
Chapter 5

POLS AND ACTIVISTS

We were ... politically irrelevant.¹

Mike O'Brien, *Near West Neighbors in Action* (NWNIA)

The environment that allowed the community organizations of Cleveland to exist was shaped by the politics of the time. The victories of the social movements of the 1960s were codified into laws, policies, and programs in the 1970s. Legislation passed in the 1970s, such as the Community Reinvestment Act and The Community Development Block Grant program, gave the groups tools and resources that were vital to their success and growth. The administration of President Jimmy Carter seemed to be in their corner with the sponsorship of the National Commission on Neighborhoods and the appointment of such neighborhood heroes as Monsignor Geno Baroni to a HUD position. Former antiwar activists, such as Sam Brown and Marge Tabakian, were put in charge of ACTION, the governing agency for Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA) and the Peace Corps. We will see how the arrival of the Reagan administration changed all the rules to the detriment of community organizing in Cleveland. Yet, for all of the importance of politics in their daily lives, the political realm was always a foreign and dangerous land for the groups. They were never able to fashion a coherent, believable, and effective political strategy. It was one of their major weaknesses.

Locally, the groups shared turf and frequently came into conflict with local politicians, especially city councilmembers. The conflict centered on one key question: Who represents the people of the neighborhood, or ward? The community organizations said, "We do." The local councilmember said, "I do." At one time, the conflict would be bitter. At another, the combatants would announce their enduring love and respect for one another.

The political attitudes of the community organizations were shaped by their status as 501(c)(3) non-profits that were required to be non-partisan. Even more important than this was how they saw their mission. Tom Gannon, of the Catholic Commission explained:

We didn't want to get involved in partisan organizing because that would divide the community and would make people suspicious of what we were doing. We didn't want to get into anyone's political camp. We didn't want an organization that would politicize like some of the Model Cities organizations, where people were fighting for jobs and things like that. We wanted to develop that independent base so we could make the politicians accountable to us.²

One of the ways in which the conflict was expressed was when neighborhood residents came up against a particular problem. The old fashioned response was to call the councilmember to get it taken care of. The community organizing approach was to hold a meeting to discuss the issue, see how much support it had, then create a strategy for the group to call a city hall official or get a meeting with a city representative. Marlene Weslian of Citizens to Bring Broadway Back (CBBB) described their experience:

At the time, one councilman was Joe Kowalski, who was really entrenched. He had been a councilman for a long time, and that was why when we went to meetings and people said, "Oh, we don't have to do anything. Let's just call Joe." We normally said "OK, fine, call Joe. If Joe does something, then that's terrific. Then we can move on to another issue and that's been taken care of." Nine times out of ten, of course, it didn't happen, and Joe didn't come through.³

According to Tom Wagner, who helped found the Ohio City Block Club Association (OCBCA) and Near West Neighbors In Action (NWNIA), the organizations even held an attitude that the councilmembers were not needed:

There was a sense that...they worked for you and they were your employees and you told them what you wanted done. There was also that sense that you didn't need them. You could enact change in terms of the local level. In that sense, you were in competition with them. There was a clear sense in the upper echelon of community organizing in Cleveland at that time that you were in competition with the councilpersons as an agent of change.⁴

Most councilmembers greeted the new organizations with suspicion, fear and hostility. Certainly, one of the most dramatic examples of this was an incident in the Union Miles neighborhood.

Marita Kavalec of Union Miles Community Coalition (UMCC) was knocking on doors in the neighborhood, when she encountered a supporter of councilmember John Barnes:

He cut the conversation short, went into another room, and came out with a shotgun. He escorted me out of the house, off the street to where my car was. Carrying his gun, he let it be known that I was in such-and-such a councilman's ward: John Barnes. This was John Barnes's territory, and I didn't have John Barnes's permission to be there. They would really appreciate it if I never showed up in that area again. If I did, he said there were going to be consequences. It was outrageous!⁵

