Agnes Jackson of Buckeye Woodland Community Congress (BWCC), lecturing a Sunday school class on justice for the neighborhoods. The demonstrators excommunicated Dudley Taw for the sin of freezing poor people with high gas bills. The Presbytery of Cleveland was not amused, and it shared its displeasure with the Cleveland Catholic Diocese and the Catholic Commission, leading to damage control by Harry Fagan. Sandra Kluk, executive director of BWCC, described the blowback.

The reason it blew up in our face was that it was a church. There are just some things that are sacred to everybody. You can go to his home. That's ok. You can go to his place of business. That's ok. But his church, that's something else. There was a lot of backlash that I think even the commission had to deal with because of that.

East Ohio Gas had no experience in dealing with groups laying siege to them. Dudley Taw hired Pat Carney for the public relations department of East Ohio to deal with the controversy. Carney had just come back to northeast Ohio after serving as a lobbyist in Washington. His first mission was to find out what East Ohio was dealing with.

Carney began to attend meetings, and said that if he went to work in the morning and did not see a picket line outside of East Ohio Gas's headquarters, he thought something must be wrong. He met with Fagan and discovered Saul Alinsky. Carney concluded that East Ohio was the target of a multi-issue movement, a social revolution with roots in socialism and liberation theology.

The Senior Citizens Coalition continued to pursue Taw in vain. It met with East Ohio officials between hits. In January 1980, they attempted to pay gas bills with pennies at the downtown offices of National City Bank. Taw was on its board of trustees. The coalition demanded a twenty five per cent discount be given to the elderly, estimated bills be eliminated, monthly meter readings, not estimates, a rate freeze for two years, and only one fuel cost adjustment be made per year.

In these demands, there seemed to be some movement in the issues of the Senior Citizens Coalition. No mention is made of the home insulation program. The twenty-five percent senior discount rates, and an end to estimated bills and monthly meter readings were the same as previous demands from such groups as Buckeye Woodland Community Congress (BWCC), St.Clair Superior Coalition
(SCSC) and Citizens to Bring Broadway Back (CBBB). The rate demands reflected the revolving door rate hikes East Ohio had received in the past year, causing a forty percent rise in bills in one year. East Ohio continued to blame the rate increases on increasing prices from its suppliers.

The campaign against East Ohio was not simply a citywide campaign. Each neighborhood had its own campaign. Mark McDermott of CBBB said the group did not know how these issues would play out in the neighborhood. In the past, the group had worked on issues that offered easily achievable victories, such as a stoplight on Fenn Avenue, a new fire station, or dilapidated houses being torn down. CBBB did not know whether the East Ohio issue was centered enough on the self-interest of community residents to work. It worked well enough to produce meetings with hundreds of people in attendance.

A major complaint was excessive estimated meter readings. Some customers had not had their gas meters read in years. The volume of complaints to the Office of Consumer Counsel in Columbus reached a point that an investigation was launched. The East Ohio response was that it was hard to get into some residences to read the meter, and that estimates frequently underreported usage. One solution, which is now standard, was to install outside meters.

Pat Carney helped to develop a consumer board to improve East Ohio's reputation and to open communications with its critics. Dudley Taw had been willing to work with Carney. Although he was from the traditional school of corporate management, he was also the one being beaten up. Taw's help was instrumental in bringing along the doubters on the utility's board. These moves accelerated under the leadership of the utility's new CEO, Dick Kelso, whom Carney credited for not only making peace with the community groups, but also building the best relations the utility had ever had with its unions.

East Ohio's rate request in the spring of 1980 brought a storm of protest. Cleveland city council held a hearing at which the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) and the Office of Consumer Counsel took testimony before 150 representatives of SCSC, BWCC, Union Miles Community Coalition (UMCC), the SCC, and CBBB. The April 29 hearing revealed not only the usual level of frustration with East Ohio, but also PUCO's lack of credibility after it repeatedly approved rate increases requested by East Ohio.

In August 1981, East Ohio won another rate hike of $43 million of a $59.2 million request. The response to the increase this time came from elected officials, such as Mayor Voinovich, and State Representative Benny Bonnano, who had launched an effort to get the PUCO commissioners elected. At the same time, EOG applied for another five point three percent rate increase. Of four rate increases granted since 1970, two were in 1980 and 1981.

Behind East Ohio's policies were a set of assumptions about the future of the gas market. EOG predicted one major spike in gas prices in the aftermath of the Natural Gas Policy Act, after which the market, freed from regulatory burdens,
would not experience dramatic price rises as in the past. Other companies, such as Columbia Gas, read things differently and tied themselves into ruinous long-term contracts with suppliers.

East Ohio finally proposed a new formula for pricing to PUCO. It took the price of gas out of its profit calculations and proposed a one-for-one arrangement, in which if the prices of their suppliers went down one cent, rates for consumers also would go down one cent. The same applied to price increases. The utility no longer wanted to be in a commodities market as it had in the past, betting on the future price of natural gas from the well. The deal was made, and it guaranteed East Ohio a generation of peace on the consumer and community fronts.

Except for actions by the Senior Citizen Coalition in June 1982 over a proposed $70 million rate hike, organizing against East Ohio wore itself out. EOG finally convinced community groups that it was not to blame for the increase in gas prices, but was passing along price increases by its suppliers and pipelines. This claim was verified by a fact sheet prepared by National People’s Action (NPA) showing the shift of the composition of the typical heating dollar from 1970 to 1980. In 1970, twenty six cents of every dollar went to the producer, twenty nine cents went to the pipeline, and forty five cents went to the utility. By 1980, the world had changed: fifty four cents went to the producer, twenty five cents went to the pipeline, and only twenty one cents went to the utility. The groups were starting to recognize that not all energy companies were the same.

