

Summer 7-2013

## Cleveland Mayor Ralph J. Perk: Strong Leadership During Troubled Times

Richard Klein  
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### Recommended Citation

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*Cleveland Memory*. 18.

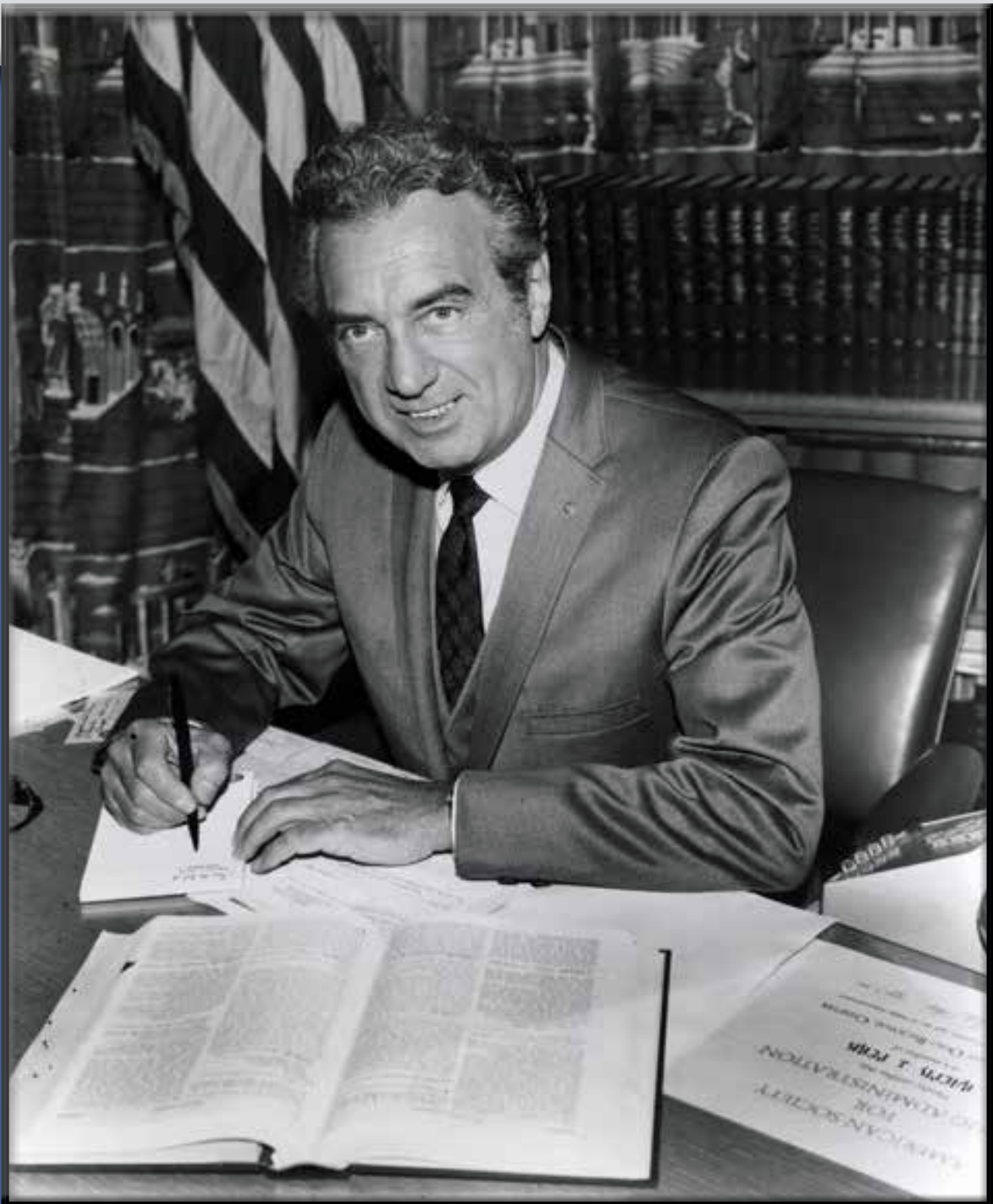
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# Cleveland Mayor Ralph J. Perk: Strong Leadership During Troubled Times

RICHARD KLEIN, Ph. D



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**Richard Klein, Ph.D**



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2013 MSL Academic Endeavors

Imprint of Michael Schwartz Library at Cleveland State University

Published by

MSL Academic Endeavors  
Cleveland State University  
Michael Schwartz Library  
2121 Euclid Avenue  
Rhodes Tower, Room 501  
Cleveland, Ohio 44115

<http://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/>

ISBN: 978-1-936323-02-9

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**CLEVELAND MAYOR RALPH J. PERK  
STRONG LEADERSHIP  
DURING TROUBLED TIMES**

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## FOREWORD

The idea behind *Cleveland Mayor Ralph J. Perk Strong Leadership During Troubled Times* originated in the 1990s. Being a close friend of the mayor and Director of the Department of Human Resources and Economic Development during his administration, I convinced Mayor Perk to offer a special non-credit course as part of the Elder's Program at Cuyahoga Community College. Based on my syllabus, this oral history course tapped into Mayor Perk's tremendous memory. It proved to be a great success. The class videotaped the course and donated it to the Western Reserve Historical Society. Mayor Perk wrote his own thirty-page paper based on this course.

A group close to the Perk Administration held several informal conversations following his death in April 1999. Believing that the public underestimated the many important contributions made by Perk and his administration, they decided that a scholarly analysis of his major accomplishments was in order. A search led by Judge Ralph J. Perk, Jr., Mr. Vincent Campanella, former Cuyahoga County Commissioner and Dr. Vladimir Rus former Slavic Languages Professor at Case Western Reserve University for an appropriate scholar identified Dr. Richard Klein of Cleveland State University. Dr. Klein accepted the task with great enthusiasm. Mayor Perk's family, colleagues and friends gratefully congratulate Dr. Klein on his very successful effort. His writing provides a balanced evaluation of Mayor Ralph J. Perk's many contributions to the City of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio.

Vladimir J. Rus, Ph.D



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is a tribute to one of Cleveland's greatest leaders. Ralph J. Perk embodied the quintessential 20<sup>th</sup> century politician. A dedicated administrator with both insight and foresight, he dedicated nearly fifty years to public service. During his six-year tenure as mayor, Cleveland went through extraordinary economic, political and social changes. The citizenry demanded strong leadership and Ralph Perk provided it. An optimistic leader with strong moral and religious convictions, he never walked away from a challenge.

Many Clevelanders are unaware of the important role Mayor Perk played in leading this city through very difficult times. A modest man, he rarely took credit for his successes. On this, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his tenure as mayor, it is very fitting to look back at his many accomplishments. His actions as mayor made Cleveland a better place to live and work. He was a man of the people, he was Cleveland's own.

I would like to dedicate this writing to the Cleveland Nationalities Movement and its President Judge Ralph J. Perk Jr. I would also like to recognize that organization's past President Ms. Irene Morrow for her keen insight on both Mayor Perk and his administration. Special thanks to Mr. Vincent Campanella for his encouragement and guidance.

I also appreciation the many helpful suggestions made by my CSU colleague Professor William Bowen. Special thanks to Ms. Suzanne Pokorny and Ms. Valerie Hicks both of CSU for their assistance and encouragement and Mr. Anurag Saxena for his research help. I wish also to thank the Secretary of the Cleveland

**Nationalities Movement Ms. Valarie Blazey for providing me valuable personal insight on Mayor Perk. I am especially indebted to the Perk Family who so graciously allowed me access to the mayor's personal archives.**

**I extend my personal thanks to my longtime friend and mentor Dr. Vladimir J. Rus. Dr. Rus not only furnished primary materials for this writing, but also, provided me with a behind the scenes look at the Perk Administration. He also critiqued my manuscript at various stages. Others I am indebted to include Mr. Richard Boylan, Director Impact Cities Crime Fighting Program for supplying me with his program files and Mr. Richard Horvath, Chief Corporate Counsel City of Cleveland for compiling the legal documents pertaining to the establishment of the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority.**

**I wish to thank Mr. Michael Ruffing, Manager Cleveland Public Library-Public Administration Library and Ms. Elaine Herron, Subject Department Librarian at the Cleveland Public Library-Public Administration Library for directing me to important city records. I also appreciate the assistance of my colleague and friend Mr. Martin Hauserman Chief City Archivist, Cleveland City Council. His special insight regarding the achievements of the Perk Administration proved invaluable.**

**This new on-line archival service featuring Mayor Perk would not have occurred without the dedication of my CSU colleagues. I am particularly indebted to Ms. Glenda Thornton, Director of the Michael Schwartz Library for her enthusiastic support. I especially wish to thank my friends and colleagues Mr.**

**William C. Barrow Special Collections Librarian and Ms. Lynn Duchez Bycko Special Collections Associate for their thoughtful comments and suggestions.**

**I also want to thank Mr. Bruce Jeppersen, Director, Center for Instructional Technology and Distance Learning, Mr. David Lodwick Coordinator, Library Systems and Ms. Joanne Cornelius Digital Production Coordinator. Special thanks to Mr. Allen Nozak Video-Audio Specialist for his many hours of assistance throughout this project. I am also indebted to Ms. Lauren Felder Website Specialist and Mr. Vern Morrison Library Media Technical Assistant for their help. Their commitment to this project led to the development of the first on-line archives at the CSU Michael Schwartz Library dedicated to a Cleveland mayor. Lastly, special thanks to my wife Jo Ann who offered encouragement and worthwhile suggestions throughout this endeavor.**

**CLEVELAND MAYOR RALPH J. PERK  
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**INTRODUCTION**

Many modern politicians eager to resolve economic, political and social issues rarely utilize a valuable resource at their disposal. Institutional memory in the form of city archival records represents a hidden gem. It enables leaders to review past political decisions and incorporate successful legislation into their own resolutions.

This case study of Cleveland's 52<sup>nd</sup> Mayor Ralph J. Perk, derived in part from institutional memory, demonstrates how a highly competent municipal leader with a dedicated staff successfully initiated three nationally acclaimed programs. However, this study is much more than an analysis of these programs. It affords some valuable examples of government efficiency worth emulating in today's world where self-interest may take precedent over the common good.

## CHAPTER ONE

### PRESSING NEW URBAN CHALLENGES

In today's fast-paced world, where spontaneous political decision-making often supersedes thoughtful planning, it is not surprising to find that many leaders depend on less-than-reliable information sources when making important policy decisions. Tightly regimented personal agendas and fear of voter retaliation may help to explain such actions. Amazingly, such cavalier actions seldom tarnish their careers. Perhaps the short retention span of many voters enables these politicians to distance themselves successfully from unpopular decisions. More often than not, these leaders justify their practices by claiming that they are first and foremost servants of the people, and, as such, are fulfilling the many demands made by their constituents for speedy problem resolution even when the economic, political or social benefits derived from such quick decision-making may prove nebulous.

Many of these same leaders argue that today's urban problems are unique to their generation. Few acknowledge any direct connection between their-own decision-making capabilities and past political achievements. In their minds, the contemporary world is all that matters. This is unfortunate. In dismissing the past they overlook one indisputable fact that events and people may change over time, but not deep-rooted economic, political or social problems. Thoughtful leaders of any era never lose sight of effective past policies and the competent leaders who introduced them. In fact, they may refer to these policies repeatedly when developing their-own initiatives.

**This reliance on the past for guidance held true in the 1970s as politicians came to terms with challenging issues. Extraordinary breakthroughs in science and technology occurring on the heels of the Civil Rights Movement and Viet Nam War led many city leaders to re-examine age-old political strategies and initiate new often sweeping reforms. Such far-reaching changes did not just happen. Astute politicians of that age looked at successful past policies for direction. They quickly discovered that the public traditionally played a major role in developing effective policies. Without public input, few policies had any long-term impact on the electorate. This simple realization on their part changed the course of urban politics forever.**

**Increasingly, the media attacked political leaders for not including the public more directly in the decision-making process. They claimed that the days of back room deals were over and that politicians were now more than ever accountable to the voters for their actions. This kind of sharp criticism led many shrewd leaders to abandon their out-of-date political agendas and to turn to the public directly for advice. Much of the feedback came from special advocacy and watchdog groups.**

**These highly vocal grassroots organizations promoted greater efficiency in government by closely monitoring activities at city hall. They determined that over burden bureaucracies often fell far short of their intended goals and that this frustrated many dedicated employees. In response, grassroots leaders called for municipalities to adopt a new government culture, a culture that would not only achieve its goals; but also, encourage innovation and reward efficiency among workers. Doing more with less became the watchword. Many of these political**

activists later became the outspoken champions for other broad-based municipal reforms.

Comprehensive urban reforms ranged from groundbreaking performance benchmarks and austere budget cuts to revolutionary communication networks and new information retention systems. Insightful politicians acknowledged the significance of being on the cutting edge of these changes. However, implementing these changes posed a formidable challenge. The quandary they faced was how to introduce these needed reforms without alienating the voting public. Their concerns regarding potential voter backlash were well-founded. A persistent struggle between majority and minority groups over political empowerment beginning in the mid-1960s prompted widespread discontent and protests throughout U.S. cities. Many traditional leaders were unnerved by it. There were no precedents for such actions.

In the immediate post-war years, the majority of municipal policies represented political compromises carefully orchestrated by local business leaders and elected officials. Public input played a minuscule role in this process. (1) As a result, few policies addressed the deep-rooted economic and social issues affecting these communities. Many municipal leaders naively believed that these problems would miraculously disappear over time. Of course, this hardly ever happened. Yet, the public rarely protested. In their minds, the business leaders were experienced powerbrokers, well-versed on the needs and wants of their respective communities. (2) Inevitably, they would do what was best for society.

Ultimately, the success or failure of a particular public policy did not rest with the city's elite leadership; but rather, those politicians forced to enact it. This strategy worked well as long as local business profits soared and employment remained high. However, any sustained downturn in the economy might spell disaster.

The adverse economic and social changes affecting urban America in the late 1960s fueled massive protest. They were the sparks that lit the fire. Disgusted by corrupt business and political leaders and their increasingly inane policies, Americans took to the streets. (3) What began as simple, non-violent demonstrations soon exploded into full-scale riots. Arson, plunder and killing dominated the daily news. This kind of mass violence shocked many Americans. They sought reassurance from their elected officials that such rebellious behavior would soon end. Unfortunately, few leaders could offer such assurance. All these politicians could say was that major changes in municipal government were in the offing once the dust had settled.

Most federal officials agreed that major steps must be taken to help the poor living in decaying urban ghettos. However, philosophical and procedural differences slowed the entire process down. In 1968, the U.S. Commission on Civil Disorders also known as the Kerner Commission recommended massive federal spending to eradicate economic and social inequities in urban America. (4) Congress disagreed and proceeded to cut spending. Many Congressional leaders believed that the War on Poverty Program was sufficient. (5)



Discerning municipal leaders in the late 1960s knew that the present social unrest occurring within many of their communities represented much more than just poverty. That was only the tip of the iceberg. The widening gap in incomes and job prospects, the dramatic exodus of affluent whites to the suburbs, the rise of black power and increased opposition to the Viet Nam War divided the nation. (6) Insightful politicians knew that any worthwhile economic and social reforms would not emanate from Capitol Hill. They would begin on the grassroots level where enlightened leaders would courageously put the interests of their community first.

Pressing local concerns rather than federal mandates led to major changes in municipal government. In particular, the feverous pace of technological advancement and the inability of the public to fully comprehend the enormity of these changes altered municipal decision-making forever. Leaders expressed growing concerns regarding the best course of action to follow. Their concerns boiled down to two fundamental questions. First, given the seriousness of the current situation what kind of political strategy might best suit the needs of their constituents? Second, should they develop new public policies based on the latest political rhetoric or simply rely on traditional ideology? Ultimately, most followed the course of least resistance and developed policies that utilized ideologies of the past and present.

Evaluating the contributions made by urban leaders some forty years ago may offer valuable insight into what constitutes effective democracy on the municipal level and how quality political leadership transcends time. The

innovative ways effective politicians of the 1970s used federal funding to insure the success of their programs is of special interest.

The 52<sup>nd</sup> Mayor of Cleveland, Ohio, Ralph J. Perk played the political game extremely well. However, his success represented much more than exceptional role-playing. His strong moral code, unbending religious convictions and obsession to do the right thing, even when it proved unpopular with the voters, gave him a decided edge over other, less enlightened leaders.

Perk believed that municipal government existed to serve the people and not the other way around. His support of regional government as a way of providing affordable, quality municipal services placed him years ahead of others. A lofty idealist, on the one hand, and a pragmatic politician, on the other, Perk possessed an uncanny knack of addressing the many concerns of his constituents in an effective and thoughtful way.