In Union Miles, the other council member was Earl Turner, who would come to Union Miles street club meetings, make promises, and derail Union Miles Community Coalition's efforts to organize. To counter this, UMCC held "Earl Turner nights" when as many block clubs would meet as could be managed. Turner could not be everywhere at once, so most of the clubs could conduct their business in peace.⁶

The neighborhood with the most conflicted relationship was on the Near West Side between Near West Neighbors in Action and Helen Smith. Smith was no stranger to the organizing scene, and had been an activist and leader with the OCBCA before it became NWNIA. Her sister, Margery Knipe, was an early and much revered organizer with the Catholic Commission. Smith felt the other councilmembers were much more paranoid about the groups than she was. She described the situation:

Well, coming out of an organizing effort I had a different perspective than a lot of the others there [did]. They looked on it as a major threat. I remember meetings where they were beating up on the bishop. We had a number of meetings with Bishop William Cosgrove and councilperson Mary Zone pounding on the table. Especially the older councilmen were not used to that type of organization.⁷

In spite of this familiarity, there was a great deal of conflict between Smith and Near West. Smith felt that Near West was not representative of the neighborhood, or was just representative of a marginal part of it. Feeding into the conflict were the ancient Near West Side conflicts between rehabbers and poor people and their

advocates, a conflict in which Helen was labeled as the councilmember of the "Ohio City" (i.e., gentrifiers, yuppies, etc.) faction.

Chuck Ackerman, a longtime activist in the neighborhood, felt this depiction of Smith was inaccurate. She may have represented the rehabbers; however, she also had a base with long-time homeowners in the area who had little use for poor and minority residents and even less use for their defenders. Smith's ability to straddle this divide between yuppie newcomers and old-time residents was the reason for her political durability.⁸

At the same time, Smith was a realist who recognized the inevitability of Near West in its prime and waited for the final days of the group in the late 1980s before she pulled the plug on ward funds and delivered the coup de grace.

Eileen Kelly became an organizer and director of Near West in a time of transition. She had no part in earlier feuds and controversies. She described the complex relationship between Smith and NWNIA, especially in light of her continued financial support of the group:

That \$10,000 from her made the place stay open. Maybe she didn't think of it that way. We had board members calling her. We had Bob (Pollack, Director of Near West Housing Corporation) calling her. Helen is a strong woman. There was always trouble with Helen. She always had a different agenda than NWNIA [did].⁹

In the competition between the community organizations and the councilmembers of the era, the clear winners were the local politicians. They had learned from their encounters with the groups. They realized that gains could be made by cooperating.

In the end, community organizations did not replace the power of the council members. Instead, a new type of ward machine that was more efficient and powerful than the classic machines of the past appeared on the scene: the non-profit development corporation that, in most cases, was a spinoff of the old organizing groups.

The development corporations founded to rehab housing, and promote economic development, were expensive. They were also far safer politically than the wild and woolly community organizations.

The council representatives had what the old advocacy groups did not: money to support staff and fund the programs of the new development corporations. The priorities of the development corporations and those of the councilmembers fit like a glove.

Community organizations not only dealt with councilmembers, they also dealt with mayors. The two most important mayors for the groups were Dennis Kucinich (1977-1979) and George Voinovich (1979-1989).

The relationship with Dennis Kucinich was particularly interesting because Kucinich and the groups used much of the same rhetoric and appealed to many of

the same constituencies. Instead of cooperation, however, the relationship was combative and competitive, to the detriment of both parties.

At first look, the relationship between Kucinich and the groups should have been a love fest. Both claimed the banner of urban populism. Both claimed to represent the “little people” against the insensitivity of big government and the rapaciousness of big business. They had the same enemies. Yet shared values, foes, and constituencies were not enough for them to make common cause.

The conflict was between two very different viewpoints on where power came from and the role of politicians in bringing about social change. Both sides were trapped by the narrowness of their perspectives. The resulting conflict set back the cause of progressive social change and reform in Cleveland for decades.