Bill Callahan of Citizen Action described the split in corporate ranks:

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In a sense, it was not an anti-utility campaign. Columbia Gas had a big stake in the drilling and transportation industry, so they liked deregulation. East Ohio didn’t like deregulation because it’s just a distribution company. The gas distribution industry was really divided on the issue, and it was not for them that it was happening.  
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The East Ohio campaign resulted in tangible accomplishments. East Ohio ceased winter shutoffs and under pressure from PUCO, finally cooperated with the demand to support home insulation programs.

An energy audit program, funded by East Ohio was begun. This generated applicants for a wide range of home insulation programs that proliferated through the early 1980s. As with many victories of organizing, these programs became a stable funding generator for the non-profit development groups.

**The SOHIO Campaign**

The campaign against East Ohio’s rate hikes led to one of the most famous and disastrous campaigns of Cleveland’s community organizations, the campaign against natural gas deregulation targeted at Standard Oil of Ohio (SOHIO).

The switch in focus to SOHIO began in early 1981. Taking the lead was
Neighborhood People in Action (NPIA). Organizations working on the issue were: Near West Neighbors in Action (NWNIA), BWCC, SCC, SCSC, UMCC, and CBBB.

The first goal of the campaign was to garner as much support as possible from local, state, and national politicians and representatives to fight the Reagan administration's plan to deregulate natural gas prices. The second goal was to secure from SOHIO, $1 billion to finance energy conservation and subsidy programs for low and moderate-income utility customers.

There were several reasons for the $1 billion demand from SOHIO. SOHIO was a local corporation whose staff played a prominent role in civic affairs. This gave the strategy a local handle to match the national focus of defeating natural gas decontrol. SOHIO was awash in cash to the point that it paid cash for its new headquarters on Cleveland's public square. It held enormous natural gas reserves that would become even more valuable if natural gas prices were deregulated.

Hubris was no small factor, behind the groups' willingness to take on as formidable a target as SOHIO. The groups were on a roll. They had national reach with their alliance with National People's Action. They routinely humbled recalcitrant bureaucrats. They had full time organizing staffs, held conventions that were attended by hundreds of members, and organized dozens of block clubs. They began to believe their own propaganda that they were giant killers.

The Ohio lobbying effort against natural gas deregulation was coordinated through a statewide coalition, the Ohio Action Coalition (OAC). The main goal of OAC was to get as much support as it could in Ohio's congressional delegation to combat natural gas deregulation. It arranged support for alternative legislation and lobbied intensively to have congressional hearings in Ohio take testimony on the impact of rising energy costs. The NPIA in Cleveland and the OAC statewide did not even talk to city councilmen without asking that they pass the word to their congressional representatives that natural gas deregulation should be defeated and that a congressional hearing be held in Ohio.

On the national level, one of the most prominent groups was the Citizen Labor Energy Coalition (CLEC), a group led by Citizen Action and the labor movement. OAC and NPA worked with CLEC, but there was no love lost between them. NPA and Citizen Action had little use for each other. The clash was based on differences in overall organizing philosophies, and how the two groups related to politicians.

CLEC was a coalition. It was compatible with the strategies of groups such as Citizen Action, which was oriented toward building coalitions with major national players, such as unions and senior citizens organizations, using high-quality research to affect local, state, or national political events and legislation. It had professional staff persons. It was not oriented toward organizing the unorganized or developing local leadership. Its focus was to organize already-existing leadership and organizations in communities.

NPA, although itself a coalition, was not involved with coalitions outside itself.
It was based on creating leadership and organizations in the communities in which it worked. Its style was to send out large numbers of organizers into communities using a rote manual of organizing. The goal was to produce numbers of block clubs and bodies to conventions, conferences, and actions. Issues were to come from the block clubs. It was a disciplined, if rigid, organization and took a shotgun approach to its organizing that often produced real leaders who could stand the test of time. 

Shel Trapp described what led to the break between NPA and CLEC. The American Petroleum Institute was holding its convention in Chicago in November 1981. This was the occasion for a series of actions and demonstrations billed as the "Shoot Out With Pig Oil." NPA was on its way to a hit. They were greeted by the Chicago Police Department, in force. CLEC had obtained a parade permit for the hit. Trapp went ballistic. The permit had violated a cardinal rule of NPA: Never tell the cops what you are doing. Trapp never forgave CLEC for the blunder and never worked with them again.

The incident was not all there was behind the split between CLEC and NPA: there were strategic differences between them, as well. CLEC felt that the energy corporations were politically vulnerable. Their goal was to target potential swing districts represented by Republican congressmen who had come in on Reagan's coattails. CLEC launched a major effort to organize opposition to natural gas deregulation in these districts. The effort would concentrate on labor unions and senior citizens organizations.

A perfect example of CLEC's strategy could be seen in its work in the Toledo area, where it used canvassing by Citizen Action to proselytize against deregulation and to build a network of people whom it could use for future efforts. Bill Callahan, who worked on the issue for Citizen Action, defined the strategy as political terrorism against the proponents of deregulation. In the Toledo campaign, it was successful in unseating Ed Weber, a Republican elected with Reagan in a traditionally Democratic district, and replacing him with Democrat Marcie Kaptur.