His popularity among the voters was a testimony to his exceptional leadership. Hundreds of his constituents visited his office daily. They sought jobs, personal advice and political favors. He rarely disappointed them. The Cleveland business community respected Perk's no nonsense approach to public service and his unflinching commitment to the voters. A strong Republican leader in a city controlled by Democrats he remained true to his political convictions throughout his long and illustrious career.

What is equally astounding is that Mayor Perk accomplished so much between election years. Prior to 1980, Cleveland mayors and councilpersons served two-year terms. Mounting financial burdens and limited free time between elections

prevented many mayors from instituting meaningful reforms. This was not the case with Ralph J. Perk. An energetic administrator, he accomplished much during his six-year tenure as mayor. Part of his success rested in the fact that he loved to campaign. Perk claimed that frequent campaigning kept him in touch with the voters. Most Clevelanders responded enthusiastically to his low-key campaigning style. Few things seemed to bother him. Furthermore, he knew that significant economic and social changes were fast approaching and that the city's leadership must prepare for these challenges now.

The unexpected closing of several major Cleveland steel mills in the 1970s led to high unemployment and decreased property values. It also cut into the city's tax base. Many leaders in Washington including President Nixon empathized with poverty-ridden cities such as Cleveland. Regrettably, growing economic competition overseas; sustained military losses in Southeast Asia and mounting civil unrest consumed much of their time.

Instead of expanding poverty programs to help those cities with the greatest need, Nixon ordered them cut. (7) He closed Job Corps training centers and reduced funding for key agencies including the National Institute of Health. The president also disbanded the Office of Economic Opportunity. Nixon intended to move social services from the federal to the state and local level. He believed that ample federal funding would expedite it.

His strategy might have worked had it not been for the Watergate Scandal. (8) This constitutional crisis shook the very foundations of American democracy. Some critics predicted that the nation would not survive. But, survive it did, due in

large measure to dedicated, hardworking political leaders in the late 1970s such as Ralph J. Perk. The Watergate Scandal enraged many voters. Accountability and honesty replaced cronyism and partisan politics. The scandal impacted Mayor Perk. A long-time supporter of President Nixon, he was sickened by what happened to him. (9) Ralph Perk was an honest politician and he could not understand why others were not like him.

Perk's six-year tenure represented a period of efficient municipal governance. This was remarkable given the economic, political and social upheavals affecting Cleveland at that time. Perk's administration was like no other. He not only gave the working class a powerful friend at city hall; but also, championed the city's elite. Few Cleveland mayors before or since could boast of so many successes. Turbulent times needed strong leadership and Mayor Ralph J. Perk met the challenge admirably.

## ENDNOTES

1. Marc A. Weiss, "The Origins and Legacy of Urban Renewal," in Federal Housing Policy and Programs Past and Present ed. J. Paul Mitchell (New Brunswick N.J.: Rutgers University Center for Urban Policy Research, 1985), 253-276.
2. Political activists in the 1960s attacked this idea. One of its harshest critics was a radical reformer of that era named Michael Harrington. Harrington gained prominence in 1962 when he wrote The Other America: Poverty in the United States. He debunked myths regarding the plight of America's poor. Harrington attacked the notion that through hard work the poor could eventually overcome poverty. He said the idea was preposterous in that poverty was a permanent part of American society and that the underclass would always exist. He concluded that the poor lacked the where-for-all to escape poverty. Michael Harrington, The Other America: Poverty in the United States (New York: MacMillan Publishers, 1962).
3. The growing youth movement also challenged traditional American values. Erik Erikson a well-known developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst believed that their rebellious actions represented their search for identity. America's adolescence found it increasingly difficult to leave the security of childhood for the long-term commitments of adulthood. Erik Erikson, Identity, Youth and Crisis (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1968), 155.
4. Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Summary of Report <http://www.eisenhowerfoundation.org/docs/kerner.pdf>.
5. First proposed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in his State of the Union address in January 1964, the War on Poverty Program impacted the nation and led to the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 which authorized the use of federal funds to eliminate poverty.
6. The oil embargo along with an aging industrial core, a changing job scene, increase foreign competition in manufacturing and the stock market crash of 1974 all but ended the post-war boom. From 1971 to 1979 the rate of inflation jumped from 4.30% to 13.3% while the rate of unemployment increased from 6.6% to 7.9%. This resulted in stagflation. Stagflation occurred when both the nation's inflation rate and unemployment rate increased while economic growth remained stagnate. Not being a typical recession, economists in the

1970s remained in a quandary as to how best to remedy it. It took many years before the U.S. economy recovered.

7. Leon Friedman and William F. Levantrosser, eds. Richard M. Nixon: Politician, President, Administrator (New York: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1991), 342.
8. For a detailed account of President Nixon's plan see Remarks by Bryce N. Harlow Counsellor to the President, National League of Cities. Congressional City Conference, Washington Hilton Hotel, March 9, 1970. "President Nixon's New Federalism."1-12.  
<http://www.ou.edu/special.albertctr/archivesHarlowInvento/H>.
9. Joseph Wagner, "Perk Earns National Attention with Defense of Nixon," The Cleveland Plain Dealer, June 26, 1974.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE LIFE AND TIMES OF RALPH J. PERK

Ralph J. Perk was born on January 19, 1914 and died on April 21, 1999. (1) He was the third child of Mary (Smirt) and Joseph C. Perk. A lifelong resident of Cleveland's Fleet-Broadway neighborhood, the future mayor was also a lifetime member of Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic Church. An important leader in city politics for nearly fifty years, Ralph Perk barely survived infancy. (2)

Shortly after his first birthday, he contracted bronchial pneumonia. Physicians in those days could do little to combat that dreaded disease. In fact, the majority of children contracting it died. Young Perk's future remained very much in doubt until a young surgeon from neighboring St. Alexis Hospital stepped in to help. George W. Crile visited the children of the poor regularly. He took particular interest in young Ralph Perk's case. Dr. Crile tried every medical procedure available at that time to save this child's life. At first, nothing appeared to help. But, over the next several months the toddler gradually regained his strength. George Crile, Frank Bunts, William Lower and John Phillips founded the Cleveland Clinic in 1921.

Ralph Perk never forgot that Dr. Crile had saved his life. The Cleveland Clinic Foundation Board of Trustees in 1971 threatened to move their main campus from Cleveland to the suburbs. The mayor promised the city's full cooperation if the board of trustees agreed to keep their main facility in the city. The foundation board voted to stay in the City of Cleveland and Mayor Perk wasted no time in fulfilling his promise. The City of Cleveland evoked the Writ of Eminent Domain in

1972. This gave officials the legal right to claim private property for the “good of the public.” The 5<sup>th</sup> amendment of the U.S. Constitution sanctioned it and the due process clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment insured fair compensation for all confiscated land. (3) In 1973, city officials transferred this blighted area to the hospital. The Cleveland Clinic built the South Hospital Complex on that site. It included a spacious research building, a 200-car garage and an 18-story luxury hotel called the Park Plaza Inn.(4)

Health problems continued to plague Ralph Perk for the rest of his life. In 1925, he nearly lost his sight to a rare eye disease. The Perk family may not have had much money, but they did have many friends. One of their friends, a neighborhood butcher, paid for young Perk’s treatments. Those eye treatments saved his sight.

Ralph Perk graduated from Our Lady of Lourdes R.C. School in 1927. He entered East Technical High School that fall. Unfortunately, the Great Depression of the 1930s forced him to quit school at the age of 15. He later finished high school through correspondence courses. Perk also took courses at the Cleveland College of Western Reserve University and St. John College of Cleveland. (5) The future mayor attended a special leadership-training program at Bethany College and lectured at Indiana University, Princeton University and the University of Utah.

In the mid-1930s, Perk and his older brother George Perk opened the Perk Coal and Ice Company. The caring way they treated their customers insured success. In fact, they often gave away coal and ice to neighbors who were penniless. Ralph Perk was also a quality patternmaker and office manager for the Perk Realty



Company. On May 4, 1940, he married his former classmate Lucille Gagliardi. She was the daughter of Sam Gagliardi a highly respected barber and boxing promoter. The Perk family was to include seven children, nineteen grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

Perk tried to enlist in the armed forces at the outbreak of World War II. Unfortunately, reoccurring bouts with kidney stones exempted him from military service. Following the war, Ralph J. Perk became a residential real estate appraiser for First Federal Savings and Loan Company. He also purchased his one and only house, a large two-story grey-colored frame dwelling at 3421 East 49<sup>th</sup> Street.

His political career began in 1935 when he attended a political rally sponsored by the 13<sup>th</sup> Ward Republican Club. According to the future mayor, the club's chairman spotted him in the audience and asked him if he wanted to volunteer for the Republican Party. Without any hesitation he responded yes. The son of a Democratic labor organizer, Perk never explained why he joined the Republican Party. Perhaps he wanted to repay his debt to the neighborhood butcher who was a leader in that party. Perhaps he believed that he could rise faster within its ranks. Whatever the reason or reasons behind his decision, Ralph Perk remained a loyal party member for nearly 65 years. He was inducted into the Cuyahoga County Republican Party Hall of Fame in 2003. (6)

The 13<sup>th</sup> Ward Republican Club elected him its precinct captain in 1940. Wanting to gain additional experience as a political organizer, Perk joined the Presidential Campaign of U.S. Senator Robert A. Taft in 1948. He also served as

**Campaign Manager of the National Young Republicans and ran unsuccessfully for the Ohio State Assembly in 1948 and again in 1950.**

**Undeterred by these campaign losses, Perk became an Assistant State Fire Marshall. In 1949, he served as Campaign Manager for Cleveland mayoral hopeful Franklin A. Polk. Perk also campaigned for the Republican Presidential nominee General Dwight David Eisenhower and his running mate Richard M. Nixon in 1952. A rising star within the Republican Party, Ralph Perk chaired the City Government Committee of the Citizens League of Greater Cleveland. He also served as Vice President and Regional Director of the National Young Republican Federation. The Ripon Club elected him president in 1952 and the following year he received the “Republican Man of the Year” award. The future mayor also chaired the Southeast Cleveland chapter of the Community Chest from 1953 to 1957. He worked in the Ohio Attorney General’s office and served as Executive Assistant to Ray Bliss, the Republican National Chairman.**

**Voters in the 13<sup>th</sup> Ward elected Perk to Cleveland City Council in 1953. His friend and political mentor Joseph F. Dolejs ran much of his campaign. It was an amazing victory in that the majority of his supporters were Democrats. This young politician proudly represented his ward for the next eight years. While in council, Perk fought to reduce air and water pollution. He also helped to balance the city’s budget and pushed for the establishment of regional government. Perk played a major role on the Executive Committee Cleveland Chapter of the American Society for Public Administrators.**

As the 13<sup>th</sup> ward representative, he championed inexpensive bus tickets for Cleveland Public School students and served on the Urban Renewal, Planning, Aviation and Air Pollution committees. Perk also sponsored legislation that led to the construction of the Cuyahoga River Interceptor Sewer System. In 1955, the future mayor introduced legislation in council that led to the city's first urban renewal project. Garden Valley Estates at 3135 East 79<sup>th</sup> Street contained over 600 apartments. Perk also played a pivotal role in convincing Congress to adopt universal pollution controls. (7) Cleveland received its first federal air and water pollution grant in 1956.

Ralph Perk represented the latest in a breed of dedicated municipal politicians willing to tackle some of the community's worst problems. His pragmatic approach to problem solving served him well. Throughout his long and illustrious political career, Perk emphasized the importance of helping his constituents through what he called "targeted intervention." He prided himself on his ability to bring people together to resolve major issues. Perk believed that any problem could be broken down to its simplest component and solved.

His optimistic approach to life and politics gained Ralph Perk and his family much deserved recognition. Cleveland's Czech community named him the "Man of the Year" in 1954. The following year, he became the youngest recipient of the Knights of Columbus "Catholic Man of the Year" award. The Veterans of Foreign Wars in 1957 named him their "Outstanding Citizen" while his wife Lucille became the "Italian Mother of the Year" in 1965.

A son of immigrant parents with strong ethnic ties, Ralph Perk cherished his freedom as an American citizen. He also knew that freedom did not exist for millions of Eastern Europeans living under Communism. He realized that without help from ethnic groups in the United States, these “captive nations” might never be able to break that stranglehold. He believed that all Clevelanders and most especially those with Eastern European ancestry had a moral obligation to save these people.

Mayor Perk was not alone in his thinking. Many influential politicians of the 1950s and 1960s shared similar views. For example, U.S. Senator Frank J. Lausche and U.S. House Representative Michael Feighan repeatedly demanded that Congress take a stronger stance against Communism. In 1959, both leaders asked the future mayor to establish an organization in Cleveland dedicated to stamping out Communism.

This resulted in the American Nationalities Movement. Made up originally of 35 different ethnic groups, this very special non-profit organization raised public awareness of the dangers of Communism. On July 17, 1959, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the Captive Nations Proclamation. This proclamation reaffirmed the commitment of the United States to fight Communism. It also proclaimed the third week of July Captive Nations Week.

The efforts of the American Nationalities Movement eventually paid-off. The Soviet Union fell on December 31, 1991. Two thousand and eleven marked the organization’s fiftieth anniversary. To commemorate that milestone, the group honored its founder Ralph J. Perk. It also approved a resolution to fight oppressive

regimes throughout the world. Mayor Perk served as its president from 1959 until his death in 1999. Ms. Irene Morrow and the mayor's eldest son Cleveland Municipal Court Judge Ralph J. Perk Jr. have also served as president.

The voters elected Ralph Perk Cuyahoga County Auditor in 1962. (8) He defeated the incumbent John J. Carney by over 20,000 votes. Perk was the first Republican to serve in that office in nearly fifty years. He supervised 300 employees within 17 departments. An innovative administrator, the future mayor revolutionized procedures by introducing data processing and reducing his payroll by 25%. He also assisted other county auditors throughout Ohio in creating their-own boards.

Perk easily won re-election in 1966 with 94,000 votes and again in 1970 with 140,000 votes. A highly energetic and respected leader, he chaired the International Association of Assessing Officers. Perk also played key roles in the Cuyahoga County Budget Commission and the Cuyahoga County Board of Revisions. However, his political ambitions extended far beyond the auditor's office. He wanted to be Mayor of Cleveland.

The outspoken editor of The Cleveland Press, Louis B. Seltzer, asked Ralph Perk to run for the city's highest office in 1965. At first, he hesitated. However, Louis Seltzer refused to take no for an answer and Perk eventually decided to run. Perk's innovative platform that called for Cleveland's municipal court to pay the city's police department \$5.00 per case to cover its expenses on court days gained media attention. (9) Perk also proposed moving welfare cases from the city to the county. He further called for transferring MUNY-Light costs from the city's

**General Fund to its Utility Fund. His platform resonated well with a great many voters. However, his late entrance into the race prevented him from defeating the incumbent Ralph S. Locher.**

**Ralph Locher became mayor in 1963 after Anthony J. Celebreeze stepped down. President Kennedy named Celebreeze the new Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW). (10) Mayor Locher barely won the 1965 election receiving only 37% of the popular vote. His closest rival an ambitious African American lawyer and member of the Ohio State Assembly Carl B. Stokes received 36.1% of the vote. Ralph Perk ran a distant third with only 17.3%. (11)**

**Ralph Locher's popularity plummeted following his firing of James M. Lister in January 1966. (12) Lister had served as the city's Planning Director for nearly two decades. A nationally respected planner and protégé of New York City's legendary planner Robert Moses, Lister was not a favorite of the mayor. Locher replaced him with Barton Clausen a public relations consultant for KYW-Radio and TV. (13) Clausen lasted less than three months. Several other planners held that post over the next several years. Finally, Mayor Carl B. Stokes appointed Norman Krumholz in 1969. Krumholz served as Planning Director for nearly ten years.**

**The mayor's inept handling of the Hough Riots in the summer of 1966 antagonized many voters. Sensing growing dissatisfaction among the ranks of the electorate, Perk considered running for mayor in 1967. However, poor health prevented him from entering the race that year. In retrospect, his decision not to**

run proved to be a stroke of good luck. Carl B. Stokes along with Frank Celeste, the former mayor of Lakewood, challenged Mayor Locher for the city's top spot. Their efforts led to the defeat of the incumbent in the mayoral primaries. Ralph Locher remained in public service and later distinguished himself as an Ohio Supreme Court Justice.