In his book on the Kucinich years, *The Crisis of Growth Politics*, Todd Swanstrom described how the relationship between Kucinich and the community groups was doomed from the start by their similarities.

When Kucinich was elected mayor, he suddenly became, for the community groups, an ex officio member of the corporate elite. But Kucinich, of course, did not see himself this way. He saw himself as the head of a new citywide community organization, which would represent the neighborhoods in larger struggles against the banks and corporations.¹⁰

Swanstrom pointed to a revealing statement Kucinich made to the Plain Dealer early in his administration:

‘Activist community groups are unnecessary with a mayor who understands their needs’ Above all, Kucinich needed to be perceived as the initiator, as the one who delivered the goods, in order to solidify his electoral base.¹¹

The groups were no less driven by their internal dynamics:

The community groups could not afford to let Kucinich take credit for delivering all the benefits to the neighborhoods. Moreover, their tendency to personalize issues meant that whoever was in power was held responsible for the problems. Kucinich, therefore, was fair game.¹²

The relationship did not start off on a bad note. There was a honeymoon period. George Barany, who was an organizer at the time with Buckeye Woodland Community Congress (BWCC) remembered election night, when the staff and leadership of Buckeye waited to see if Kucinich would show up for a promised negotiating session:

We waited in that office to see if he would show up. At 10:30 at night, he showed up with his wife Sandy and the media and a small entourage, and we did have a negotiating session, brief, right then and there. We felt, this guy's great. We're going to get some real opportunities here.¹³

The honeymoon did not last very long. One of the first groups to come into conflict with the administration was Citizens to Bring Broadway Back (CBBB). An abandoned house in CBBB's area had been on the emergency demolition list of the city for two months. There had already been three arson fires at the house.

Facing the inaction of the city, Broadway decided to do the job for them and put together a neighborhood demolition crew that began demolishing the house. According to organizer Linda Hudecek, they soon changed their minds. It was the city's job to tear down the house. It was the city that had to be called to account. Hudecek recalled:

So we loaded all of this charred wood into this pickup truck and a couple of cars...and only about ten of us went down to Community Development...We went into the building carrying all this charred wood in, we're dropping ashes and junk everywhere, and she (Community Development Director Betty Grdina) started screaming, "Call the police, call the police," kicking us out, yelling, "Get these people out of my office; just get them out of here!" She was literally shoving people out of the office.¹⁴

The hit happened about one or two p.m. in the afternoon, and by four p.m. the house was demolished by the city. It was one of CBBB's first victories. It was also one of the first of its run-ins with the Kucinich administration.

The construction of a new fire station at East 49th Street and Broadway was one of the most important accomplishments of CBBB in its early years. The original firehouse serving the area was over 100 years old, and obsolete. The floors could not support the load of modern fire equipment. Original plans called for the new station to be constructed in 1975. The years rolled by, and still the promised fire station never materialized. This was not only a fire protection issue; it was also an issue of the politics of community development funding during the Kucinich administration.

Through a source at city hall that they named "Deep Throat" after the informant in the Watergate scandal, Broadway learned that community development money had been set aside for the station. The official story was that it was gone. The goal of the new firehouse campaign of CBBB was to go after money that was there yet not there.

One of the more famous events in the campaign was a meeting scheduled with city Finance Director Joseph Tegreene to discuss the fire station issue. The meeting

was set for October 27, 1978, close to Halloween. At the last minute, Tegreene canceled, and sent Frank Mancuso, a powerless underling, in his place.

In retrospect, the participants at the meeting felt sorry for Mancuso, who delivered a very simple message: He could not agree to anything. Because it was around Halloween, Paul Buccino from University Settlement House had dressed a pumpkin up to represent the mayor and tried to get answers from the pumpkin. There was no response from the pumpkin to any of Buccino's questions.

The meeting then adjourned to Community Development Director Betty Grdina's house to ask why the city was not responding after nine attempts to get the mayor to talk to Broadway. About ninety people reconvened the meeting in front of Grdina's Near West Side apartment, shouting to her to come down and meet with them. Police were called, and one officer finally agreed to deliver a letter from the group to Grdina.