Meanwhile, NPA was working on the issue as it would any other with direct-action confrontation, where it would demand that the oil companies back off their campaign for deregulating natural gas. Callahan considered it a loser from the start. The group was confronting an industry around an issue considered a top priority by the industry, and would move heaven and earth to win. NPA groups could harass SOHIO's CEO Alton Whitehouse all they wanted, but Whitehouse was not going to go against a national policy proposal that would earn his company billions of dollars in profits. He would ignore them if he could. When he could not ignore the groups anymore, he would make phone calls to their funders. Either way, they would lose.

In May 1981 NPIA launched the offensive against SOHIO by staging a sit-in in the lobby of the Midland Building, then its headquarters in downtown Cleveland. Pitt Curtiss, head of public relations for SOHIO, was called to the lobby by security. Curtiss described the scene:
I went down to the lobby to try and interface with the group to find out what was causing this. The issue of natural gas deregulation was hard to determine for a while because the group was insisting that they wanted to talk to SOHIO's chairman, who wasn't available. I finally got the group to leave after a good deal of discussion by agreeing to make Al Whitehouse aware of the group's presence.

At the end of September, the group started to pin down details of a meeting with Pitt Curtiss. It decided on a smaller meeting for October 7, 1981. Preparations included both a leadership meeting and an energy issue staff meeting to prepare leaders for the upcoming meeting with SOHIO.

At these early stages of the campaign, questions about the SOHIO effort, foretold future problems. There was considerable skepticism about whether the billion-dollar goal was realistic. The groups constantly wondered about where SOHIO was coming from and what its strategy would be. Staff meeting notes reflected doubts about the preparedness of leaders for negotiations. They were worried that there had not been enough role playing or thinking through different scenarios in a preparatory game called 'What if?' in which all sorts of possible developments were thought out ahead of time. They were also concerned that there was not enough explanation of the origins of the issue. Finally, doubts about the reliability of information abounded, expressed in notes from staff meetings.

Sandra Kluk, lead organizer for the SOHIO campaign for BWCC, described the concerns of organizers:

It was part hesitation and part wanting to make sure we were covering ourselves because we were taking on a much bigger target. We were also very careful about this stuff, and we really wanted to make sure we had community support. We knew it was going to be a major event. We were also concerned that if we did get a meeting with Alton Whitehouse and SOHIO, were our leaders ready for it? Were they trained to the point where they could come up against someone like Alton Whitehouse?

The groups settled on three basic demands going into the October meeting: the billion-dollar demand to fund weatherization and energy assistance, assurance that SOHIO would oppose the deregulation of natural gas, and confirmation that a meeting would be arranged with Alton Whitehouse.

Pitt Curtiss, the public relations head for SOHIO, provided the best description of the October 7 meeting:

The way the evening developed, I was seated as an audience of one confronted with a series of skits depicting the difficulties con-
fronting low-income people as a result of the threat of natural gas deregulation. I suspect those skits went on for about thirty minutes, and I sat there as a polite and interested audience.

Curtiss responded that natural gas was not a big profit center for SOHIO, a minor supplier in the United States, in spite of the enormous gas reserves held in Alaska. His message was not well received:

I was continually interrupted during this discussion, and wasn’t certain that I was really able to make the point I wanted to make. I suspect that there was a total disbelief about SOHIO’s position in this because the demand was being made that we contribute a billion dollars.13

Based on notes from the October 12 staff meeting reviewing the October 7 meeting, there was little to celebrate. From the meeting notes, the staff was impressed with Pitt Curtiss and embarrassed that he was better prepared than they were. Curtiss was also good at manipulating their leaders and at diverting attention from SOHIO and onto the city. Anger and impatience were expressed regarding the lack of good intelligence about SOHIO.

In contrast to the meeting notes in the BWCC archives, Sandra Kluk recalled that Curtiss was so successful at alienating people that BWCC considered him a godsend:

Every time that man opened his mouth, somebody came to our side, including the media. The media was actually a friend at that point on the issue we were doing and also were angry at SOHIO. Curtiss was being very abrasive, speaking down to people, and they really reacted to that. He was actually good for us.14

More significant than tactical worries were concerns over the entire campaign. Comments from the October 12 meeting reveal a level of discomfort: “Do folks still buy the idea of Standard Oil giving money?” and “Having no other demand is hurting us.”

While NPIA was trying to figure out SOHIO, SOHIO was trying to figure out NPIA. SOHIO sent a delegation to Carney at East Ohio for advice on handling the groups. Carney responded that it was not going to be easy.

The next staff meeting on October 23 discussed moving on to an actual meeting with Alton Whitehouse. Attendees reviewed the earlier meeting with Curtiss, the outcome of a public meeting, and an educational program on the results of the decontrol of natural gas prices. Several points were resolved: They did not want to meet with Curtiss; they wanted Alton Whitehouse. They resolved to do better in future meetings: “Let’s not embarrass ourselves again.”

SOHIO had put an offer on the table: Whitehouse would meet with three rep-
resentatives at the Standard Oil building. NPIA staff response was mixed: “Meet with him.” “Meet with him with fifteen leaders.” “Fuck him and hit him.” No resolution was recorded in the meeting.

The meeting ended with a push for intensive research about Whitehouse, what clubs he belonged to, what properties he owned, and any upcoming events where he might be speaking.

The energy staff meeting of November 18 was a preparation for a public meeting that would be held at UMCC. The public meeting would educate leadership and the rank and file about the issues of the campaign, the history of negotiations, the history of SOHIO, and the thinking behind the demands. The meeting would also decide how to respond to the offer from SOHIO. The options were laid out: a) “Accept small meeting with SOHIO on our own terms;” b) “If screwed in small meeting, we hit him;” and c) “Other?” A possible visit to this meeting by NPA leader Gail Cincotta was mentioned.