Mayor Locher's departure from city hall left the field wide open. Ultimately, Frank Celeste bowed out of the race leaving Carl Stokes and Seth Taft. A young articulate African American and a leading Democrat, Carl Stokes had fought his way out of poverty to become a highly respected lawyer and politician. His opponent the Republican candidate Seth Taft epitomized the well-bred corporate lawyer. The grandson of a U.S. President and son of Cincinnati Mayor Charles Phelps Taft II, Seth Taft already enjoyed a distinguished record of public service. Although very different in background and temperament, these two candidates continued to battle it out throughout the summer and fall. Stokes won the election by 1,644 votes and was inaugurated on November 13, 1967.

Carl B. Stokes enjoyed being the first black mayor of a major U.S. city. Apprehensive and excited about his new role, Stokes knew that everyone was watching him. If he succeeded it would lead to new political opportunities for African Americans throughout the nation. However, should he fail it might take many years before the voters would elect another African American to the city's highest office. This kind of pressure might have unnerved some but not Carl Stokes. He remained calm. His ambitious political agenda called for eliminating

slums, reorganizing the city's police department, building suburban public housing and promoting black middle class economic power.

His initial successes as mayor included unfreezing U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds for new urban renewal projects. (14) He also expanded the Model Cities Program and provided African Americans good job opportunities. By 1970, there were over 250 blacks employed at city hall. Mayor Stokes also initiated a new, high profile program dedicated to neighborhood rehabilitation through urban renewal.

Known as Cleveland Now, this \$150m program called for the creation of 16,000 jobs, construction of twenty new welfare and child care centers and introduction of new recreational activities geared specifically for central city youngsters. (15) Program supporters included Republic Steel Corporation, Pickands Mather and Company, the Stouffer Corporation, the May Company and the Cleveland AFL-CIO Federation of Labor. (16) Unfortunately, this highly touted initiative soon lost favor with the public. Allegations of corruption and fraud within its ranks brought the Cleveland Now program to a screeching halt. Its failure led many voters to question the mayor's ability to lead the city. They wanted to know how he could have allowed such illegal activities to occur under his watch.

Hoping to salvage his political reputation, Mayor Stokes in March 1970 issued his own response entitled Cleveland: Now! Report to the Citizens of Cleveland. This report claimed that the program had generated some tangible results. They included quality-built low-to-moderate income inner-city housing units and good paying jobs for the chronic unemployed. Stokes admitted that the



Cleveland Now program had not decreased juvenile delinquency or increased the quality of municipal services. However, he was certain that it would have achieved all these goals and much more if only the public had allowed it to continue. (17)

The mayor concluded that the program's greatest single weakness was not its unfulfilled promises; but rather, the lack of public support once allegations of corruption had surfaced. The mayor's explanation did not resonate well with the people. Many saw it as a whitewash. Some of his most ardent supporters questioned the rationale behind his arguments. This misstep by Mayor Stokes haunted him for the remainder of his tenure. The media certainly had a field day with it.

But as many already knew the honeymoon between Carl Stokes and the media had ended long before the Cleveland Now scandal. (18) A number of factors contributed to it. Such things as controversial appointees, decided laps-in-judgment during the Glenville Riots of 1968 and an ongoing feud between the mayor and the city's police department encouraged the local media to go on the offensive. A great many of his political backers thought that these attacks were unfounded. However, the local media disagreed. They remained vigilant in pursuing what they believed to be the corrupt underside of the Stokes Administration. Media spokespersons claimed it was their duty to protect the public from corrupt politicians regardless of the consequences. Their criticism of Mayor Stokes only intensified over time.

The irony in all of this was that the local media at the beginning of his first term supported the mayor. In fact, the Cleveland Plain Dealer believed that Mayor Stokes would not only serve Cleveland's minority population, but also, represent the

interests of the business community. An article published by The Plain Dealer on December 31, 1967 reflected this optimism. (19) It congratulated the mayor for re-establishing a favorable national image for the City of Cleveland and promoting local business expansion. This daily also commended him for supporting the new county port authority. (20)

Unfortunately, these halcyon days ended quickly. The inability of Mayor Stokes to control the Glenville Riots in the summer of 1968 sealed his fate. Both Cleveland newspapers turned against him. A federal study investigated the Glenville Riots through the eyes of the media. Entitled Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, investigators concluded that the attacks launched by the media against the mayor were both newsworthy and warranted. (21) It further stated that the public had the right to know what was happening even if that media coverage demonstrated the mayor's ineptness under pressure.

This feud between the mayor and the media might have subsided had it not been for newspaper accounts claiming that Fred (Ahmed) Evans, one of the instigators of the Glenville Riots, had received \$6,000 from Cleveland Now. Evans allegedly used these proceeds to purchase high-powered rifles and over 300 rounds of ammunition. (22) He was later convicted on seven counts of first-degree murder and received the death penalty. (23) Evans died of cancer several years later. This kind of embarrassing press coverage discouraged Mayor Stokes.

Growing voter dissatisfaction in the spring of 1969 convinced Ralph Perk to enter the mayoral contest. (24) Although he lost that race by 4,500 votes, political

leaders on both sides of the aisle took special notice. Republican Party stalwarts supported Perk's candidacy as the 20<sup>th</sup> District delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1968. He represented that same district at the next two conventions. Perk also served as the Chairman of the National Conference of Republican Mayors and Municipal Elected Officials and as a member of the Republican National Committee Advisory Council.

Carl Stokes' second term as mayor proved more disastrous than his first. Some questioned his wisdom in firing Cleveland Police Chiefs Richard Wagner and Patrick Gerity. Both chiefs appeared to be competent leaders. (25) However, the repercussions from these firings paled when compared to two other events affecting the city's police department. The first involved alleged cheating on promotion exams. Rumors had been circulating that several black police officers had illegally received the answers to these exams. Chief Gerity responded to these accusations by conducting his own probe. His findings led to a grand jury investigation that uncovered improprieties. These irregularities resulted in the prosecution and conviction of the Civil Service Commissioner President Jay White and his Secretary Charles Butts. (26)

The second problem concerned Stokes's appointment of the new city police chief. On January 26, 1970, Mayor Stokes announced the appointment of William P. Ellenburg as the city's latest police chief. Ellenburg succeeded Patrick Gerity. A former Detroit police officer with a distinctive record, Chief Ellenburg had the reputation of being very tough on crime. He seemed perfect for this job. However, within days of being named to this important post, The Detroit Free Press printed a

scathing indictment of the new police chief. The paper claimed that Chief Ellenburg and his assistant Frank Cochill had accepted bribes from a well-known mafia lawyer in Detroit named Lawrence Burns. Ellenburg immediately denied all charges. The two local dailies at first supported him. However, a subsequent investigation by the mayor's office produced incriminating evidence and William Ellenburg was forced to resign his post. (27) Critics within the Cleveland legal community wanted to know why Mayor Stokes had not conducted a more extensive background check on this candidate before offering him the job.

Calamities such as these undermined the mayor's power base. An antagonistic city council and a disgruntled media only served to weaken his case further. Stokes' popularity plunged in January 1971 when voters rejected a 0.8% increase in the city's income tax. He wanted to use the additional funds to pay off the city's growing budget deficit.

The mayor's reluctance to attend Monday night city council meetings proved to be another poor decision. Stokes claimed that he had not abandoned city council and that many of his administrators never missed a session. (28) However, this breach in political etiquette whereby his administrators argued their own cases in front of council without the presence of the mayor did not go over well with many in that chamber. It also led many voters to question his leadership abilities. The voting public possesses a very short memory especially when city officials do not fulfill their campaign promises. Erratic behavior predicated on a less-than-stellar performance in office usually spells disaster at the polls.

Carl B. Stokes increasingly fitted into this category following the 1969 election. He was a lame duck. The public's negative reaction to him only intensified with time. Ultimately, it destroyed his chances for higher political office. That political realization so apparent to many by the winter of 1971 was not evident in the fall of 1969. Mayor Stokes had to endure additional embarrassments before its full affect set in. By that time, there was very little he could do to stop it.

Nineteen Seventy proved to be a disastrous year for the Stokes Administration. The closing of several major stores in the Upper Euclid District and the threatened demolition of the Allen Theatre in Playhouse Square received national coverage. Many business and civic leaders placed full blame on the mayor.

Other negative developments gaining media attention that year included increased white flight to the suburbs, a hiring freeze on safety forces and the closing of several major factories. Additional sore points were an insolvent MUNY-Light, bankrupt public service retirement funds and further infrastructure decay. His subsequent closing of 26 recreational centers along with cuts in sanitation services and a deficit-ridden Cleveland municipal stadium made matters even worse. Local officials held out little hope for a speedy economic recovery. Subsequent spikes in energy prices, soaring labor costs, numerous additional shop closings and unprecedented inflation only served to reinforce these earlier fears and trepidations.

The final blow to the Stokes Administration occurred when rumors of funding misappropriations led the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to suspend all future renewal activities. Many of these rumors remained unsubstantiated, yet Washington refused to budge. This action lent

**further credence to critics who argued that the Stokes Administration was engaged in illegal activities.**

**Many in the media portrayed Carl Stokes as a corrupt opportunist wishing to advance his own political career at the expense of the people. (29) Tired and dejected, the mayor announced on April 16, 1971 that he would not seek a third term. He left Cleveland to become a newscaster for WNBC-TV in New York City. The mayor later served as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Seychelles and as a Cleveland Municipal Judge. Carl Stokes died of throat cancer on April 3, 1996. He was 68 years old.**

## ENDNOTES

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## CHAPTER THREE

### A NEW MAYOR FOR A NEW DAY

Public reaction to the Stokes announcement was mixed. Some were shocked by the news, many were not. The mayor's staunchest supporters thought he was an excellent leader who had been brutally attacked by the local media for attempting to institute much needed reforms. Many of his opponents believed that Mayor Stokes may have done his very best; however, it was not nearly enough given the terrible economic straits facing Cleveland during his administration.

Whatever the views expressed, nearly everyone agreed that the City of Cleveland was about to enter a period of unparalleled economic and social changes and that the next mayor, whoever that might be, must be an experienced leader ready to meet those challenges. (1) Several candidates battled it out for Cleveland's top-post in 1971. Many assumed that Cleveland City Council President Anthony Garofoli would win the election. However, Mayor Stokes did not support him. He claimed that Garofoli had all but sabotaged his Equal Employment Opportunity Ordinance of 1969. On the weekend prior to the mayoral primaries, a number of major leaders loyal to Stokes contacted black voters throughout the city. They asked them not to vote for Garofoli, but rather, throw their support behind the candidacy of Cleveland millionaire and former state representative James H. Carney. Over 50,000 blacks voted for Carney the following Tuesday.

Three candidates remained after the mayoral primaries. James Carney and Arnold Pinkney led the pack with Ralph Perk trailing a distance third. Perk was not discouraged by his poor showing at the beginning of the campaign. Following

the advice of his trusted Campaign Manager Robert Bennett he continued to attack his opponents. Perk's run for mayor represented a true Horatio Alger story. With a campaign budget of about \$600, Ralph J. Perk fought an uphill battle throughout much of the summer of 1971. However, he gained significant political strength with the electorate during the two months just prior to the election. His political platform that called for completing the Cuyahoga County Justice Center, reducing crime and ending the sale of pornography appealed to a great many undecided voters. He also proposed establishing an emergency ambulance service, erecting a new flight terminal at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport and eliminating air pollution.

What turned the political tide in his favor was his assurance to the voters that if elected he would continue to provide good municipal services without raising taxes. (2) Ralph Perk won the election with 39% of the popular vote. He received a total of 88,664 votes, while Pinkney and Carney got 74,085 and 65,725 votes respectively. (3)

The first Republican mayor in Cleveland in thirty years, Perk's inauguration on November 11, 1971 drew more than 1,500. The new mayor set the tone for his administration when he said that "I ask not so much that you have faith in me, but that you have faith in yourself and in your city, together we will make a difference." Perk's remarks reflected his faith in the people. He also made it quite clear that any major programs initiated during his administration would reflect the will of the people. He successfully mobilized the ethnic population.

Over the years, the mayor had developed a practical approach to politics. He thought of it as a blend of conservative and liberal thinking fine-tuned to the needs of the individual voters and the community at large. Perk believed that a successful politician knew how to maintain a proper balance between the specific demands of his constituents, on the one hand, and the general concerns of the community on the other. Never allowing one group to dominate the political scene especially when important issues were being discussed represented the key to effective leadership. This kind of straight-forward thinking enabled him to promote frugality, enterprise and morality among the city's working class voters, while at the same time, extol the virtues of business expansion, civic commitment and self-reliance among the city's powerbrokers.

The mayor further expanded his power base by cultivating colleagues and friends from all walks of life. His political appointments reflected his pragmatic thinking. Initial administrative appointments included Richard Hollington Jr. as Law Director, Andrew Putka as Finance Director, Vincent C. Campanella as Budget Director, George Voinovich as Cuyahoga County Auditor, Harry Volks as Press Secretary, Howard B. Klein as Personal Aid, Philip S. Hamilton as Personnel Director and Gerald Rademaker as Police Chief.

Other influential appointees included Vaclav Hyvnar as Executive Assistant Nationality Affairs, Ralph Tyler Sr. as Service Director, and Warren D. Hinchee as Commissioner of Light and Power. Salvatore Calandra as Chief Council, Malcolm Douglas as Chief Council, Nicholas Bucur as Cleveland Transit System Board

**Member, John Nagy as Recreational Commissioner and William Seawright as Advisor for Black Affairs.**

**Mayor Perk also relied heavily on Dr. Michael Pap, Dr. Vladimir Rus, Patrick Henry, Common Pleas Judge Herbert Whiting, Warren D. Riebe, Neil McGuinness and Irene Morrow. Other important city administrators included Richard Boylan, Norman Krumholz, J. William Petro, James C. Davis, Robert Hart, Raymond Kudukis, Ina Keegan, Mark Driscoll, Bruce Akers, James Stewart, Robert Michalski and Hal Morgan.**

**Robert Beasley, James Zingale, Dr. Jack Robertson, George A. Chuplis, Michael Rini, Olive K. Banister, Henry Kondrat, Dr. Ruth Miller, Rowena Gordon, and Herman Kammerman also played key roles in the Perk Administration. Nicholas DeVito, Bohdan Futey, Joyce Whitley, Robert Hansen and John R. Climaco worked closely with the mayor as did Charles Russo, Samuel Miller and Caesar Moss. Other instrumental decision-makers included Clyde Kirsch, Almeta Johnson, James Wilburn, Gunther Katzmar, Dr. Frederick Robbins, Thomas Stallworth, Michael T. Scanlon, Robert Weisman, Rosemary Lewis, Luke Owens and George J. Wrost.**

**Mayor Perk also recognized the importance of the city maintaining strong ties with other outside public agencies. One group to receive his attention was the Northeast Ohio Area-Wide Coordinating Agency (NOACA). Founded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 1968, NOACA served as the regional transportation and environmental planning agency for Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain and Medina counties. (4)**

One of its primary functions involved reviewing local project applications for federal funds to insure that they were in accordance with both federal and state mandates. (5) In 1970, Mayor Stokes stopped sending representatives to NOACA board meetings. He claimed that the agency purposely neglected the needs of the City of Cleveland. He wanted nothing to do with it. (6)

Ralph Perk viewed NOACA from a different perspective. Recognizing the many benefits the city might receive from working closely with NOACA, he paid the \$43,000 in back dues owed and began to send city officials to its meetings. Perk also resolved the city's \$22m urban renewal debt, recouped \$27.9m in Model Cities funding, collected more than \$700,000 in delinquent taxes and reduced the city's property taxes by 10%.

Under the direction of the city's new Law Director Richard R. Hollington Jr., officials also negotiated a successful state bailout package. This was an amazing achievement given the precarious financial situation Cleveland found itself in at the beginning of the 1970s. (7) The problem began when the Stokes Administration tried to increase the city's income taxes while dropping the 5.8 mil school renewal tax.

In all probability, Cleveland taxpayers would have continued to pay the renewal levy with few questions asked. However, this sudden reversal in strategy forced the Cleveland Board of Education to take its case directly to the people. The Board of Education won out and the city's income tax levy failed. In essence, the Stokes Administration transferred \$18m from the city coffer to the school board. This resulted in a more impoverished city. (8)

Cleveland's deficit exceeded \$13m by 1971. (9) City officials might have paid little attention to it except that state officials required all municipalities in Ohio to balance their budgets annually. In response to this crisis, Mayor Perk ordered an immediate 10% across-the-board cut on all salaries. This action saved the city an estimated \$8m to \$9m. (10)

The unions representing the safety forces and sanitation workers challenged the legality of Perk's decision in court. A lower court upheld their challenge. However, the Ohio Court of Appeals overturned that decision. (11) It said that the mayor was well within his legal rights to order these cuts. Perk requested dissenting unions to meet with their members to see if they would voluntarily comply with the reductions. The mayor warned that failure to abide by the recent court ruling would result in extensive layoffs. After some consideration, these unions decided not to challenge the ruling. (12)

Over the next several months, Mayor Perk reduced city employees by 30%. At the same time, Richard Hollington Jr. convinced the Ohio State Assembly to approve enabling legislation that led to the city's bailout package. Under this agreement, state officials allowed Cleveland to borrow \$9.6m in advance at an interest rate of 3%. (13) They also permitted the city to reinstate the earlier pay cuts and increase the salaries of police officers and firefighters.