Tom Gannon of the Catholic Commission, commented on the response to CBBB's visit to Grdina's apartment:

They went to her house, and she called the police on them. The groups had gone to a lot of people's homes before that, but no one had ever called the police on them, not the Republican administration, not Ralph Perk. Now the 'people's mayor's' community development director had called the police on them.¹⁶

The confrontation with Kucinich was a risky proposition for Buccino, who was the executive director of the University Settlement House. The day after the demonstration in front of Grdina's apartment, Buccino received a call from Benny Bonnano, an ally of Kucinich's in city council, who wanted to know what was going on. Bonnano related that Kucinich's chief of staff, Bob Weissman, was furious over the hit. The administration had an opening to punish Buccino. A Community Development Block Grant to provide matching funds for the settlement house was pending. Furthermore, Buccino was in hot water with the head of the Neighborhood Centers Association (NCA), Bob Bond, who was not a fan of community organizing. Buccino was confronted with two tests. Would his agency be punished by the Kucinich administration? Was the independence of his agency within NCA real or theoretical? He passed on both counts. University Settlement received its CDBG money and, after a heated argument with Bond, the independence of Buccino's agency was maintained.¹⁷

Faced with situations such as these, activists had to be concerned not only with their impact on the position of the group with the city, but also within their communities. In the case of the action at Betty Grdina's apartment, it caused the departure of some older early supporters of the group. Linda Hudecek and Marlene Weslian thought the confrontational tactics did not fit their view of appropriate conduct before authority figures. There were ways you petitioned your government and ways you did not.

One of the lowest points in the relationship between the community groups and city hall, came at the November, 1978 Neighborhoods Conference. The conference represented ten groups, with about 700 people attending. Representing the city administration were Community Development Director Betty Grdina, Chief of Staff Bob Weissman, and Finance Director Joseph G. Tegreene.

The conflict was initiated by Betty Grdina's refusal to answer questions from the audience until the agenda was changed to include her colleagues, who were not scheduled to speak. Conference leaders finally allowed Weissman two minutes to speak, after which he was to be cut off.¹⁸ Tom Gannon described what happened:

[Weissman said], 'This is how you're going to have to behave if you want to come down to city hall and see us.' He started to read from a legal pad, and he went on for a few minutes and all of a sudden people said, 'What? What is this bullshit!', and they started saying, 'Sit down! Boo! You work for us! You work for us!'¹⁹

Diane Yambor of Buckeye took the microphone away from Weissman after telling him his time was up. He kept talking. Fanny Lewis, a Kucinich supporter and future councilmember, marched up on stage and a struggle for the microphone began between Lewis and Agnes Jackson of BWCC. Gannon described what happened next:

Fanny Lewis walked up and hit Agnes Jackson over the head with the microphone. You heard this big "bong" go over the PA system. Sarah Turner (of BWCC) picked up a chair and was going to hit Fanny over the back of the head with the chair, at which point one of the organizers took the chair away, and Sarah grabbed another one, and that's when all hell broke loose.²⁰

According to Diane Yambor, the last they saw of the mayor's delegation that night was them running from the hall, although no one was chasing them.

In response, Weissman cut off city hall cooperation with Buckeye Woodland Community Congress, Citizens to Bring Broadway Back, and the St. Clair Superior Coalition. "We're going to cut these groups off. They are off limits." Weissman said. "We can maintain our contacts with the neighborhoods by dealing with other groups in those areas."²¹ He also attacked Harry Fagan and the Catholic Commission for employing "professional agitators and organizers."

Diane Yambor speculated that the groups sponsoring the conference had been set up by Grdina's insistence that Weissman be allowed to talk when the conference had really wanted to learn from her why the city had blocked an investigation by HUD of CDBG spending, especially when the investigation would have dealt, for the most part, with the actions of preceding administrations. Bernice Krumhansl of

SCSC also speculated that Grdina's actions were an effort to dodge the CDBG issue. Harry Fagan thought the reason was more basic than that: "Weissman came (to the conference) to lecture, not to listen. He found out he was dealing with grownups who don't get lectured to."