The meeting with Whitehouse and Curtiss was held on December 8. The demands of the delegation from NPIA were that SOHIO oppose the deregulation of natural gas, that SOHIO provide $1 billion dollars for energy assistance in the state of Ohio, and that Whitehouse attend local neighborhood energy hearings. No reports on the result of the meeting, other than that provided Curtiss, could be located. Curtiss remembered:

The meeting lasted for perhaps a half an hour when we became aware that NPIA had issued a news release to the local media saying they were confronting SOHIO about a billion-dollar contribution. That just finished it right there. We had at that point said, “This isn’t what we had in mind.” Whitehouse was very upset. He left the meeting, and I don’t blame him. I sat with the group. In a very nice way, I said to them, “You screwed this up. You turned us off.”

Both sides backed off for the holiday season and took stock of the situation as they entered 1982, a year that was to be one of the most important in the life of the community organizing movement in Cleveland.

Chasing Whitehouse around northeast Ohio was not the only activity of the campaign. Preparations were made for pushes in winter and spring to gain the support of other groups and institutions in the fight against deregulation. The winter and early spring of 1982 were taken up by organizing a congressional hearing in Cleveland and a forum at Cleveland State University on natural gas deregulation.

A major focus of this effort was the religious community of Cleveland. Bishop Anthony Pilla of the Cleveland Catholic Diocese was approached to have the diocese oppose deregulation, to have the state conference of bishops do the same, and to approve workshops on the issue to be held in area churches. The Cleveland State event was successful, drawing an audience of over 500 people. The congressional
hearing ensured that Citizen Action, the Citizen Labor Energy Coalition, and NPIA never worked together again locally.

Attending the hearing were NPIA, Citizen Action, the United Auto Workers (UAW), and U.S. Senator Howard Metzenbaum. Citizen Action and the UAW were in a love fest with Metzenbaum. NPIA was looking for a confrontation and a demand to make on Metzenbaum who was already a stalwart against deregulation. They hit a natural ally. The behavior of NPIA at this forum resulted in a series of letters to NPIA protesting the treatment of Senator Metzenbaum. Citizen Action and the UAW were interested in building a coalition. NPIA considered itself to be the leader on the issue. To Bill Callahan, it was a fundamental strategic weakness of the NPIA approach that he found appalling:

That is the most fundamental breakdown in organizing you could possibly have. You are in a room with leadership and they are not trying to figure out who they are, how they operate, and what their self interest is. From the earliest Alinsky definition of how you do this stuff, there is nothing more important than understanding the other party’s self interest. You walk into a room and say this is the way it ought to be. You’ve got to deal with us. You’re defining people as a target and you haven’t done an analysis of them. That level of sophistication was a big problem.

The focus of the spring activities for NPIA was the upcoming demonstration at the April 22 1982 stockholders meeting of SOHIO to be held at the palatial Stouffer’s Hotel, (now the Renaissance Hotel) on Cleveland’s public square. There was a two-part action plan. First, the NPIA group had collected about 100 proxy votes from sympathetic institutions and individuals, so that their representatives could be present at the stockholders meeting. The second part was a demonstration and picket line outside of the hotel to protest the corporate policies of SOHIO and to gain public attention for NPIA’s energy campaign.

SOHIO had anticipated this move in the aftermath of the Chicago Shoot Out With Pig Oil demonstrations in November 1981. It began to monitor stock transactions to see whether any group was purchasing blocks of stock that could be used for proxies to gain entrance to the stockholders meeting. As Curtiss recalled:

The thought occurred to us, [that] a disruption of the annual meeting would not be out of order for this group. So we followed the purchase of stock, saw where a member of [NPIA leader] Gail Cincotta’s staff [had] purchased a block of stock. That was a clear signal.

The plans NPIA had made for its activities that day did not hold up under the excitement and pressure of the moment. Security was all over the hotel but, by some fluke, the front entrance of Stouffer’s had been left unguarded. Demonstrators out-
side the hotel, numbering in the hundreds, entered the hotel lobby. Neighborhood people blowing penny whistles, and waving banners and placards occupied the lobby, and filled the ornate stairway that led to the stockholders’ meeting.

At the meeting, SOHIO management refused to recognize speakers representing NPIA. The NPIA contingent advanced on the stage where the officials were seated and a confrontation ensued. Officers of the board abruptly declared the meeting adjourned. The shortest, most tumultuous stockholders meeting in SOHIO history was over.

Organizers of the demonstration thought that they had shut down the meeting themselves, however, Curtiss maintained that the abrupt ending had been a conscious decision made by the company beforehand. He said:

We had expected that the meeting would be disrupted. We planned to deal with it: Call the meeting to order, announce the vote of proxies, and adjourn the meeting.18

Curtiss and SOHIO hit back at the groups in a media campaign that challenged the legitimacy of the protest. Curtiss recalled:

In the aftermath of that meeting, we met further with the media to make sure to reinforce what the original issue seemed to be, but what was now taking place was a result of the Chicago influence. It was masterminded by the Chicago people. They were the ones who came up to the registration desk and tried to run things their way. We had cameras there. We were getting pictures of everybody, so we knew who was whom.19

SOHIO was conscious of the media attention, felt on the defensive, and responded accordingly. The company viewed the media as a liberal institution that would naturally favor the viewpoint of the NPIA. After the stockholders’ meeting, SOHIO held a press conference. Curtiss said:

In effect, what I said was, 'How would you feel if you were trying to conduct the business of a company and that business was disrupted by a horde who had gained illegal access to the meeting, but had no intention other than causing trouble?' 20

Harry Fagan returned from vacation to face a deluge of phone messages and complaints about the shutdown of the stockholders meeting. On May 6, he issued a blistering memo to the Ohio Training Center and the NPIA groups about the events of April 22.