This groundbreaking legislation saved Cleveland from bankruptcy. (14) The city paid off its debt less than a year later. Moody's Investors assigned the City of Cleveland its highest bond rating in 1975. During his six-year tenure as mayor,

**Perk always balanced the budget. He also reduced the city's short-term debt from \$148m to \$38m.**

**Ralph Perk's reliance on qualified local leaders to assist in the development and implementation of major programs did not end with the city's bailout. Prominent business and civic leaders aided the Perk Administration in procuring significant federal grants for a wide variety of new economic and social programs. The \$35m compensation package received by the city with the establishment of the new county sewer district and the \$8m loan granted to the Cleveland Transit System (CTS) reflected their diligent efforts. Community leaders also helped Perk to obtain a \$175,000 from Washington to hire 58 additional police cadets. (15) Their hard work resulted in the city receiving another \$33m five-year federal grant aimed at fighting crime and promoting public service. Mayor Perk's reliance on competent outside leaders at every crossroad saved the taxpayers millions of dollars during his six-year tenure.**

**The mayor's commitment to the City of Cleveland extended far beyond his daily administrative duties. He truly believed that the community's best years lay ahead. Therefore, he encouraged his administrators to seek out large federal grants whenever and wherever possible. Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and the Cleveland Police Department's Community Response Unit represented two important federally sponsored programs initiated by this mayor. The Perk administration also issued \$91m in revenue bonds to expand the concourse, baggage areas and parking lots at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport.**



Perk received nearly \$5m from Washington to renovate Public Hall. Improvements ranged from a new lighting system and modern rest rooms to an airtight roof and special in-house TV system. The mayor also negotiated a new 25-year lease for Cleveland Municipal Stadium with the Cleveland Stadium Corporation (CSC). Led by Browns owner Art Modell, CSC agreed to fully refurbish this forty year old city landmark. (16) Ralph Perk also introduced a new rehabilitation program for inner-city housing. Called the 3% Loan Program, this conservation measure significantly lowered energy costs for many homeowners.

The mayor's ability to secure large government grants was remarkable. His optimistic outlook, sound business practices and dedication to city, family and friends inspired admiration and respect among many of his colleagues. No economic, social or political challenge seemed too great for him. Perk considered himself the "People's Mayor." He treated everyone with dignity and respect. The mayor never forgot his obligation to them. Therefore, it is not surprising that many Clevelanders fondly remember him. He knew how workingmen and women thought because he was one of them.

Ralph Perk also understood the growing alienation between the city's well-established working class and the newly emerging elite class. Once considered the backbone of the region's economy, hardworking Clevelanders were being repeatedly ignored by a new group of highly sophisticated, well-educated professionals. What were they to do? How were working class men and women going to survive within this new, highly competitive economic climate? Who would represent their needs?

**This is where Ralph Perk came into the picture. Many in the working class considered him to be their champion and friend. He never forgot his humble origins and most especially the people who had supported him from the beginning. The mayor honored his pledge to them. Perk not only aided Cleveland's working class in making the transition from the industrial world of the past to the new high tech age of tomorrow; but also, encouraged them to feel good about themselves during that transition.**

**To the casual observer, Mayor Perk's actions may have appeared to be little more than effective partisan politics at work. And perhaps to a certain extent it was that. After all, much of Perk's time involved finding jobs for the chronic unemployed, engaging in charitable work and socializing with his constituents. Yet, somehow his action meant much more than that. It was the motivating factors behind his actions rather than the actions themselves that set him apart from other mid-century politicians.**

**Ralph J. Perk truly loved his community and respected his constituents. He wanted to do what was right by them and not what was politically expedient. In the early 1950s, he took a vow of poverty with Msgr. Robert Nevins. He did not take these religious vows lightly. This good-natured eager to please politician chose to walk the straight and narrow. No one forced him to take these vows.**

**The good that resonated from Perk's deeds far outweighed any direct political benefits he might have gained from such actions. Benjamin Franklin once said that "God is very good to us...let us show our sense of His goodness to us by continuing to do good to our fellow creatures." (17) Perk's nearly fifty years of un-**

blemished public service was a testimony to his honesty and integrity. He was in every sense of the word a man of the people. No other Cleveland mayor in recent memory was a better friend to the working class.

In many ways, Perk fulfilled the role of the politician as first envisioned by the nation's founding fathers over two centuries ago. They believed that a local leader should be a self-sacrificing, trusted guardian of the public good. He should defend the principles of the average citizen against ruthlessness individuals who might place their own self-interest above their responsibilities to their neighbors.

Mayor Perk may not have articulated his political role in quite that fashion. Few modern leaders expound such clichés. Yet, he firmly believed that every Clevelander had the right to pursue his or her dreams in a safe and healthy environment and that it was the responsibility of political leaders, like him, to insure that nothing prevented them from attaining their goals. His overriding concern for the well-being of his constituents may appear old fashion in today's fast-paced world. But, it distinguished him from other, less enlightened politicians of that era.

Ralph Perk became mayor during one of the bleakest periods in Cleveland's history. Significant population losses worsened by a stumbling economy, massive job layoffs, major factory closings and increased crime undermined this vibrant city. The mayor's straight-forward policies offered hope to thousands of Clevelanders. Other economic incentives such as tax abatements, land banking and low interest business loans also played crucial roles in revitalizing this aging community.

**As stated earlier, Perk introduced many worthwhile initiatives during his six-year tenure as mayor. Some represented major breakthroughs, while many dealt with more routine concerns. Of all these programs, three stand out as exceptional examples of administrative adroitness. The first one offered practical solutions to mounting inner-city crime; the second addressed chronic unemployment while the third transformed a nearly bankrupt transit system into a profitable regional carrier. Well-defined initiatives with measurable results, they epitomized the best in administrative ingenuity during a crucial time in Cleveland's history. They are well worth re-examining today.**

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## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **MAYOR PERK FIGHTS CRIME**

A highly energetic leader, Ralph Perk was up and running within days of his election as mayor. One of his first acts as mayor involved traveling to Washington to meet with Vice-President Spiro T. Agnew. Their candid discussions focused primarily on the City of Cleveland's current economic plight. Being one of a select group of big city Republican mayors gave Perk a decided edge with both the Nixon and Ford administrations. A shrewd politician with close connections to the White House, the mayor enjoyed phenomenal success when it came to landing large grants for important programs. The Impact Cities Crime Fighting Program, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Program (CETA) and the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA) were three highly successful federally-supported initiatives to gain national recognition. They demonstrated Mayor Perk's political mastery at its best.

The Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) approved the Impact Cities Crime Fighting Program in June 1972. (1) Under Title I of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, Congress authorized LEAA to provide large crime-ridden cities such as Cleveland with significant federal grants. (2) These funds helped to reduce robbery, burglaries and stranger-to-stranger street crime by significantly improving local law enforcement capabilities. Under this special agreement, qualifying communities in the U.S. determined their worst crime related problems and then developed special crime-fighting programs to eliminate them. LEAA also required participating cities to recruit top-notch law

enforcement personnel to operate these programs. Federal officials further insisted that these municipalities furnish the public with valuable information on crime prevention. Congressional leaders earmarked additional funds to build new police stations, organize auxiliary police forces and train community service officers to assist their local police departments.

Officials in the LEAA considered the City of Cleveland to be a prime candidate for its latest funding cycle. After all, 17% of all crimes committed in the State of Ohio occurred there. In addition, over half of the city's population was under the age of 25 and that group accounted for 80% of the arrests. The fact that the bulk of the city's criminal activity occurred within predominately African American neighborhoods lent further credence to their argument. Finally, a dramatic increase in the number of drug related crimes appeared to insure federal money.

Shortly after the mayoral elections, Ralph Perk and one of his closest advisors Robert Bennett met with U.S. Attorney General John Mitchell. Much of their conversation focused on allegations of graft and corruption within the Cleveland Police Department. Mitchell claimed that the force had the dubious reputation of being one of the worst law enforcement agencies in the entire country. He made it quite clear that this must end. The Attorney General also informed Mayor Perk that a new federal crime prevention program was about to be announced and that in all probability the City of Cleveland would qualify for it.

On January 13, 1972, LEAA unveiled its \$160m crime prevention program. Mayor Perk responded by hiring Richard Boylan to coordinate his proposed Impact



Cities Crime Fighting Program. (3) An Ohio State University law graduate and former Ohio Assistant Attorney General, Boylan worked for the U.S. Justice Department.

His first task as program coordinator involved developing a comprehensive law enforcement proposal for LEAA. Called Cleveland Will Survive and Thrive Impact Program Master Plan 1972, this \$20m two-year initiative received support from most anti-crime agencies in Ohio. (4) Focusing primarily on robbery, burglary and one-on-one street assaults, this proposal challenged the local justice system to reduce the local crime rate by 5% in two years and 20% in five years. It also called for overhauling the city's police force. Boylan's inclusion of the Performance Management System (PMS) guaranteed an accurate measurement of program effectiveness and insured an efficient assessment of priorities based on resources. (5)

When LEAA officials announced the final eight recipients Cleveland was not on that list. Atlanta, Baltimore, Dallas, Denver, Miami, Newark, Portland and St. Louis had made the cut. An outraged Mayor Perk flew to Washington and demanded that the White House intervene on Cleveland's behalf. White House officials met with LEAA officials and Cleveland was added to the list. It replaced Miami. (6)

LEAA Director Jerris W. Leonard announced that Cleveland would be receiving four grants of more than \$21m. Mayor Perk appointed Richard Boylan to serve as program director in July 1972. (7) LEAA approved three additional grants worth \$1.4m the following month. Much of that initial funding went towards establishing a crime prevention patrol. (8) The felony investigation squad, citizen's

auxiliary police force, police narcotics unit and drug abuse center also benefited. Those grants also covered the cost of adding double-shift workloads for municipal court bailiffs and judges. Under this new arrangement, the local court system added six new judges from nearby counties. This increase in the daily workload shortened the time between a suspect's apprehension, trial and sentencing. Federal funding also upgraded common pleas court and the adult parole program. The police athletic league, inner-city youth academy, mental health facilities and senior citizen programs profited as well. City officials used some of these funds to expand vocational education opportunities and install new computers into police cars.

These federal grants significantly reduced crime. Reported crime in Cleveland for 1972 was down 19% from 1971. That included a 38% decrease in auto thefts and a 22% drop in rape cases. Burglaries and robberies also were down by 16% and 14% respectively. LEAA responded to this positive news by allocating three more grants totaling \$11m. Boylan used the bulk of these funds to expand the city's juvenile delinquency prevention program and pay overtime salaries of officers assigned to the outreach centers. The remaining funds went towards hiring additional police officers.

Envisioning an even greater role for Boylan and his program, the mayor announced on March 13, 1973 the establishment of the Impact Cities Task Force. Nicknamed the Smut Squad, it targeted inner-city bookstores that sold explicit sexually oriented subject materials to minors. This highly publicized campaign received the support of many religious leaders. Unfortunately, enthusiasm soon waned as other more pressing issues took center stage. Shifting priorities led

**Richard Boylan to change his program focus. He decided to revamp the Cleveland Police Department rather than leading the charge against pornography. Whether Ralph Perk fully agreed with Boylan's decision is hard to determine. Publicly, the mayor wholeheartedly supported the crusade against pornography. However, behind the scenes Perk encouraged Boylan to follow his own instincts. The mayor wanted this young man to stay in Cleveland. He thought that Richard Boylan would make a great future mayor.**

**In terms of his own political prospects, Mayor Perk knew that his re-election in November 1973 would not depend on eliminating pornography. It would be determined by how well he handled a whole range of issues and whether the voting public still had faith in his leadership abilities. Perk remained confident that he could ride out nearly any political storm that might arise. After all, his crusade against pornography had closed some of the city's most notorious porno shops and peep shows. Why belabor this point any further. Mayor Perk was absolutely right. He handily won re-election that fall with a two to one margin over his opponent the Clerk of Cleveland City Council Mrs. Mercedes Cotner. (9)**

**City officials in January 1974 announced a 13% drop in the city's homicide rate from the previous year. The number of reported rape cases had decreased by 10% while robbery had dropped by 17%. Assault and battery had also decreased by 18% and burglaries were down by 12%. The local press congratulated the mayor on his tough stance against crime. This was not the first time that Ralph Perk had received accolades for his crime fighting efforts. The press had**

**congratulated him in September 1973 when the city received \$4.5m in federal grants to fight school truancy and juvenile delinquency.**

**Federal officials approved an additional grant of \$812,070 in late January 1974. (10) These funds went towards launching the Impact Neighborhood Patrol. Made up of the Impact Cities Task Force, the Impact Cities Task's Force Tactical Unit and sixty police officers, this group assisted the Auxiliary Police during the peak crime months of October, November and December. Washington also authorized \$1.6m to train 600 additional auxiliary officers. (11)**

**In March 1974, Mayor Perk announced that the city had received a special \$100,000 federal grant to create the Cleveland Crime Commission (CCC). The press called it the God Squad. Led by Msgr. Robert Blair, Rabbi Rudolph Rosenthal, Bishop Joseph Feghali and Reverend Joan Campbell, CCC investigated allegations of graft and corruption within the city's police force. It also recommended administrative and procedural changes for that department.**

**With the legal assistance of Charles F. Clarke, a prominent litigation lawyer from the Cleveland-based law firm of Squire, Sanders, and Dempsey, CCC discovered that allegations of graft and corruption within the police force were mostly unfounded. However, that did not mean that the police department was not in need of major reform. It required an extensive overhaul. Commissioners recommended modernizing administrative procedures and job recruiting methods. They also called for establishing a probationary period for all police recruits, providing more extensive cadet training and furnishing crime prevention programs for children. Commissioners further suggested that the police department expand**

its speaker's bureau and offer special awards and merit pay for those officers who displayed exceptional heroism in the line of duty.

Other recommendations included greater administrative assistance from city hall, elimination of job discrimination and a total overhaul of operations at the Warrensville Workhouse. These commissioners also called for replacing the present Public Safety Director with a new Police Director. This new mayoral appointee would not only oversee all aspects of law enforcement within the police department itself; but also, serve as its spokesperson.

The Cleveland Crime Commission submitted its final report to city hall in May 1974. (12) Mayor Perk praised the commissioners for their dedicated service and hard work. (13) However, the public was not as enthusiastic. Critics argued that it would be nearly next to impossible to implement most of their recommendations, far too political. A June 5, 1974 editorial in the Cleveland Plain Dealer summed it up by saying that the majority of these suggestions were little more than "warmed-over proposals of previous committees, some dating back to 1914." The editorial staff concluded that the commission had glossed over many other equally important issues. (14) Persistent criticism forced Cleveland Police Chief Lloyd Garey to disband the group in the fall of 1975. (15)

Mayor Perk announced on June 30, 1973 that the Impact Cities Crime Fighting Program had received an additional \$100,000 federal grant. (16) Director Boylan used those funds to operate six escort teams for senior citizens living in public housing estates. Recruited through the Urban League of Greater Cleveland, these teams made up of local teenagers escorted the elderly from their apartments to

neighborhood clubs, stores, restaurants and doctor offices weekdays. Public reaction to this program was favorable.

In 1974, Cleveland's Finance Director Vincent Campanella authorized Richard Boylan and the city's Safety Director James Carney to establish the nation's first Emergency Medical Service Bureau (EMS). A recent study released by the Metropolitan Health Planning Corporation (MHPC) indicated an alarming increase in the number of emergency medical calls over the past two years. MHPC recommended that immediate action be taken by the city to remedy this growing problem. (17) Boylan and Carney responded quickly. They established an efficiently run countywide emergency phone system and a first rate training program for EMS workers. The two directors also purchased ambulances and medical equipment. Beginning operations in October 1975, EMS handled over 80,000 calls in its first year.

Mayor Perk announced the appointment of Richard Boylan as the Interim Director of the Warrensville Workhouse on August 16, 1974. His first task as workhouse director involved firing corrupt employees and prison guards. He also secured a \$5m grant from Cuyahoga County to renovate the sixty-year old facility. Boylan also supported efforts by the Perk Administration to construct a new \$9.2m mental retardation center on a nearby site. The city completed that project in 1975.