Conflicts between Kucinich and the groups were also reflected within particular neighborhoods. This was especially true in the St. Clair-Superior neighborhood. Only the Near West Side was as diverse, cantankerous, and contentious as the St. Clair Superior neighborhood was. Everything was complicated, with maddeningly complex ethnic, racial, and political dynamics. Adding to the volatile mix was the socialization of the populace to the bare-knuckles school of ward and union politics. Forbearance, tolerance, and a willingness to forgive and forget were conspicuously absent from these traditions.²²

Kucinich used his alliance with Tanya Grdina, his safety director, and Betty Grdina to build a power base in the neighborhood. The Grdina family was a powerful presence in the neighborhood. Immigrants from Slovenia, they established themselves commercially in the neighborhood early in the century. The streetcars would stop in front of their store and immigrants new to the country would find lodging, jobs and other services provided by people who spoke their language and were familiar with their culture.

Kucinich challenged St. Clair, which he regarded as a rival. According to Swanstrom, he was also angered by the refusal by the coalition to help him defeat the recall election in August 1978. The word on the streets was that if people had a problem, they should call Kucinich, not the coalition. The coalition became alarmed by the Kucinich campaign creating separate leaflets for white and black areas, as one of the main goals of the coalition was to avoid racial conflict in the neighborhood.

The confrontation at the neighborhoods conference not only led to a formal break with the Kucinich administration, it also split St. Clair. Nine coalition board members resigned, citing too much power in the hands of the president Bernice Krumhansl, the domination of organizers who were pushing "grandiose" issues not important to neighborhood residents, lack of financial accountability, and staff being composed of outsiders who did not understand the neighborhood. Krumhansl responded that the loyalty of those who resigned was to Kucinich, not to the neighborhood.²³ Those who resigned said they were going to found a rival organization, but nothing ever came of it.

While the board resignations were dramatic, they were not unexpected, and St. Clair loyalists were already organizing to recruit new members and limit the damage. Ron Jaksic, relative of coalition leader Kathy Jaksic and an officer of SCSC, described the damage:

My view then was it took away any innocence, any virginity the coalition had in terms of good representational leadership. It knocked it out, killed it, made it difficult to be as broad based.²⁴

The conflict even split families, such as the Jaksic family for instance:

We had plenty of family arguments with my one aunt. She was old ward club, old guard kind of leadership in the Perry Home organization, [which] was formed years ago, more of a social group. At the time, [it was] a group that was concerned with integration. It was more racist in the sense of preserving the area from change.²⁵

Nothing ever was simple in St. Clair. As Ron Jaksic remembered:

So it was really twisted. Every component in St. Clair was not a straight shot. It made for a very frustrating period of time. I think that affected a lot of leadership, burnt out a lot of people.²⁶

The controversy between St. Clair Superior Coalition and the Kucinich administration moved from about who did what to whom at the neighborhoods conference to the issue of a blocked housing program. The controversy was public, with major opinion pieces authored by both sides appearing in the "Forum" page of the *Plain Dealer*.

St. Clair Superior Coalition was putting together a housing rehab program for the neighborhood, and it wanted HUD to approve funds to hire an outside consultant: a community organization from San Francisco.

The China Town Corporation had succeeded in starting a housing rehab program. Their experience, the coalition felt, was relevant to the situation St. Clair Superior Coalition was facing. According to Ron Jaksic, Kucinich activists began a rumor campaign claiming the San Francisco group and SCSC were preparing for a Chinese takeover of the neighborhood. SCSC even tried to do an end run around the administration to appeal directly to HUD for grant approval, something that HUD never looked upon with favor. The Kucinich administration vetoed SCSC's funding request.