It was a full-blown dressing down. First, Fagan reiterated that the plan for the stockholders’ meeting had been run by him, and that he had cautioned the groups to keep public opinion on their side and focus on preparations for negotiations.
In a favorite point that Fagan would bring up time and again in his dealings with the groups, he cautioned them to distinguish "...the difference between those who are committed to social change and those who participate in social therapeutic activities." 21

He faulted the groups for losing public sympathy, for doing nothing to interpret the actions to the broader community, for exposing themselves to funding cutoffs from foundations and corporate donors, for bad research, and for alienating leadership that could split the coalition. He ended the list with the accusation, "...and worse than apparently having no clearly designed immediate next step or follow-up strategy, is the clear reality that I think you were used.” Used, in his opinion, by NPA leaders.

He continued his memo by focusing his anger at NPA:

My conclusion is simply [that] you lost in Cleveland, but NPA may well have won nationally, meaning I think NPA’s national negotiating strategy for funding and programs is greatly enhanced through local skirmishes, but I would be hard pressed to enumerate the economic, political, or social negotiating points that are now better here in Cleveland. 23

He expressed fear that NPIA was becoming an appendage of NPA.

Fagan stated his disappointment with lessons from the past not learned: “More to the point, though, is my chagrin in being unable to reconcile your collective organizing experience with these short-sighted tactics.” 24 Then he closed with: “You must know that I feel a strong bond with you all in our common struggle. I leave it up to you to determine if and how you wish to deal with my concerns.” 25

Trapp claimed that the initiative for all the SOH10 actions came from the local groups, not from Chicago, as Fagan and SOH10 suspected. He said NPA played an advisory role, but that the local Cleveland groups were in the driver’s seat. For NPA to be calling the shots from Conspiracy Central in Chicago was nonsense. Initiatives that NPA worked on came from the grassroots. 26

Fagan’s letter was not the only one the groups received. Another letter had gone out two days after the stockholders meeting from Tom Gannon, who at the time was a trainer for the Catholic Commission. Its tone was more sympathetic, but still critical. The first point Gannon made was that SOHIO might come out of the event with public sympathy because disrupting other people’s meetings violated many deeply held American notions of fair play and respect for free speech. He wrote:

The disruption of the stockholders meeting after only five minutes has struck some of our supporters as unfair and unnecessary. As incredible as it seems, people still worry about such notions as “fair play” and “free speech,” even during these days of Reaganomics and blatant corporate greed. 27
Gannon continued in what is really more an essay, than a memo to the groups. He made an analogy between the situation NPIA was in, guerrilla warfare, and the importance of maintaining community support.

As [is] so often seen in national liberation struggles, the small guerrilla forces gather public support and sympathy, gaining recruits and financial sustenance from the people while simultaneously isolating the government or the enemy from the masses. After such a campaign (if successful), the power structure gives in, not because it will suffer ultimate defeat, but because it loses the will or feels it is not worth continuing the battle. Small and large victories have been won [in] this way. 18

Gannon worried that SOHIO would launch an effort to get the groups defunded, and expressed the hope that if it did, it would be so clumsy and heavy handed that it would backfire. He feared that hits such as that made at the stockholders meeting portrayed the groups as illegitimate and extremist. Gannon also worried that the groups were in a tactical rut of using confrontation tactics that were not well thought out, that were predictable and that would be vulnerable to new responses from their opponents. To Gannon, they were using tactics to express anger, not linking them with the goal of negotiations or a longer-term strategy.

Gannon asked what the groups would do for encores after going to Alton Whitehouse’s residence, and then breaking up the stockholders meeting. What measures were held in reserve? Gannon also feared such tactics would strengthen the resolve of SOHIO: “I’ve often found that a person will give in if he or she fears you, but never if he or she hates you.” 29

He encouraged them to lighten up a bit, break the tension, give SOHIO an opportunity to de-escalate, and give NPIA a chance to refocus public attention or the issues, rather than on its tactics of civil disobedience.

As had Fagan, Gannon ended his essay with an affirmation of support and solidarity with the groups: “I write this memo with trepidation because I don’t want to come off the wrong way. I have a lot of respect for you all as organizers and as people.” 29

Responding to the criticism, George Barany of the Ohio Training Center sent a letter on behalf of NPIA dated May 8. Whether it was a response to Fagan or whether their letters had crossed in the mail is unknown. The one-page letter was no match for the polemics of Fagan and Gannon; it was a bare-bones restatement of what the campaign was about and an appeal to continue the support. The tone of the letter was that of a campaign on the defensive, if not yet under siege. Barany stated:

Our actions are very similar to those of a union fighting for better working conditions. We are a union of Ohio community people try-
ing to pressure the sixth-largest U.S. energy producer to set up a program that would have a positive impact on our devastated state.31

He restated the dire condition of the state of Ohio in the midst of a budget deficit and the second-highest unemployment rate in the country:

Please continue to support our efforts. Dramatic actions have to take place to make SOHIO realize the devastating effect their company policies are having on Ohio's population. Please call to find out what you can do to stop gas bills from rising. 32

The campaign revealed the conflict between NPIA and its old mentor, Fagan. Barany described the rift:

Fagan really didn't want us to do this stuff, but we laid out the option to people and people said let's go get them. The stockholders' meeting came after years of attempting to get somebody to seriously negotiate with us. The heat came down from SOHIO because they were a major contributor to Catholic Charities.