Richard Boylan resigned as Interim Director in January 1975 to return to his full-time duties as Director of the Impact Cities Crime Fighting Program. Less than a month later, the mayor appointed him the city's new law enforcement advisor. However, strong opposition from Cleveland Councilman Dennis Kucinich and Ohio

**Representative Edward Feighan forced his resignation. Boylan continued to serve as Director of the Impact Cities Crime Fighting Program returning to his private law practice later in 1975.**

**Impact Cities ended that same year. A nationally recognized program with a successful track record it had reduced crime in Cleveland. (18) Critics at that time argued that its narrow focus and lack of direct public input served to undermine its effectiveness. (19) In retrospect, this criticism seems harsh. Highly focused programs like this one require expert leadership. Leaders with law enforcement and legal backgrounds have the professional know how necessary to operate them successfully. Placing less qualified persons in key leadership roles would only spell disaster.**

**The Impact Cities Crime Fighting Program produced many positive results. Nowhere was this more evident than in the Cleveland Police Department. Changes in that department ranged from expanding the police force's capacities and revamping its out-of-date operational procedures to introducing modern crime solving techniques and expanding career opportunities for veteran officers. Additional reforms introduced included higher salaries for patrol officers and special job incentives for career officers. None of these advances would have occurred without the diligent efforts of both Richard Boylan and Mayor Perk. They made the city a much safer place to live and work in.**

**Mayor Perk did not limit his reform activities to crime and public safety issues alone. Recognizing the growing hardships facing many Clevelanders, Perk focused much of his attention towards helping those with the greatest economic and**

**social needs. The federally-sponsored CETA program represented one of the new initiatives he enthusiastically supported. It offered hope and promise to thousands of Clevelanders during the turbulent 1970s.**



## ENDNOTES

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### CETA: A PROMISE FULFILLED

On December 28, 1973, President Richard M. Nixon signed the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973. (1) Known as CETA, this bill provided state and local governments with large amounts of federal funding designed to modernize existing work force training capabilities. CETA replaced two other programs begun under the Kennedy Administration.

The first one called the Area Redevelopment Act of 1961 (ARA) provided \$394m to communities with chronic unemployment. (2) Much of that funding went towards low-interest business loans, major infrastructure improvements and job retraining. Native Americans used these funds to stimulate rural development. Considered a landmark piece of legislation when introduced, ARA never received the kind of enthusiastic support from Capitol Hill it deserved. The Public Works and Economic Development Act Amendments of 1976 replaced it. (3)

The second program known as the Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962 (MDTA) also focused on chronic unemployment but in a different way. (4) This \$100m initiative administered by the U.S. Department of Labor hired private consultants to operate various job training programs. These professionals exercised great latitude when it came to administering them. Program and instruction inconsistencies left many enrollees ill prepared for the changing job market. Congress repealed MDTA in 1973.

In response to public pressures for more relevant programs, Congress enacted the Job Corp bill in 1964. Administered by the U.S. Department of Labor

under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (5), the Job Corp furnished enrollees ages 16 to 24 with a wide variety of education and training options. Targeted government centers coordinated all activities. The Work Incentive Program of 1967 (WIN) enacted through the Social Security Amendments attempted to lessen dependency on welfare by providing recipients one-on-one counseling, special job referrals and additional technical training. (6) Following in this tradition, President Nixon signed the Emergency Employment Act of 1971 (7). It encouraged state and local governments and non-profit organizations to hire Job Corp trainees. Over 150,000 enrollees benefited from this program. It also set the stage for the \$1.5b CETA program which was introduced two years later.

CETA was unique in that it decentralized decision-making regarding manpower programs from the federal to state and local levels. (8) Unlike earlier bills, it insisted on consolidating all service delivery capabilities under regional supporters called prime sponsors. (9) Federal officials required every prime sponsor to include a planning council. The planning council served as an advisory body. It reviewed all CETA operations and helped sponsors to fulfill their comprehensive employment and training service plans as submitted to the Department of Labor. Participating cities with populations of more than 100,000 qualified as prime sponsors. By the late 1970s, more than 450 communities throughout the U.S. operated two or more facilities. In an austerity move, the Reagan Administration replaced it with the Job Training Partnership Act of 1982. (10)

Originally designed to promote job creation and training, CETA soon narrowed its objectives to focus primarily on job training. Ralph Perk first applied for CETA funds after his landslide re-election as mayor in November 1973. Following the guidelines of the Emergency Employment Act of 1971, the mayor established a regional government agency with direct ties to the City of Cleveland. Called the Cleveland Western Reserve Manpower Consortium (CWRMC), this new regional agency administered all CETA funds. With representatives from Cuyahoga, Geauga and Lake Counties and the cities of Cleveland and Parma, the Consortium enhanced the career development and economic self-sufficiency of qualified clients who sought full-time employment. It also provided extra income and job experience for enrollees wanting only part-time work.

Coordinated with other governmental jurisdictions, agencies and departments, the private sector and their respective communities through its various organizations, CWRMC's centralized delivery system proved invaluable. It minimized program duplication and maximized available resources. This regional agency also had the legal authority to conduct self-evaluation and change activities to insure local compliance with the laws, regulations and directives of the U.S. Department of Labor. It provided classroom training, on-the-job training, work experience, manpower and supportive services and public service employment with the expressed intent of removing artificial barriers to employment for the chronically unemployed.

On March 29, 1974, the respective elected officials delegated the administration of this new Consortium to Mayor Perk. The mayor, in turn,

assigned operational responsibility to the City of Cleveland's Department of Human Resources and Economic Development (HRED) then headed by Dr. Vladimir J. Rus. Each elected official appointed a representative to a sub-cabinet of the Consortium chaired by Dr. Rus. With the assistance of its planning council and evaluation committee, the sub-cabinet recommended activities and funding to the elected officials for their approval.

Upon approval, the Manpower Division of HRED in coordination with its Economic Development Division led by Dr. Joseph P. Furber administered these CETA programs. (11) Most programs were implemented through special contracts made with local governments, schools and non-profit agencies. The choice of HRED as the lead agency made perfect sense. Established in September 1968, it was charged with the responsibility of organizing and operating the city's manpower training program. (12) HRED soon expanded its focus to include economic development and human resources. Under the Perk Administration, Dr. Michael Pap headed its Manpower Division while Dr. Furber served as the Commissioner of Economic Development.

As the coordinator of the Model Cities Manpower System, HRED supervised AIM/JOBS. (13) Created in 1967 and funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, this program assisted displaced residents through recruitment, supportive services, counseling, coaching, job training and job placement. AIM/JOBS subcontracted outside agencies to perform these services. HRED also directed the Just for Youth Action Program and the Cleveland Neighborhood Youth Corps. The Just for Youth Action Program reduced juvenile delinquency while the Cleveland Neighborhood

**Youth Corps offered valuable job training for recent school dropouts. HRED also provided young law breakers with counseling and job training through its Offender Rehabilitation Program and Vocational Educational Project.**

**The Emergency Employment Act of 1971 also enabled HRED to offer temporary public service employment. It created 185,000 jobs under its Public Employment Program (PEP). HRED also directed the Veterans Education and Training Action Committee whereby disadvantaged veterans received special educational and training benefits. (14)**

**Under the leadership of Dr. Joseph Furber, the Economic Development Division of HRED offered a wide range of special programs designed to stimulate regional business growth. Economic Development also played a critical role in forming local Community Development Corporations (CDCs). Hands-on non-profit organizations developed by city officials, CDCs improved the quality of life for those living and working in many of Cleveland's oldest neighborhoods. HRED further assisted these non-profits through its highly acclaimed employment and community outreach programs. As of 2012, there were over 30 CDCs in Cleveland.**

**Working in conjunction with the Greater Cleveland Growth Association, the Planning Commission and the U.S. Department of Commerce, HRED supervised major public works projects. It also provided low-interest loans and special marketing strategies for minority-owned businesses. Its highly acclaimed International Trade Coordination Program (ITCP) significantly expanded the city's import and export trade. HRED specialists also worked closely with the Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC). EDAC advised the mayor on effective**

ways to expand business. By the mid-1970s, over 200 employees operated 16 CETA programs.

Mayor Perk took great pride in HRED's Cleveland-On-The-Job Training Program. It gave top priority to inner-city youth between the ages of 14 and 21 and displaced workers above the age of 45. Welfare recipient family heads and non-English speaking residents also received special assistance as did women, ex-offenders and veterans. In terms of budget allocations: 85% of it went towards classroom training, Public Service Employment (PSE), job training and work experience. Contractors received 10% while HRED got 5%.

The Cleveland Urban Observatory was one of HRED's greatest achievements. Dr. Michael Pap headed it. This public policy-oriented group was one of ten strategically placed throughout the U.S. (15) Professor Robert Wood of Washington University in St. Louis first suggested the establishment of a network of research analysts dedicated to resolving the myriad of urban problems facing modern cities in 1962. The federal government supported it.

Under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) Office of Education, the National League of Cities served as its secretariat. It depended on HUD funds to finance its research activities. The Office of Education funded its service and training activities through Title 1 grants resulting from the Higher Education Act of 1965. During its first year in operation, the Cleveland Urban Observatory received about \$160,000 in grants. (16)



This program carried out its research activities based on priorities established by Cleveland agency administrators, program executives and department commissioners. Working with local academic experts, the Cleveland Urban Observatory not only provided reliable data to the City of Cleveland and its environs; but also, other communities throughout the country with similar economic and social problems.

It also forged long-lasting institutional relationships between government officials and academic leaders from local colleges and universities. This kind of collaborative effort produced highly effective public policies aimed at combating some of the worse urban problems. The Cleveland Urban Observatory also sponsored special conferences and seminars on important economic and social issues and assisted the Perk Administration in completing its annual budget. This program remained in operation until 1978.

The Cleveland Urban Observatory produced a great many worthwhile studies many written by nationally renowned authorities. They included Equalizing Objectives and the Allocation of Intergovernmental Revenues, A Report (1971) by Professor Robert N. Baird and A Study of Poverty in the City of Cleveland: Its Location, Magnitude, and Characteristics (1971) by Professor M. David Boehm. Social Reporting for Cleveland: Its Potential and Its Problems (1972) by Professor Alan P. Chesney; Report on Multi-Service Center Network Project for the Cleveland Urban Observatory (1972) by Professors Allan L. Service and Andrew Daugherty and Manpower and Human Services in Cleveland (1973) by Professor

Michael S. Pap also received a great deal of attention on both the regional and national levels.

Other significant reports and studies included Regional Economic and Demographic Analysis for Cleveland, Ohio (1974) by Professors Thomas A. Bausch, Lawrence R. Cima, and Joseph T. Bombelles; Greater Cleveland's Economic, Institutional and Cultural Resources (1974) by Professor Michael S. Pap; and Selected Ethnic Communities in Cleveland: A Socio-Economic Study (1974) by Professors Karl B. Bonutti and George Prpic. Cleveland: An Introduction to a Great City and Its Surrounding Communities (1974) by Professor Michael S. Pap and Local Government Revenue and Expenditure: A Case Study Cleveland 1961-1971 (1975) by Professors Edric A. Weld and John F. Burke also gained national recognition.

The Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973 was subdivided into seven titles. (17) Title 1 focused on developing job opportunities, providing education, operating training programs and furnishing essential services. (18) Title 2 dealt with Public Service Employment and Manpower Training Programs in unemployed or underemployed areas in communities with chronic unemployment. Title 3 offered job programs for Native Americans, seasonal farm workers, inner-city youth, older workers, offenders, foreigners with limited knowledge of the English language and other targeted groups.

Title 4 provided a job corps within the U.S. Department of Labor. It offered residential and non-residential manpower services geared towards low-income disadvantaged adults and youth while Title 5 established a National Commission for

**Manpower Policy with the responsibilities of examining national manpower issues, suggesting ways to deal with such issues and acting in an advisory capacity to the U.S. Secretary of Labor on these issues. Title 6 afforded additional public service jobs and special training programs for the unemployed and underemployed and offered special programs in areas of excessively high unemployment and Title 7 established the general provisions of this bill including definitions applicable to this act. (19)**

**The activities and services provided by CWRMC followed proscribed federal guidelines. It offered training, counseling and job placement for the chronic unemployed. It also encouraged recent school dropouts to return to the classroom and assisted battered women. On-site training, mini-manpower delivery systems, handicapped employment and social service programs for the elderly also received top priority.**

**The Consortium opened centers in Cleveland, East Cleveland and Parma. Lake and Geauga counties also furnished centers. Supporters included the Cleveland AFL/CIO, the Urban League of Greater Cleveland, the Greater Cleveland Growth Association, the Ohio Bureau of Employment Services (OBES) and the Federation for Community Planning.**

**CWRMC first applied for federal funds in the spring of 1974. Its proposal called for raising the income level of the disadvantaged immediately while at the same time improving their future prospects for good paying jobs. Federal officials were highly impressed with this new inventive approach and approved the Consortium's first year budget of \$13.9m.**

The Public Employment Program (PEP) later renamed Public Service Employment Training (PSE) received 55% of CETA Title 1 budget for FY 1974-76. The remainder went towards classroom instruction, work experience, manpower services and on-site training. The city's Building Department, Police Department, EMS, Public Safety, Motor Vehicles Department, Cemeteries and Parks, Accounting Department, Law Department and Health Department profited from Title 1 funding. Federal cutbacks in 1977 forced the city to trim Title 1 allocations. Cleveland officials kept PSE alive by transferring funds from Title 1 to Titles 2 and 6 and the city's general fund. (20)

Nineteen seventy-four proved to be a very good year for Mayor Perk, the City of Cleveland and the CETA Program. In May of that year, the Perk Administration and the Greater Cleveland Growth Association unveiled their plans for a new World Trade and Cultural Center (WTC). First proposed by the Cleveland accounting firm of Ernest and Ernest in 1967, the Ohio State Assembly allocated funds for such a center in 1969. Cleveland State University was to be its site. However, the Stokes Administration did nothing further.

Hoping to revive interest, Mayor Perk authorized the Advisory Council on International Trade to conduct its-own feasibility study in 1972. The council discovered that over 90% of the region's business community supported the idea of a world trade and cultural center for downtown Cleveland. These leaders firmly believed that it would not only stimulate the economy, but also, serve to promote Cleveland's ethnic diversity. These findings convinced Ralph Perk that the time was right to build such a center. (21)

HRED assisted in this effort through its successful International Trade Program (ITP). ITP attracted new businesses to this region by increasing job opportunities. Working in conjunction with the Advisory Council on World Trade, the Council of World Affairs, the Sister City Committee and the Cleveland World Trade Week Committee, HRED proposed the establishment of a new non-profit organization to operate it.

The proposal developed in May 1974 by the Perk Administration with the cooperation of the Greater Cleveland Growth Association expounded upon this idea. Entitled For Establishing a World Trade and Cultural Center in Cleveland Through Creation of a Non Profit Corporation, this 28-page report argued that the State of Ohio had laid the groundwork for such a center five years earlier when the state assembly approved funding for a similar enterprise at Cleveland State University. What the Perk Administration wanted to do was expand upon the original plan.

This study then discussed three important benefits the community would receive from such a center. First, it would furnish the latest technical information and impeccable counseling services for its members. Second, it would promote greater cooperation among its trading partners. Third, it would offer a first class facility in which to hold meetings and conventions. This study emphasized the importance of immediate action if the City of Cleveland intended to become a major international center.