Barany felt that events such as the stockholders meeting jeopardized Fagan's status as the figurehead of the neighborhood movement. He said:

The heat really came down and Fagan was kicked by the bishop: 'How could you allow this to happen?' He (Fagan) had no control. But basically, what he scolded us all for was that he puts his reputation on the line, he put his name out there promoting us, and how could we do this to him? We didn't do anything to him, but that's how he perceived it.33

On June 2, there was a meeting on SOHIO attended by Fagan and key organizers and leaders of the NPIA organizations. On June 3, Fagan sent a conciliatory, upbeat memo on the outcome of the meeting. He first apologized for the negative tone of his May 6 memo, then reaffirmed his respect for the role of neighborhood leadership, pledging to communicate with leaders and staff. Fagan pledged continued support of the commission for the groups, stating, "Please be assured that my life and the commission's existence are inextricably connected to the survival and growth of Cleveland's neighborhood movement." 34 He outlined how the following topics had been discussed in a strategy session: "Media emphasis and control, public opinion importance, internal organization communication, interpretation of continuity and follow up steps, and connectedness to neighborhood development entities." 35 The upbeat mood of the letter continued, backing away from the harsh
criticisms of the May 6 memo: "...I see your strategy as well thought out and clearly focused;” “Your rationale for involvement in NPA was solid and your invitation to Gail was certainly misinterpreted by me,” and "As far as institutional cover goes, I will continue to do what needs to be done to hold things together.”

He ended the letter, “Obviously, the past is behind us, but I feel so much better about moving into the future together.” 36

While the initial blow-up over the stockholders meeting was past, it was apparent that the neighborhood groups were moving in directions of which Fagan was critical. Fagan perceived a lack of long-range strategic thinking and unrealistic notions of what it would take to win in issues such as SOHIO. The challenge, he believed, was to insure the survival of the groups, and the maintenance of their ties to the neighborhoods with issues that were not as glamorous as chasing Alton Whitehouse around town.

In an interview in 1983, as he was preparing to leave the commission for another position in New York, Fagan commented that watching the groups was like watching your twenty-year-old child who had just left home. You might not like what he is doing with his life, but there is not much you can do about it, either.

The groups not only got into trouble with the Catholic Commission, but also with their own neighborhoods. Gloria Aron of NWNIA and Kathy Jaksic of the SCSC faced criticism by their constituencies.

In St. Clair, the fallout from the stockholders meeting resulted in an emergency board of trustees meeting. Issues were brought up of who should have a say in such actions: the issues committee or the full board. Local companies that had supported SCSC in the past had to be mollified and met with. One of the most significant fallouts of the SOHIO campaign and this particular action for SCSC was a growing alienation between SCSC and the Ohio Training Center.

According to St. Clair leader Ron Jaksic, SCSC was initially suspicious of OTC at the time it was formed. These doubts and suspicions were common among the groups, and were to be as destructive as any responses to the SOHIO campaign from the corporations of Cleveland. That suspicion grew under the pressure cooker of the SOHIO campaign. Jaksic recalled:

> When they were going to form the Ohio Training Center, there was a little bit of a rumble in the ranks. It was supposed to do the training and assist with leadership development. It was viewed by me as a formalization of the staff component. We knew that anything from the organization was a combination of staff direction and leadership. It was negative: too much strength, [too much] power for the staff. To me, [it was] manipulative of the leadership. 37

Wesley Walker had been an organizer for Union Miles Community Coalition and was preparing to leave the Ohio Training Center at the time of the SOHIO
campaign. He shared a common complaint that the SOHIO campaign strategy was all thunder and lightning and was without much substance.

According to Walker, the goal of George Barany, who had taken over OTC from Joe Mariano, was to produce as many people as possible for actions and events: "chair covers" in organizer lingo. People were being put on buses who did not know why they were there. They were participating in events and actions they did not understand, but did so out of personal loyalty to organizers and leaders they trusted. At any one event, there might be just one or two people who understood the issues. 38

Buckeye archives do not comment much on local activities during the summer of 1982. Those items that are present show continued work on lobbying against decontrol of natural gas. This was the calm before the storm.

Coming Cleveland's way was NPA's Reclaim America campaign, a nationwide demonstration on wheels starting in Chicago with the ultimate destination being Washington D.C. and Wall Street. Reclaim America was NPA's response to the domestic policies of the Reagan administration. Shel Trapp said the idea came about at a leadership strategy meeting in Chicago. He thought it was a great idea.

Reclaim America ended up being a lot of fun, but, according to Trapp, it accomplished nothing. It also set the stage for the one event that is most commonly identified as the beginning of the end of this era of community organizing in Cleveland – the Hunt Club hit.

Various groups in Cleveland prepared the way for the NPA caravan by garnering endorsements for the goals of Reclaim American Week. Included on the list was a proclamation from Cleveland city council welcoming Reclaim America and winning the support of Cleveland's Republican mayor, George Voinovich. Eileen Kelly, an organizer and future director of Near West Neighbors In Action, recalled the event:

I remember Near West's part was to redo the Bill of Rights. They actually let us hang it [the banner] from the second floor of City Hall. I remember doing that on my mother's dining room table. It was the neighborhood Bill of Rights, so it was talking about all the things that are issues for neighborhoods. 40

The Reclaim America caravan stopped at various cities on the way to Cleveland, picking up delegations from local affiliates along the way. They arrived in Cleveland September 12, 1982, for a rally in front of City Hall. By this time, the caravan was made up of eleven buses, including delegations from Cleveland that were to continue with the caravan on to its final destination.