On October 16, 1976, Mayor Perk appointed Nicholas Bucur to head the Cleveland International Trade Commission (ITC). (22) Perk viewed ITC as an

**important first step leading towards the establishment of an Office of International Trade in city hall. As the mayor said, “Cleveland has been in the forefront in space-age technology, and it is time for us to use the knowledge in the field of international commerce and people-to-people interchange for our advantage.”**

**ITC met with different business groups over the next several years. One of these endeavors the World Trade Show of 1976 propelled the City of Cleveland into the international spotlight. (23) Unfortunately, interest in the center soon waned. Previously unimagined economic crises prompted by double-digit inflation, escalating labor costs, high unemployment; major plant closes and continued population losses consumed much of the attention of the business community for many years to come.**

**The region’s return to prosperity in the early 1990s encouraged the Port Authority, Cuyahoga County and the Greater Cleveland Growth Association to seek out new international trading partners. Their efforts resulted in the establishment of a new regional entity known as the Greater Cleveland International Trade Alliance. This alliance enabled the local business community to widen its various trade options. In particular, they sought out new trading partnerships in Latin America and Asia while expanding existing agreements with Europe. In 1994, the City of Cleveland became one of 280 communities to receive the coveted World Trade Center (WTC) franchise. The high quality of the area’s on-line databases through WTC enabled the Cleveland business community of the 1990s to pursue new lucrative opportunities worldwide. Mayor Perk congratulated city officials on**

**receiving this great honor, an honor based in part on the diligent efforts of the Perk  
Administration twenty-years earlier.**

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11. **For further information on the City of Cleveland Dept. of Human Resources and Economic Development see City of Cleveland, The Dept. of Human Resources and Economic Development February 10, 1972.**



12. Prior to 1968, Cleveland's manpower training programs were fragmented. Jack Krauskopf, Manpower Programs in Cleveland, A Case Study, U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National League of Cities, October, 1970.
13. For further information regarding the functions of the Department of Human Resources and Economic Development in the early 1970s see Michael Pap, An Introduction to a Great City and Its Surrounding Communities (Cleveland: The Cleveland Urban Observatory, 1974), 274-280.
14. Ibid.
15. For a closer look at the various programs offered by the Cleveland Urban Observatory see Michael Pap and Vladimir Rus, The Cleveland Urban Observatory Program: Applying Academic Research to Urban Problems (Cleveland: The Cleveland Urban Observatory, 1974), 1-9 and Pap, An Introduction to a Great City, 278-280.
16. Edward Whelan, "Urban Study Center Seeks Partial City Funding," The Cleveland Plain Dealer, August 13, 1972. U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare and the National League of Cities, About the Urban Observatory, 1974.
17. For a description of the various program titles see Cleveland Area Western Reserve Manpower Consortium, Narrative Description of Titles 1-7, Under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Budget Office, 1978), 23-27.
18. A properly detailed agreement and well-articulated annual plan were mandatory for all participating communities. All seven titles were lengthy proposals. Each one of the title agreements described its purpose and the agency's responsibilities along with monitoring procedures and grievance processes. Participating agencies left nothing to chance.
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20. For an in-depth look at the financial complexities involved in operating the PSE program in Cleveland see Price Waterhouse and

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21. “World Trade Putting Cleveland in the Picture,” **The Cleveland Plain Dealer**, March 12, 1973. Andrew Juniewicz, “Perk Prepares Proposal for Public Works,” **The Cleveland Plain Dealer**, October 1, 1976. “Perk Envisions City Hall Annex,” **The Cleveland Press**, October 1, 1976.
22. City of Cleveland, **Mayor Ralph J. Perk Press Release, October 16, 1976.**
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## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **EFFECTIVE REFORMS AT WORK**

The federally-sponsored CETA program enabled the Perk Administration to develop a wide variety of highly innovative initiatives destined to improve the quality of life for many Clevelanders. The Summer Youth Employment Program represented one of the best of these new efforts. It offered important educational opportunities, worthwhile employment options, special recreational activities and community-based social events geared for disadvantaged youngsters from throughout Greater Cleveland.

CWRMC Planning Council initiated the process by hosting strategy sessions with interested agencies. Held in the spring of 1973, these meetings concentrated on job site development, educational programs, recruitment, registration, certification, supervisory training and counseling. (1) Mayor Perk, in partnership with the Superintendent of the Cleveland Public Schools Dr. Paul Briggs and the Cleveland Board of Education, created the Comprehensive Youth Services Program (CYSP). Led by U.S. Attorney Frederick M. Coleman, this task force included representatives from various youth service agencies and the Consortium's Planning Council. One of its primary functions involved developing program guidelines and objectives.

Its program guidelines detailed the procedures officials must follow concerning orientation sessions, recruitment and evaluation while its program objectives projected realistic outcomes. Expected outcomes ranged from providing

meaningful work experiences and encouraging interaction in problem solving to emphasizing social awareness and instilling a new sense of civic pride.

CYSP further recommended that all programs operate independently of each other. This would enable site counselors and supervisors to spend additional time with those youngsters with special needs. CYSP also emphasized the importance of enrollees acquiring good work habits by offering participants the opportunity of earning extra money for performing worthwhile community services.

Meanwhile, city officials focused on other important details such as scheduling the physical exams for participants, resource development, monitoring, evaluating and writing the final report. Program coordinators also held special sessions with the Cleveland Board of Education. The board agreed to handle recruitment, placement, counseling, certification, enrollment and orientation. School officials also assumed full responsibility for payrolls and performance evaluations.

A \$4.5m Title 3 grant financed the 1974 program. Its 11,842 participants ranged in age from 14 to 22 years. (2) Eighty-eight percent of these enrollees lived in Cleveland with the rest coming from outlying districts. One thousand forty-five businesses, public agencies and non-profits supported this effort. Supporters included the Chrysler Corporation, Ohio School of Broadcasting, Karamu Nursery, the Fairfax Foundation and Hillcrest Dog Grooming. Kinsman Opportunity, King Kennedy PAL, the Cleveland Board of Elections and CYSP also participated.

There were 1,252 job sites that summer. Cleveland topped the list with 995 sites while Cuyahoga County and East Cleveland provided a combined total of 124

sites. Lake County, Geauga County and Parma offered 66, 46 and 21 sites respectively. The number of participants by job classification was as follows: clerical 2,056, education 1,854, custodial 2,264, maintenance 3,248, conservation 838, food service 443, health services 296, craft mechanics 883, library assistance 197 and recreational 2,471. Participating agencies included HRED and the Cleveland Departments of Public Properties, Finance, Health and Welfare, Community Development, Parks and Recreation, Public Service, Port Control and Public Utilities. The Board of Education provided the Go-to-College Program and Environmental Renewal Program. Enrollees also participated in the school board's vocational education courses and special tutorial program.

CETA's success rate on the national level paled when compared to Cleveland's record. Some of the problems facing programs in other parts of the country included incomplete record taking, limited supervision from Washington, poor initial planning and a lack of manpower program experience. The national recession in 1974 compelled federal officials to re-examine the effectiveness of CETA programs and eliminate those deemed unsuccessful.

Redefining which communities did or did not qualify for funding under the revised guidelines of the Emergency Jobs and Unemployment Assistance Act of 1974 also impacted the program's future success. (3) Cities with the greatest chronic unemployment such as Cleveland received top priority. Between 1974 and 1976, the City of Cleveland qualified for more than \$31,000,000 in CETA grants including a \$4m emergency allocation.

Initially, HRED provided CETA job training for both entry and mid-level positions. However, working conditions within the Cleveland job market changed dramatically by the mid 1970s. Breakthroughs in manufacturing, technology and information retrieval and retention appreciably altered local employment opportunities. Plentiful entry-level jobs in factories, stores and offices literally vanished overnight. In its wake, the Cleveland business community wanted its employees to have training in computers and electronics. HRED responded to these challenges by eliminating entry level training and increasing the number of mid-level job opportunities. The department also offered courses in computer sciences and electronics and expanded the number of its on-site work experiences.

Public Service Employment Training (PSE) received \$7.5m in Title 1 funding in 1974. That allocation represented 55% of the Consortium's entire budget. Increasing demand for municipal services prompted such action. Between 1974 and 1976, the city hired more than 1,750 part-time employees. None of those opportunities would have been available without PSE funding. This versatile approach to training paid-off handsomely. Hundreds of regionally-based businesses and government agencies participated in the various programs. A federal study released in 1977 praised CWRMC for its many achievements. Its successes were wide-ranged and included such things as providing additional CETA-supported neighborhood service centers and developing new Community Development Corporations (CDCs).

The Perk Administration proudly sponsored the Comprehensive Youth Services Program again in 1975. CYSP provided over 14,000 youngsters with

summer employment at more than 1,400 sites. The City of Cleveland furnished more than 1,054 sites while Cuyahoga County provided 249. Geauga and Lake Counties offered 107 sites and the City of Parma 24. Local foundations contributed over \$300,000 to this effort. (4) Much of that funding went towards hiring program supervisors.

The Consortium announced in January 1976 the opening of a second training center on the Near West Side. (5) Cleveland City Councilperson Mary Rose Oakar played an influential role in choosing its location. A strong program supporter, Ms. Oakar had used CETA funds to help restore the historic Robert Russell Rhodes House at 2905 Franklin Boulevard. The Cuyahoga County Archives moved into this rejuvenated landmark in the late 1970s.

Much of the Consortium's \$12.7m budget for FY 1976 went towards improving successful programs. Federal allocations for the following year increased to \$15,907,718. The City of Parma secured \$315,759 while Geauga and Lake Counties received \$245,049. Washington also allocated \$3m to PSE, \$1.5m to miscellaneous programs and \$1m to jointly sponsored projects. In response to the growing demand at city hall for more part-time workers, Mayor Ralph J. Perk spent \$4m in CETA funds to hire 155 additional workers. Unexpected federal cutbacks in early 1977 forced the mayor to furlough most of them. Not to be outdone by officials in Washington, Perk secured a special \$4m grant to rehire the majority of them.

A second example of the mayor's ingenuity was when he transferred \$5.6m from the CETA budget to the Summer Youth Employment Program in 1977.

Nearly 13,000 youngsters participated. A third example of his political mastery occurred later that same year when Mayor Ralph J. Perk allocated \$272,000 in CETA funds to hire more EMS technicians.

CWRMC furnished the public with valuable information concerning many of its major programs. For example, its newsletter Labor Market Outlook, A Summary of Labor Market Developments focused on current economic trends and their impact on the labor market. Its first issue dealt with female participation in the CETA program and how their involvement improved the Cleveland job scene.

(6) CETAGRAM, A Monthly Bulletin Published by the Cleveland Area Western Reserve Manpower focused on some of the agency's most promising new initiatives. Its February 1977 issue, for example, spotlighted CETA's Job Search Group. Under the direction of Action Vista Volunteers, enrollees learned effective resume writing, good interview techniques and innovative ways to conduct follow-up leads with potential employers. The city's Welfare Department furnished trainees while city hall donated clerical assistance, bus tickets, telephones, postage, office space and materials. (7)

Another successful new offering called the Manpower Training Program prepared participants for skilled jobs in the machine tool industry. Co-sponsored by TRW and the Lakeside Area Development Corporation (LADCO) with the cooperation of the Mayor's Technical Advisory Committee on Economic Development and the Metropolitan Cleveland Jobs Council, this 12-week program boasted an 85% job placement rate. (8)



**The Consortium again sponsored the Summer Jobs Program in 1977. Its planning council that year included Dr. Vladimir Rus, Dr. Paul Briggs of the Cleveland Public Schools, Dr. Thomas Campbell of Cleveland State University and Dr. Nolen Ellison President of Cuyahoga Community College. Other members included Fredrick Coleman, Campbell Elliott President of the Greater Cleveland Growth Association, Cuyahoga County Commissioner Seth Taft, Raymond Ernest Vice President of Marketing East Ohio Gas Company and Donald Mason Manpower and Development Commission Federation for Community Planning. Rounding off this prestigious list were Cleveland City Councilperson Mary Rose Oakar, Enden Schulze of the Ohio Bureau of Workers Compensation, Reverend James Stallings Executive Director of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and William Wolfe Executive Director of the Urban League of Greater Cleveland.**

**A Title 3 \$6m grant later that same year enabled over 12,000 youngsters to participate in meaningful work experiences at 1,440 sites. (9) Eighty-five percent of the program enrollees came from the City of Cleveland while Cuyahoga County, the City of Parma and Geauga County furnishing the remaining 15%. In terms of the number of available program sites, Cleveland led the field with 1,164. The breakdown of available inner-city work sites was as follows: City of Cleveland 497, City of Cleveland departments 306, Cleveland Board of Education 290 and Federal/State Agencies 71. The number of available work sites outside the central city stood at 226. Cuyahoga County provided 220 work sites with Parma and Geauga County offering 31 and 25 respectively. The number of participants by job**

classification was as follows: clerical 1,511, education 1,197, custodial 1,729, maintenance 2,508, conservation 1,218, food service 765, health services 258, crafts mechanics 470, fine arts 1,042, recreational 1,609 and other 584.

For the first time, enrollees attended special job-related seminars and workshops. One of those sessions called “Decision for Tomorrow” provided valuable job skills. Three hundred youngsters also received additional training through its Vocational Exploration Project (VEP). Co-sponsored by the National Alliance of Businessmen and the Human Resources Development Institute, this very special eight-week program introduced 300 youngsters to good jobs available through the private sector. Participants included Eaton Corporation, Higbee’s Department Store, Sherwin Williams and the Union of Operating Engineers.

Neighborhood Pride represented yet another successful program. Over 600 enrollees cleaned up playgrounds, recreational lots and alleys. Local community and religious leaders working with representatives from Cleveland City Council not only determined where these improvements were to occur; but also, supervised them. Other youngsters participated in sports and recreational activities while some explored environment issues through SPARE.

A \$4m increase in the CETA budget for 1976-77 enabled CWRMC to expand its program offerings. One of these new endeavors called CETA and the Arts provided a comprehensive jobs program for local artists. It was the first of its kind in the nation. An outgrowth of a pilot project this new program employed out of work artists. Its purpose was to involve arts groups in realistic, art-related projects that would not only benefit the community; but also, introduce youngsters to

exciting new forms of art. It also promoted neighborhood preservation and betterment. Cleveland City Council President George Forbes lent his support.

Title 1 and Title 3 grants provided the bulk of its \$200,000 budget. The Cleveland Community Development Department and the National Endowment of the Arts also contributed. Under the able leadership of its Board President and President of Cleveland State University Dr. John A. Flowers and his Executive Director Ms. Nina F. Gibans, the Cleveland Area Arts Council (CAAC) furnished all the technical support. It also recruited artists, administered available funds, determined project selections and provided materials. (10)

CETA and the CAAC enabled seventy artists to teach their crafts to nearly 1,000 youngsters at 20 neighborhood locations. (11) Serving as site supervisors, participating artists offered instruction in dance, visual arts, music, mural painting, theatre and creative writing. Enrollees worked twenty hours a week at an hourly rate of \$2.30.

Two extravaganzas at the end of the summer brought this CETA program to a successful conclusion. (12) The first celebration, a one-day public art festival called the Cleveland Games of '77, drew thousands downtown, while the second, an offbeat musical adaptation of Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland called "Shuffled-Up Decked-Out Alice," received rave reviews from the press. (13) This new approach to teaching the arts received acclaim from many circles. Regional Project Coordinator Helen Haynes hailed it as the best public art program since the WPA days. The Summer Arts Program Coordinator Edith Roebuck thought that its greatest single achievement was that it encouraged artists from Cleveland to leave

**their studios and classrooms and embark on an entirely new adventure with inner-city youngsters. (14)**

**Mayor Perk used CETA funds for a wide variety of other purposes beyond the Summer Youth Program. Some of that money went towards hiring additional security guards for the city's recreational facilities. The mayor also used these funds to stimulate regional growth. In the latter case, the Cleveland Economic Coordinating Commission (CECC) received CETA allocations to launch a new national publicity campaign. This special campaign emphasized the many economic and social benefits of locating new business here.**

**The Perk Administration also allocated CETA funds to improve probation programs and promote native-American culture. CETA further lent its support to many non-profit charitable groups and civic organizations. They included the Greater Cleveland Boys Club, Catholic Charities and Karamu House. The Consortium in conjunction with the Federation for Community Planning used CETA money to co-sponsor "Seniors Serving Seniors" (SSS). This very popular volunteer network of senior citizens provided less fortunate elderly with companionship, home visits, transportation services and nutritious meals. It ended under the Kucinich Administration. (15)**

**Local arts and cultural organizations also took advantage of available CETA money. Those benefitting included the Playhouse Square Foundation, national public radio, the Cleveland Ballet and the Cleveland Opera. CWRMC's generous support was outstanding given the economic crisis facing the City of Cleveland at that time.**

Without a doubt, CETA's successes energized Greater Cleveland. However, the Perk Administration knew full-well that many of the deep-seated economic and social problems affecting this region could not be readily remedied by these programs alone. It would require much more than that. Leaders at city hall also fully recognized that changing national priorities, many emanating from recent technical breakthroughs, challenged traditional American economic and social values. How best to prepare the public for these enormous changes? That question confronted the Perk Administration daily.

One thing became very evident as the decade of the 1970s unfolded. Cleveland's future would be dominated by high-tech. Mayor Perk felt duty bound to help his constituents make that adjustment. He knew that effectively run regional agencies represented the future of municipal government throughout the U.S. He also understood that the City of Cleveland had a long way to go before reaching that desired end. Perk further realized that the voting public would be resistant to any-and-all changes in municipal government without proper preparation upfront.

One way to lessen public resistance was for the mayor to spearhead reform. If he enthusiastically supported regional agencies that provided affordable, quality services for all, others would surely emulate it. He further believed that once voters realized the many advantages of regional government, as seen through successful existing agencies, then they would clamor for even greater bureaucratic reforms.

The Perk Administration decided that it must initiate this process by establishing a successful model for others to follow. The success of that agency would encourage others to follow. With that idea in mind, Mayor Perk focused his

**attention on the development of the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA).**

## ENDNOTES

1. In 1976, the U.S. Department of Labor reemphasized the importance of planning councils see U.S. Dept. of Labor, CETA Advisory Council Handbook, CETA Technical Assistance Document, Handbook No. 339 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, June 1976).
2. City of Cleveland, Dept. of Human Resources and Economic Development, Comprehensive Youth Services Program, Summer 1974.
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5. William Mirengoff and Lester Rindler, CETA Manpower Programs Under Local Control (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1978), 149.
6. City of Cleveland, Dept. of Human Resources and Economic Development, Cleveland Area Western Reserve Manpower Consortium, Labor Market Outlook, A Summary of Labor Market Developments 1, no. 1 (July, 1976).
7. City of Cleveland, Dept. of Human Resources and Economic Development, Cleveland Area Western Reserve Manpower Consortium, "Job Search Groups Help Enrollees on Road to Employment," Cetagram, A Monthly Bulletin 4, no. 2 (1977): 2.
8. City of Cleveland, Dept. of Human Resources and Economic Development, Economic Development Division, "Lakeside Area Development Corp (LADCO)" Revised Directory of Local Development Corps, June, 1977. City of Cleveland, Dept. of Human Resources and Economic Development, Cleveland Area Western Reserve Manpower Consortium, "Industrial Involvement with CETA Leads to Full-Time Jobs," Cetagram, A Monthly Bulletin 4, no. 2 (February, 1977): 3.
9. For further detail regarding Dept. of Human Resources and Economic Development activities and programs in 1977 see City of

- Cleveland Personnel, Cleveland Communique 2, no. 1 (May, 1977): 1-3.
10. City of Cleveland, Cetagram, A Monthly Bulletin 4, no. 2 (1977): 1-2.
  11. William Miller “Summer Arts Program to Begin Today,” The Cleveland Plain Dealer, June 20, 1977.
  12. For further details on the 1977 Summer Program finale see “Festive Downtown Weekend Being Planned,” The Cleveland Plain Dealer, August 10, 1977.
  13. City of Cleveland and the Cleveland Area Arts Council, Expressions: The Newsletter for CETA and the Arts Cleveland, Ohio 1, no. 2 (1977): 1-4.
  14. For a more in-depth account of the Summer Jobs Program of 1977 see City of Cleveland, Dept. of Human Resources and Economic Development, Cleveland Area Western Reserve Manpower Consortium, Ceta Super Summer.
  15. Joan L. McCarthy, “Senior Service Scuttled,” The Cleveland Plain Dealer, May 28, 1978.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### A NEW REGIONAL AGENCY COMES OF AGE

Mayor Perk took great pride in the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA). A strong advocate of regional government he looked forward to the day when an elected county board would operate all municipal services within Greater Cleveland. (1)

The idea of regional government first surfaced in the City of Cleveland at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was part and parcel of a national political crusade called the Progressive Movement. Progressive reformers wanted the United States to remain steadfast to its original democratic principles. At the same time, they believed in government reform using the latest scientific principles and best new management techniques. In their minds, regional government represented an effective way to achieve these desired ends.

Enlightened leaders in Cleveland such as Hiram Addison, Newton D. Baker, Harris Cooley and Tom L. Johnson led the fight. This was no small matter given the fact that most Clevelanders were not prepared to support any kind of regional government. The voters needed to be won over. After much discussion, these leaders decided to introduce periodic reforms that would have regional rather than local ramifications. Once the public recognized the many advantages of regionalism as reflected through discernible reforms then they would begin to demand even greater bureaucratic changes.

Elected officials such as Tom L. Johnson and Newton D. Baker spent a great deal of time attacking municipal graft and corruption at city hall while civic leaders

**focused their attention on the voting public. The Citizens League of Greater Cleveland reflected this civic commitment. Established in 1896 by President James A. Garfield's son Harry, the Citizens League is a civic organization dedicated to achieving "integrity, efficiency, and transparency in local and county government by promoting citizen education and involvement." (2)**

**Civic leaders also strongly supported advocacy groups with more limited agendas. Cleveland's Home Rule Coalition represented just such an organization. Founded in 1910, this alliance consisted of academic, civic, business and political leaders. It backed legislative efforts in Columbus at that time to amend the state constitution to give greater home rule to cities throughout Ohio. Unable to muster widespread public support, it had very little impact on the home rule issue.**

**The passage of the home rule amendment by the Ohio State Assembly in 1912 enabled Cleveland Mayor Newton D. Baker to establish his-own civic commission. The mission of this commission was twofold: secure vested powers from the state legislature and establish a new municipal government. Unfortunately, its commissioners soon became embroiled in a major controversy over which form of government best suited the City of Cleveland.**

**Eager to break this deadlock, the Cleveland Board of Realty held a series of informal sessions on various home rule options. City officials did not approve. They believed that a publicly-run organization representing all the people of the City of Cleveland should be the one to determine the best kind of government and not outside special interest groups. This dispute continued until 1916 when Cleveland's newly elected mayor Harry L. Davis empowered the Committee of**

**Fifteen to resolve it. (3) Its members unanimous supported the city manager form of government. However, they disagreed over its implementation and the procedures to be followed. The majority of the committee favored Plan One. It called for a city charter referendum and proportional representation in Cleveland City Council. This plan further stipulated that council would elect a president who, in turn, would choose the city manager. A minority of this group supported Plan Two. It called for the election of a mayor who would then select the city manager. Cleveland voters overwhelmingly endorsed Plan One in the 1924 elections. (4)**

**Political reformers in the mid-1920s relished their recent triumph at the polls. (5) They believed that their political victory represented an important first step leading towards regional government. Unfortunately, traditional partisan politics did not die. Voters missed their ward bosses and the pageantry surrounding them. Following the Stock Market Crash of 1929, many voters began to attack both the city manager and city council. Their attacks appeared unwarranted given the many accomplishments made by political reformers in the previous five years. (6) They had successfully reduced property taxes, built new parks and recreational areas and increased the number of firemen and police officers. They also lowered utility rates, provided good public service jobs for qualified African Americans and secured a \$31m public improvement bond. These successes should have guaranteed public support for many years to come. They did not.**

**On November 11, 1931 Cleveland voters abolished the city manager form of government and proportional representation in council. In its wake, they reinstated the traditional mayor-council form of government headed by the city's**

**43<sup>rd</sup> mayor Ray T. Miller. Although the Great Depression of the 1930s destroyed any hopes of regional government, at least for the foreseeable future, it did not rule out the possibility of regionalizing selected utilities. In fact, politicians on both sides of the aisle favored it. They believed that it would improve customer service and lower costs.**

**The growth of Cuyahoga County suburbs in the late 1930s lent further credibility to this idea. The City of Cleveland led this reform effort in 1938 when it imposed a modest charge on all Cuyahoga County communities connected to the city's sewer system. These additional funds covered the mounting costs of operating both interceptors and wastewater treatment plants. Placed under the Division of Water Pollution, Cleveland Department of Utilities, this sewer system provided quality service for over twenty-five years.**

**The phenomenal growth of Cuyahoga County suburbs in the late 1950s and early 1960s put an additional strain on an already overburdened system. Growing concerns by public officials concerning water quality, leaking storm sewers and outdated treatment facilities led the Division of Water Pollution to initiate an extensive modernization program beginning in 1965. The Division of Water financed it through periodic across-the-board rate increases determined by usage. Unfortunately, city officials rarely prosecuted those who were delinquent in paying their bills. This meant that suburbanites paid the brunt of these rate increases. With no financial relief in sight, angry Cuyahoga County mayors challenged the right of city officials to authorize rate increases and prioritize projects without first obtaining their approval. Numerous court cases ensued.**

Finally, Common Pleas Judge George J. McMonagle called a halt to it. In June 1972, he ordered Mayor Perk to transfer the city's water system to Cuyahoga County. The City of Cleveland received a compensation package worth \$29.8m and the newly created Cleveland Regional Sewer District (CRSD) took control. Established under the Ohio Revised Code Chapter 6119, this new county agency assumed all legal and operational responsibilities. (7) CRSD became the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District in 1979. (8)

The successful transfer of the city's sewer system to the county led Mayor Perk to review the operations of other ailing public agencies. The Cleveland Transit System (CTS) received much of his attention. Established in 1942 as a special city department with its own three-member board, CTS saw its annual ridership plunge from 446m in 1946 to 78m by 1974. Much of its problem originated with its antiquated way of handling operational expenses. It still relied heavily on revenues from its fare-boxes. The proliferation of affordable post-war suburbs conveniently reached by modern highways coupled with major transit fare increases and decreased service brought this once proud system to the brink of bankruptcy. A 17-day strike in July 1970 made matters even worse. City officials discussed the possibility of shutting down the entire carrier. However, they knew that was next to impossible since 30% of all families in the City of Cleveland and 50% of the city's elderly had no access to any other mode of transportation. (9)

The Cleveland Planning Commission addressed this most important issue in 1971 when it released a special study that recommended a number of effective and practical ways to improve this aging transit system. Entitled Transportation and

**Poverty, Guidelines for the City of Cleveland Planning Commission this detailed report projected future priorities based on present needs. It argued that public officials should give top priority to those residents who depended exclusively on this carrier to take them to work, school, hospitals, cultural activities and recreational events. It determined that the problems facing CTS today should take precedent over other more tempting transportation projects such as expanding the Interstate Highway System into the city. (10)**

**Mayor Perk agreed with the planning commission's findings. However, before the city could begin to improve CTS two questions must be resolved. First, what was the best way to revitalize this aging carrier? Second, what might the City of Cleveland expect to receive in terms of financial reimbursement and increased service should the voters approve a new system?**

**The idea of modernizing Cleveland's transit system was not something new. Numerous studies over the years had recommended major changes for this carrier. However, few were as candid as the Regional Planning Commission study released in 1957. This report called for a complete overhaul of the system. That included updating its entire fleet of buses and rapid cars and building a new downtown subway system that would connect to inner-ring Cleveland suburbs. This study predicted that CTS ridership would continue to drop into the 1960s and beyond as more commuters drove their cars to work. It further projected major federal cutbacks in transit funds as more tax dollars went towards completing the 42,000 mile Interstate Highway System. This report concluded that this catastrophe might**

be averted if city officials were willingly to modernize the system now before construction and operating costs increased significantly.

A proposal by the Cleveland-Seven County Transportation Land Use Study (SCOTS) in 1967 recommended several cost-effective ways to rejuvenate this aging system. It called for expanding current bus service into outlying districts and integrating light rail service into the new regional freeway system. (11) The Northeast Ohio Area-wide Coordinating Agency (NOACA), successor to SCOTS, incorporated many of these ideas into its first regional plan. Regrettably, public officials paid little attention to these dire predictions and CTS continued to operate in debt. By the early 1970s, the system verged on bankruptcy. The City of Cleveland responded to this financial crisis in August 1973 by purchasing CTS bonds through a special lending arrangement. City officials also lent the ailing carrier \$8,875,000 in order to release its frozen assets. CTS ended 1974 with a \$7,307,732 deficit. (12)

Local officials knew that the federal government was legally bound to keep the system in operation until a new carrier was established. Upon its liquidation, the new service would assume all incurred debts including those owed to the City of Cleveland. However, before any of these changes could occur voters must first approve the establishment of a new transit system. Mayor Perk did not anticipate much opposition since local voters already supported other countywide projects such as the Metro Park System, regional airports and CRSD.

On January 3, 1972, Mayor Perk met with the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Transportation John Hirten. Their discussions focused on CTS. They concluded

that the solution to this dilemma was not to revitalize CTS, but rather, establish a brand new carrier. Following that meeting, the mayor developed his-own special transportation plan. This \$400m program called for the creation of a new regional transit agency funded primarily through regional and federal taxes. Initially known as the Cleveland Department of Transportation, this new agency would handle all the region's public transportation needs for many years to come.

The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1973 assisted Mayor Perk by increasing the availability of capital funds. The National Mass Transportation Assistance Act of 1974 also helped by taking over the new agency's operating costs and capital expenditures. (13) At the same time, the mayor endorsed a \$750,000 five-county study that recommended over \$1b in infrastructure improvements and managerial changes. A pre-requisite for securing any-and-all future federal funds, this study's priorities included lowering commuter fares and expanding the community response transit. The future of this new would depend upon voters approving a charter revision. If approved, it would enable the mayor to seek out additional funds from a wide variety of sources but most especially state officials. Voters overwhelmingly approved this revision.

In February 1974, Special Counsel to the City of Cleveland Richard R. Hollington Jr. introduced enabling legislation in the state assembly that called for the establishment of a new regional transit company. Both the Ohio House and Senate approved legislation that gave communities in Ohio the legal right to create their-own regional transportation authorities with the power to levy voter-approved taxes. At the same time, Mayor Perk worked diligently to resolve other



**administrative hindrances. Holdups ranged from determining fair-market value for CTS and arranging ways to pay-off its debt to selecting appropriate managerial procedures for the new system and weighing the new carrier's best funding options. Mayor Perk's extensive political experience played a major part in resolving these thorny issues. In this case, he reduced CTS's market value, developed a sensible debt repayment schedule, formulated suitable managerial procedures and inaugurated new funding opportunities.**

**Mayor Perk through the National Mass Transportation Assistance Act of 1974 secured an operating grant totaling \$24m. On December 29, 1974, Cleveland City Council under Ordinance No. 2380-B-74 along with the Cuyahoga County Board of Commissions under Resolution No. 2865 approved the establishment of the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA). (14) Both provisions called for the appointment of a ten-member Board of Trustees and compensation to the City of Cleveland for CTS assets. They also detailed procedures to be followed for the dissolution of RTA should that become necessary.**

**ORC Section 306.22 stated that the ordinance and resolution could be amended through the adoption of a special amendment which must be approved by both Cleveland City Council and the Cuyahoga County Commission. (15) The ordinance and resolution also required the passage of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a Transfer Agreement.**

**Under the ordinance and resolution, the territory of the new carrier included all of Cuyahoga County. Its Board of Trustees consisted of four Cleveland residents designated by the mayor with the advice and consent of Cleveland City Council;**

three others selected by the Cuyahoga County Commissioners one of whom must be a Cleveland resident and three handpicked by the chief executive officers from the other cities, villages and townships in Cuyahoga County.

The first six months of 1975 represented a very busy time for RTA. The first order of business involved hiring a general manager. The board appointed Leonard Ronis. Ronis had held a similar post in CTS. In February, RTA became a corporate political subdivision of the State of Ohio. Its authority originated from Ohio statutes pursuant to Ohio Revised Code Sections 306.30 through 306.73. (16) This meant that the legal duties of this carrier to maintain the safety of persons within its jurisdiction were essentially undistinguishable to municipalities throughout Ohio.