As the rally ended on a brilliant autumn day, the call went out that it would be a good idea for the caravan to join the hunt for Alton Whitehouse, who was reported to be at the Chagrin Valley Hunt Club.
Located in exclusive Gates Mills, the Hunt Club was one of the most prominent social institutions of Cleveland's elite. If NPA and its affiliated groups in Cleveland wanted a confrontation with that elite, no better site could be found.

Kelly said:

We got on a bus and went out to Chagrin. We didn’t know what the hell we were doing there. I mean, no one knew. Alton Whitehouse, are you sure he’s going to be there? I remember somebody saying, ‘What makes you think he’s going to be here?’

The reports on whose idea it was to go to the Hunt Club are vague. The preponderance of opinion points to NPA leaders Cincotta and Trapp as initiators of the move, a role that Trapp denies.

With enthusiastic chants of "Freeze SOHIO, not Ohio", and people singing, "Give Us a Billion Dollars" to the tune of "Wade in the Water," the crowd was primed and needed little encouragement. It piled onto the buses and a rag-tag fleet of vans and private cars, and headed to the Hunt Club. Key staff and leaders were motivated by their unabashed hero worship of Cincotta and Trapp, the people who had inspired and trained them. How could they go wrong?

This awe can be seen in the words of Marlene Weslian of Citizens to Bring Broadway Back:

(Gale Cincotta/ Shel Trapp) was the person to admire and to strive to be like, and who certainly knew everything about everything. The fact that NPA wanted to make Cleveland the stop and take part in this issue with us got people incredibly psyched up. 

What occurred when the 600 demonstrators landed at the Hunt Club was not just a political event. It was a collision of worlds that barely recognized each other's existence, and that never came into contact. That afternoon at the Hunt Club, the club chairman’s Saturday lunch was in progress. The veranda was full of well dressed diners while on the grounds, members in English riding outfits were tending their mounts, gathering for the afternoon’s equestrian events.

Pouring out of the buses were organizers in jeans and working-class and poor people in polyester. The Hunt Club had never before seen so many African-Americans or so many who were not among those the English call “the great and the good”. As Marlene Weslian of CBBA remembered, “How dramatic to see the difference in how people live. ... It was so clear who had it and who didn’t when you went there.”

A confrontation soon developed between the management of the Hunt Club, the overwhelmed police force of the village of Gates Mills, and the leadership of the demonstration. Weslian recalled the shock of those on the veranda,
Those poor people just didn’t know what was going on. There they were sitting there having lunch, totally decked out, with tablecloths and crystal. People were saying ‘Excuse me, I’m thirsty. Do you mind if I drink out of your water glass?’ People literally didn’t know what to do.

The demonstrators demanded to see Whitehouse. Hunt club management responded that he was not present that day. Shouting matches between enraged luncheon guests and individual demonstrators erupted. The wife of James Lipscomb of the Gund Foundation reportedly had one person from the caravan take her glass of wine, toast her, and down it.

Finally, management of the club promised to give Whitehouse a message, and the demonstration ended. The caravan went on to its next stop, and the rest of the Cleveland contingent returned to face a reaction that made that of the stockholders’ meeting seem tame.

While many who attended this hit were thrilled at the confrontation, there was also an undercurrent of embarrassment. Kelly remembered that:

“It felt bad. It was no big fun thing. I remember some folks who went up on the porch. I remember other people saying, ‘I’m glad I didn’t go up there.’ It was an embarrassing thing, very embarrassing for the Near West people. I think Gloria (Aron) felt a little bit thrilled by it, in retrospect, she was embarrassed.”

There was nothing embarrassing about it to Weslian:

“When we went to the Hunt Club that day, that was the most incredible action we had ever done. I mean, we had done some incredible things in Washington over the years with NPA. We had gone to federal departments. We took over the Federal Reserve Bank, but going to the Hunt Club in Cleveland was really the pinnacle for Cleveland groups.

At a basic level, the action enraged the upper class of Cleveland beyond any other action the groups had taken. Mike O’Brien of NWNIA, explained that the hit had violated a norm more profound than the Constitution. “You do not embarrass the rich, among their rich peers.”

Again, a major concern of SOHIO was the position of the Cleveland media regarding the issue. What annoyed Curtiss was the behavior of the media during the Hunt Club action:

“Two or three busloads descended on the Hunt Club seeking Al Whitehouse. They were persuaded to leave, but one thing we knew in the aftermath was that there was a TV camera on one of the buses.”
Curtiss made his anger apparent to Cleveland media:

I was frankly very upset that a television camera and reporter had traveled with the group. That was totally unprofessional. It made it appear that this was perhaps a liberal journalist hand-in-hand. "7"

The action was roundly denounced in the media. The Village of Gates Mills was so traumatized by the event that the village council met in emergency session to listen to the outrage of its residents and to consider measures to ensure that nothing of the sort would happen again.

SOHIO did not take the attacks sitting down. Curtiss made the rounds to the foundations, and organizations supporting the groups. Surprisingly enough, the Hunt Club was not the last straw, as far as SOHIO was concerned; it was the disruption of a speech that Whitehouse was scheduled to give at the Heights Area Chamber of Commerce following the Hunt Club hit.