Pursuant to city Ordinance No. 342-75 which was passed on May 12, 1975; Mayor Perk entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the CTS Board of Trustees and designated representatives from both Cuyahoga County and the Cuyahoga County Mayors and City Managers Association. (17) MOU also included Cleveland's consent to the Transfer Agreement. It set forth the guaranteed minimum level of service, proscribed infrastructure improvements; fare structure and cash considerations to be awarded to the City of Cleveland upon the transfer of all CTS assets to the new RTA. This special agreement also contained the condition that Cleveland's obligations were only effective upon passage of a countywide sales tax of not less than 1% to be used exclusively for local mass transit purposes. (18) Under this very special arrangement, the City of Cleveland would receive 50% to 60% of all service improvements over the first five years. Also,

**fifteen percent of that funding would be used to upgrade Community Responsive Transit.**

**The Ohio Revised Code Section 5739.023 ORC Section 306.70 provides that any tax levied by a regional transit authority will only become effective upon approval of a majority of the electors within that designated district. Pursuant to RC 306.49(A) once such a tax levy receives voter approval then the transit board must levy set tax on all property within its territorial boundaries with the exception of those properties that have withdrawn from the regional transit authority prior to the date on which the tax is levied.**

**The newly established transit board complied with the law and approved a special election just for that expressed purpose. Endorsed by prominent civic and political groups from various organizations including the 21<sup>st</sup> District Caucus, the League of Women Voters and the Cleveland Chapter of the NAACP, the voters by a 70% margin approved the 1% countywide sales tax on July 22, 1975. (19) Perk also negotiated a realistic debt schedule. This enabled RTA to recoup some of its losses. A federal grant of \$1.8m also served to reduce debt. The Cleveland Foundation and the George Gund Foundation assisted by providing operating grants.**

**The Transfer Agreement was entered into on September 5, 1975. (20) It provided the mechanism by which all CTS assets and property were transferred to RTA. Mayor Perk, the CTS Chairman and the RTA Board President executed it. Later that same month, the new carrier assumed control of the Shaker Rapid lines. RTA also opened its new downtown headquarters at 1404 East 9<sup>th</sup> Street and began operating its first buses and transit cars.**

**Other system-wide improvements included a new 24-hour customer phone hot line, cleaner buses and transit cars and additional safety measures. City officials also operated Community Response Transit. Consolidation between Cuyahoga County's handicapped services and the city's Neighborhood Elderly Transportation Network led to the development of the new Dial-A-Bus Program. (21)**

**Over the next several months, RTA signed service agreements with other independent bus lines in Euclid, Maple Heights and North Olmsted. Brecksville and Garfield Heights lines joined the system later. The new carrier also announced its new fare rates: \$.25 local; \$.35 express; \$.13 seniors and handicapped during rush hours, free otherwise; \$.13 for students and transfers and children under the age of six ride free.**

**During its first year in operation, RTA averaged 356,000 riders per week. That figure represented a 65% increase from previous CTS levels. Its combined income was \$16,685,565 with \$16,425,487 in expenses. The \$260,078 difference went towards debt service and capital expenses. In terms of revenue sources: 57% of it was derived from sales taxes, 24% from daily fares, 15% from Washington and 4% from other miscellaneous sources. In terms of revenue distribution: transportation services received 43% while administration and maintenance services got 26% and 14% respectively. Contracted transportation services, capital improvements and debt retirement accounted for the remaining 17%.**

**In the fall of 1975, RTA received an operational grant of \$11.6m from Capitol Hill and a special \$532,000 grant from the State of Ohio. Special contracts with more than 20 regional school boards netted the system a bonus of \$758,000. A**

**\$5.1m capital grant from the Ohio State Assembly enabled RTA to match an earlier federal grant. This transit system also secured \$8m from the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT).**

**The phenomenal success of its Community Response Transit led RTA to add six more service areas in 1976. This carrier also offered special communication devices for the deaf and hired 25 police officers. Its board also introduced a new incentive program geared for minority businesses. Known as the Minority Business Enterprise Program this \$1m initiative enabled small and medium-sized minority firms to remain competitive in the bidding war. Minority businesses began providing RTA with a multiple of goods and services. RTA also received a \$55m federal grant to update its entire system in 1977. The first phase resulted in 165 new buses and 60 new rapid cars while the second stage led to the reconstruction of the blue, green, and red rapid lines. The third phase refurbished Tower City station.**

**An early promoter of RTA, Mayor Perk saw its potential. The mayor knew that other large cities such as Boston, Chicago and New York prided themselves on their modern transportation systems. Perk also understood that these high volume carriers brought thousands of people into their communities daily. He believed that Cleveland's mass transit system had the potential of being one of the best in the nation. The public's resounding support of RTA from its first day of operation supported his contention. Apparently, the American Public Transit Association agreed and named it "North America's Best Public Transportation System" in 2007.**

**Ralph Perk considered the development of RTA as a crucial first step towards establishing an effective regional government. He believed that creating an**

efficient regional government was essential if Cleveland intended to remain a viable community in the future. The economic resurgence of other metropolitan areas such as Indianapolis, Miami, Jacksonville and Nashville, based in large measure on their wholehearted support of regional government, convinced Mayor Perk that the future belonged to those communities that followed their lead.

Regional government made sense in other ways. If done properly, it lowers municipal services costs by eliminating duplication and streamlining procedures. Regional government also abolishes cut-throat competition among neighboring communities by insuring future business growth for all municipalities involved. Recent consolidation efforts in Cuyahoga County reflect this thinking to a certain extent.

Many of the economic and social reversals affecting Cleveland in the late 1970s and 1980s might have been avoided had local leaders paid closer attention to Perk's actions. RTA has stood the test of time. It is a good example of an efficiently-run regional agency. If only city leaders had paid more attention to it. Perhaps it might have been a model emulated by others. Unfortunately, they did not do that. The city bottomed out before Clevelanders began to clamor for major government reforms. Their reluctance to heed Mayor Perk's warnings years earlier proved a very costly mistake. It continues to haunt Cleveland to the present day.

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12. City of Cleveland, City of Cleveland Annual Report, 1974-1975, p. 48 and City of Cleveland, City of Cleveland Annual Report, 1973-1975, p. 54.
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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### MAYOR PERK'S LEGACY

With all his successes, Ralph Perk assumed that he would be re-elected mayor in November 1977. He was wrong. Two of his strongest political rivals Dennis Kucinich and Edward Feighan joined forces to defeat him in the mayoral primaries. (1) These results shocked many Clevelanders especially in light of the strong endorsement the mayor had received from The Cleveland Plain Dealer. (2) Ohio's largest newspaper considered Mayor Perk to be a man of integrity with a strong sense of civic pride. Its editorial staff congratulated him for providing good municipal services without raising taxes and encouraging new development downtown. The paper also praised his recent renovation efforts at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport and the fact that both Moody's Investors and Standard & Poor's had assigned the City of Cleveland an "A" Bond rating. (3)

With this kind of positive endorsement, how could he have lost in the primary? It was a very interesting question well worth investigating further. Some critics at that time insisted that Ralph Perk's political defeat stemmed from the fact that he represented the last in a long line of post-war municipal crusaders. (4) These crusaders included popular political figures of the 1960s and 1970s such as John Lindsey in New York; Kevin White in Boston and Andrew Young in Atlanta. Practical political leaders who came of age during the Great Depression of the 1930s and World War II, they saw unlimited possibilities for continued growth within their respective communities. They knew that forging close ties with the local business community was essential for success. The subsequent strong partnerships

they developed with prominent area-wide business leaders enabled these politicians to establish their own successful public policies often with the unanimous support of the loyal opposition.

Part of the reason for their success stemmed from the fact that the political differences between the majority of Republicans and Democrats were very small. This meant that politicians on both sides of the aisle could negotiate workable compromises on major issues without the daunting fear of voter reprisal or retaliation from their own party bosses for not adhering to strict party doctrines. It also permitted top municipal leaders to draw freely on the expertise and wisdom of outsiders regardless of their own particular political affiliations. A product of that political era Ralph Perk played by those rules.

This accommodating approach to politics begun in the immediate post-war years continued into the 1970s. It took the Watergate Scandal of the mid-1970s followed by the election of Ronald Reagan as President in 1980 to change it. In its wake, a new breed of municipal leader emerged. Unlike their predecessors, these officials felt no compulsion to compromise their political principles for the good of the majority. Instead, they used strong-armed tactics to push their own political agendas. Few expressed any concerns as to how their policies might affect the people they served. Good policies bad policies it made no difference. They knew they were correct and that was that. Ruthlessness like that knows no bounds. In their pursuit of their own self-serving goals and objectives they often left capable political reformers like Ralph Perk in the dust. No room for reason or justice in a world that has gone mad.

Critics closer to home suggest that the mayor inexorably contributed to his own defeat. They contend that Perk believed that his recent string of political successes would insure victory at the polls. Even when political polls indicated otherwise. Growing support for Dennis Kucinich and Edward Feighan during the spring of 1977 should have been a warning to Ralph Perk that trouble lay ahead. Unfortunately, the mayor overlooked these warnings preferring to belief that the voters would come to their senses in the voting booth and re-elect him. Unfortunately, he was wrong.

Some insist that Perk's appointment of Nicholas Bucur to head the new Cleveland International Trade Center may have prompted his loss. Bucur previously served as the mayor's campaign manager. Without his help, this incumbent relied mostly on volunteers from the Republican Party. These well-meaning workers lacked the commitment and enthusiasm of earlier campaigners.

Others see the nonpartisan primary as the culprit. Many of Perk's strongest backers assumed that the mayor would win and did not bother to vote for him in the primary. That enabled Kucinich and Feighan to squeak out a victory. Had the city held traditional partisan primaries, in all probability, the mayor would have won that contest and faced either Kucinich or Feighan in the general elections.

Other critics with a national perspective contend that the voting electorate wanted political change. Voters in Buffalo, New York, New Orleans, Pittsburgh and St. Louis unseated their incumbent mayors that year. The majority of these newly elected officials served their constituents with distinction for many years to come. Many argue that Perk's inability to stop white flight to the suburbs and resolve the

**MUNY-Light controversy led to his defeat. Still others claim that his downfall resulted from his relentless attack on pornography and boycott of the musical revue “Oh! Calcutta!” (5)**

**Whatever the reason or reasons prompted his defeat, Mayor Perk took it graciously. Upon leaving office, he established Ralph Perk and Associates. This consulting firm assisted small businesses and municipal governments in securing federal grants. Perk’s successes in professionalizing the city’s police force, training the chronic unemployed for good jobs and establishing an award-winning mass transit system appear all but lost in time. Yet, they are some of the greatest accomplishments made by any mayor in the city’s history.**

**The question is how and why did this oversight occur? Perhaps the mayor’s modesty may account for some of it. Undoubtedly, Ralph J. Perk displayed the quintessential characteristics of a highly innovative and successful politician. He was clever, charming, and insightful, always ready to please his constituents. The mayor also represented the consummate networker. No one enjoyed mixing politics and social activities more than Perk. At the same time, he knew his bounds and he rarely overstepped them. He was not a glory seeker in the traditional sense.**

**This mayor loved a good time and he enjoyed public acclaim. However, he recognized the triteness of pomp and circumstance and refrained from it except when necessary. Being a self-effacing individual, Perk often minimized the role he played in developing his many successful programs. He preferred to praise a program director, commissioner or staff member rather than take the credit himself. Over time, the public appears to have forgotten the indispensable role this**

mayor played in these initiatives. The fact that most of his administrators ran their agencies or departments in an efficient manner may further explain it.

Rumormongers at that time contended that some of his best programs were watered down versions of initiatives first introduced by his predecessors. Nothing could be further from the truth. Perk's unique approach to politics and public service distinguished him from others. With boundless energy and unbending determination, Mayor Perk pursued his political ambitions in a logical way. All three programs discussed in this writing represented well-articulated initiatives executed by an insightful leader with the help of highly competent administrators, commissioners and community leaders.

The two mayors preceding Ralph Perk may have been effective administrators; however, they never received the kind of extensive federal funds he did. Mayors Locher and Stokes may have enjoyed cordial relations with the White House; yet, neither could boast of an intimate relationship with the Presidents. Mayor Perk, on the other hand, enjoyed strong personal connections with both Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford.

This carefully forged network enabled him to tap into sizeable federal grants for a wide variety of programs. What is even more amazing is that Ralph Perk accomplished all of this with a minimum of grandstanding. His unprecedented successes during dire economic times demonstrated his competency. His low-key cooperative leadership style is well worth emulating in today's highly volatile world.

## ENDNOTES

1. **“Cleveland’s Mayor Perk Eliminated by Two Democrats in Primary Vote, Young Winners to Face Each Other on November 8,” The New York Times, October 5, 1977.**
2. **“Cleveland Plain Dealer Endorses Perk, Feighan for Mayor,” The Cleveland Plain Dealer, September 25, 1977.**
3. **City of Cleveland, Ohio Official Statement, \$60,000,000 Airport System Revenue Bonds, Series A, November 1, 1976.**
4. **Both local newspapers were quick in responding to Mayor Perk’s loss see “Postmortem Apathy Did Perk In,” The Cleveland Press, October 6, 1977 and David Abbott, “Little People’s Support for ‘Ice Peddler’ Melts After Six Years, Curtain Falls,” The Cleveland Plain Dealer, October 5, 1977.**
5. **U.S. Judge William K. Thomas on August 9, 1977 ordered the City of Cleveland to sign a contract with Mr. Dyke N. Spear, the producer of Oh! Calcutta! Judge Thomas said that the City of Cleveland had violated Mr. Spear’s constitutional rights of freedom of speech. Christine Jindra, “Nude Play in Again at Music Hall, City is Ordered to Allow ‘Oh! Calcutta!’” The Cleveland Plain Dealer, August 10, 1977.**

## SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

All three programs described in the previous chapters illustrated Mayor Perk's political mastery. A man of the people, he knew firsthand the value of hard work and honesty. He also understood that political success did not just happen. It resulted from thoughtful planning and careful decision-making at every level. Modern politicians in their zeal to resolve issues quickly may downplay the many economic and political advantages one might gain from well-scripted public policies.

Perhaps today's world no longer affords leaders the opportunity of engaging in meaningful dialogue with colleagues and friends. If this is indeed the case then modern politicians need to turn to other reliable sources for assistance. This is where records by past leaders may help. In many ways, the issues facing municipal leaders today are very similar to the ones that confronted politicians a generation ago. Like today, the 1970s represented a time of great change and political uncertainty. In both eras, a volatile economy, protracted overseas military conflict and public misgivings regarding the honesty of local politicians served to undermine traditional beliefs and moral values.

Also like today, the 1970s was a time of voter cynicism. No one could be trusted on face value alone. Municipal leaders found themselves caught in the middle. Should they break away from past traditions and create their own unique new identities based on previously untested more radical reforms or should they follow the crowd and support the status quo? Municipal leaders in the 1970s like today were very unsure as to which path to follow. In the final analysis, most chose to revise traditional political agendas with the hope of meeting the challenges and



expectations of the electorate. Where these leaders differed from modern-day politicians was not in their approach, but rather, the society in which they lived.

Prior to the Watergate Scandal, the media rarely probed into the personal life of local leaders or debated the merits of specific policies based on alleged hidden political agendas. Instead, the media discussed the ramifications of such policies. They were particularly interested as to how these policies might affect the re-election chances for incumbents. There was nothing personal in this kind of free flowing dialog no hints of wrongdoing here. Only in times of political scandal would the media deviate from their-own self-imposed moral code. The professional attitude displayed by most media representatives enabled most hardworking politicians to be highly creative especially when it came to dealing with difficult problems.

If particular policies did not gain public support then the politicians would try something else. Through trial and error, often with the help of the loyal opposition, municipal leaders would eventually come up with acceptable policies. The public more often than not would accept these initiatives believing that their elected officials were morally bound to do the right thing for all of them. If the public became disillusioned with those politicians then they would vote them out of office. It was as simple as that.

The innovative public policies introduced by veteran politicians like Ralph Perk set the stage for modern decision-making whether today's leaders acknowledge it or not. Modern politicians enjoy a decided advantage over their predecessors in

that they have the wherewithal to evaluate the public's reaction to controversial past issues.

Institutional memory as displayed through such things as city archival records provides modern politicians with valuable insight into how past leaders handled sensitive issues. It also enables them to gauge potential public reaction if similar pieces of legislation were introduced today. Possessing this kind of insight upfront may help to speed up the legislative process while appreciably improving the quality of policies enacted. Access to these records may also prevent today's politicians from falling into some of the same economic and political traps that ensnared their predecessors.

Increasingly, today's politicians rely on computer-generated information to enhance policies. These policies may include snippets of local history. These bits and pieces of a community's past may serve to reinforce their goals and objectives. Those snippets taken from dependable historic resources may indeed lend additional credibility to specific policies; however, those derived from unreliable records may hurt their cause.

Institutional memory derived from reliable historic records may increase the chances of success in two important ways. First, it may strengthen a community's awareness of its history lending credibility to the politician and the policies presented. Second, it may predict the success or failure of public policies based on similar past experiences. Mayor Perk seeing the value of institutional memory used it often in decision-making.

Ralph Perk's approach to governance served the City of Cleveland well. The Impact Cities Crime Fighting Program, CETA and RTA demonstrated his commitment to the people. Occurring in a time of multiple plant closings, high unemployment and significant population losses, his initiatives offered hope. It behooves modern-day leaders to re-examine the contributions made by Cleveland's 52<sup>nd</sup> Mayor. Outstanding politicians of any era demand excellence from their colleagues, friends, co-workers and most especially themselves. Mayor Perk was no exception. A selfless politician wanting to improve the quality of life for all Clevelanders, he was a credit to his family, friends and his community.

The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his election as mayor occurred in 2011. Many things have changed in this city over the past four decades. However, Clevelanders still belief in worthwhile cultural and religious values. Mayor Perk cherished these values as well. He dedicated his life to helping others. However, his contribution to the City of Cleveland far exceeds that. He inspired his colleagues, family and friends to achieve remarkable things. Perk brought the best out in people by helping them develop their own special skills and talents. He was the hope and spirit of the city that he loved so much.

Seeing the past through his eyes may provide us with some valuable clues concerning what constitutes effective leadership and builds strong character. These positive character traits have withstood the test of time. They never lose their luster or fade from view. All of us have much to learn from Cleveland's own Ralph J. Perk. Let us begin the learning process today.

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