A busload of demonstrators from NPIA showed up, a confrontation ensued and, according to Curtiss, one bystander was injured. As Curtiss recounted, "That was the straw that really caused us to take steps to be sure that the usual funding organizations in the city knew what these groups were doing. Whether they were defunded, I don't know." 48

Curtiss contacted Bishop Pilla, as he remembered:

Somehow, we became aware that Catholic Charities might be involved in the funding of this activity. We went to the IRS to get copies, public information. It was important to us that community leaders understood what this organization was doing, how totally unrealistic they had become, how aggressive their actions were becoming.49

He also met with Dan Berry of the Gund Foundation.

I don't recall the specifics of the conversation, but I do recall taking the position that what we were dealing with is a group that thinks this is the way to make progress. This is my feeling: If you give in you're going to get more of the same. SOHIO's point was, 'We're not interested.' There has been enough damage already that we're not interested in working with these people. When you looked at the people who were engaged in these demonstrations, they thought this was good fun. Let's be disruptive. When children get disruptive, you don't give in to them.50

Behind the scenes, according to some reports, a decision was made that the Ohio Training Center (OTC) would take the fall for the action. It was defunded
and went out of business. The Hunt Club hit was considered the event that resulted in the defunding of community organizing in Cleveland. With the rise of the more docile, reasonable development corporations, funders had a way to stay involved in the neighborhoods without being linked to the wild and woolly organizing groups.

The attitudes of participants in the action at the Hunt Club, in retrospect, vary greatly. Many agree that it certainly was one of the most memorable hits and thought it was fun. Some look upon it as a youthful indiscretion, and there are those who considered it to be a demonstration of the power of the movement at this particular time. The powerful in Cleveland were starting to worry about the power of the neighborhood movement, according to this narrative.

One of the most remarkable admissions concerning the backlash against the groups came from Trapp, who said that NTIC and NPA underestimated the reaction and the power of SOHIO to make life difficult for the groups with the funders.51

Ken Esposito, formerly of Union Miles, who at the time of the Hunt Club hit was at the OTC, felt that the SOHIO campaign was an example of the groups overreaching. They became embroiled in a campaign, the repercussions of which they had not foreseen and that were to be disastrous for the movement.52

Many others, such as Gannon and Fagan, were not so convinced of the virtue of the action. They felt that the action had been decided on the spur of the moment by the training center and NPA. Many participants felt that there was little forethought about the action, what it would cost, and how they were to respond to the flak that would result from it. In short, they threw away the rulebook that they had followed—or were supposed to have followed. According to Weslian:

> It was the demise of organizing after that. God, did the shit hit the fan after that action, but, boy, was it incredible! I think that just shows how powerful the organizations had become and the fact that there wasn’t anything we wouldn’t do... It wasn’t like going up to city hall. Supposedly the people are supposed to have a right to go to city hall. When you start going to people like the Hunt Club, that’s where they drew the line.53

For all the suspicions, second thoughts, and disagreements about particular events or actions, the loyalty of the leadership to the overall campaign was solid, and is still defended to this day.

While those who remained in Cleveland caught the first wave of the backlash for the event, the Reclaim America caravan continued on to one of its major destinations, a rally on Wall Street with a planned hit at the stock exchange. Kelly described the event:

> We went to New York. We had a big parade, marched down Wall Street. Everybody had their Reclaim America signs. It was about neighborhoods. At the George Washington monument, they had
speeches about neighborhoods. It was fun; however, the big idea, like they conjured up with the Hunt Club, was to close the stock exchange. However, it was closed. We had all these people ready to go in, and it was closed, so people were pissed. 

The stock exchange was closed for a holiday, a minor detail that had escaped planners.

The rest of the trip, in Kelly’s eyes, continued to be a mixture of the inspiring and the absurd. Events at Washington were inspiring. Then there was a hit in Philadelphia where they got lost and no one knew what they were doing. The ordeal of it led to Kelly and Aron fleeing to a cab and a lobster dinner. “We ran. We felt like we were escaping. We ran, got in a cab, and ate like pigs,” Kelly remembered.

The campaign after the Hunt Club hit went from the offensive to the defensive. In energy organizing meetings after the September hit, the goal of getting $1 billion from SOHIO was dropped, to the relief of almost everyone. Organizing around energy issues returned to pushing for modest reforms from East Ohio and the details of doomed legislation before Congress opposing deregulation that began with the Natural Gas Policy Act.

In organizing, your next great event is always in the pipeline, and the groups were undaunted in their planning. They brought up the idea of having a neighborhood tour, where they would have an opportunity to show representatives from East Ohio, SOHIO, and political, religious, and social service leaders what the implications of deregulation would be in the neighborhoods of Cleveland. The problem was that the campaign was trying to be nice to people they had spent the past year attacking. No one was interested in attending.

They also found that they had no more tricks up their sleeves in the aftermath of the past year’s high-profile hits. A retreat was held in December 1982 by the major groups to evaluate where they were at the end of one of their stormiest years. Although no minutes or records have been found of that meeting, it is hard to see how it could have been upbeat. The warning that Gannon had made in the spring after the stockholders hit had been vindicated. They were out of ammo. There was no reason for anyone to pay attention to them any longer, and no one did. Many had told themselves that the SOHIO campaign was a demonstration of the power of the movement. Instead, it represented its bankruptcy.

As bad as the SOHIO campaign proved for the groups, it was a boon for neighborhood weatherization programs. SOHIO, joined by East Ohio, flooded the neighborhoods with funding for energy audits and assorted weatherization programs.

East Ohio and SOHIO learned how easy it was to co-opt the opposition. It was hard to make the case that they were just thieving corporate bandits in light of this generosity. They finally won deregulation. The climate changed. Prices moderated, and the energy crisis was retired to the nostalgia of the 1970s, along with leisure suits, discos and community organizing.