In December 1978, Buckeye Woodland Community Congress and other Cleveland groups proposed to the National Commission on Neighborhoods that Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds be directly funneled to neighborhood organizations to make sure that something got down to the neighborhood level. This flew in the face of the history of the CDBG program. The CDBG program had been designed to give local governments and politicians some say over how federal dollars were spent. It was a reaction to the experience with War on Poverty programs in which federal dollars funded the opposition to many city halls, with predictable backlash from local politicians. BWCC's request was simply not going to happen.

The administration responded to its neighborhood critics in a May 26, 1979, "Forum" article in the *Plain Dealer* written by Betty Grdina.

First, Grdina cited a long list of neighborhood accomplishments. Then she stated

that plenty of neighborhood groups had no problem with city hall. The problem, she wrote, was with a minority of groups who were addicted to the media spotlight and to confrontation politics. Grdina did not mention the master's thesis the mayor had written on confrontation politics or the fact that he was a skilled practitioner of the art, as well.

She outlined the administration's position on the groups: The foundations and charities were front groups in corporate Cleveland's war on Kucinich:

Their motives can be traced to the elite foundations which control funding to these groups: the Cleveland Foundation, the Gund Foundation, and even the Catholic Commission on Community Action, a branch of the Catholic Charities Appeal, which donates substantial sums and trains organizers in the use of confrontation tactics.

Even Republic Steel is involved in the attempt to subvert a neighborhood group. The Growth Association is now showing interest in neighborhood groups. Believe it or not, Cleveland Trust's Brock Weir has also come out 'in favor' of neighborhood groups.²⁷

Grdina also stated that the groups had set themselves up as unelected representatives of the neighborhoods. She cited largess from the Kucinich administration for the St. Clair-Superior area, and charged that the leaders of the SCSC also had political ambitions. She discussed the housing issue, and stated that there was no need to hire an outside consultant. She defended the dissident groups in the SCSC area, saying they are being ignored by the media and silenced by SCSC. Next, she leveled her ire at the organizers by accusing them of creating media events that distorted the picture of what was really going on in the neighborhoods. Grdina charged the organizers with inciting "Ku Klux Klan" style intimidation of public officials such as CBBB's bringing arson debris to her office and the demonstration in front of her residence.

She finally leveled the classic accusation used by anyone who is the target of dissent. She played the "outside agitators" card:

The organizers claim they choose disruptive, and sometimes violent methods because that's the only way to get results for the neighborhoods. But many of the organizers have never lived in the neighborhoods they claim to represent. They are only visiting. They will move to try to 'organize' other areas when they have finished trying to wreck St. Clair Superior's reputation.²⁸

Grdina ended her piece:

The ultimate question is their right to speak for the neighborhoods at all, since they are funded by corporate contributions and run by nonresident organizers.²⁹

In the battle of the "Forum" pages, it was now the turn of the SCSC to respond to the Kucinich administration. The response came in a June 11, 1979, Forum article titled "The Coalition Speaks." Written by Bernice Krumhansl and Rev. Thomas Martin, a leader of the coalition, it related the history of the organization and its willingness to work with all institutions that affected the neighborhood. They then cited various issues they worked on and all the accomplishments of SCSC.

Krumhansl and Martin then responded directly to Grdina. First, they asked if SCSC was so insignificant, why it was being attacked. Then they described their recent convention with 340 delegates, forty-five block clubs, and fifty-five streets represented. What other organization in the neighborhood could claim the same diversity and inclusiveness? They added that they were not into confrontation for the sake of confrontation, but only in those cases where they were being ignored.

In discussing the neighborhoods conference, Krumhansl and Martin charged that one person was knocked to the ground by a Kucinich aide and that St. Clair opposed the rudeness shown Weissman. They charged that SCSC was being singled out for punishment, and rejected out of hand the charge they were a partisan organization, saying no one was prevented from participating on the basis of his or her political affiliation.

St. Clair gave its view of the controversy over bringing in representatives of the San Francisco group as consultants. Grdina had charged that there was no need for the San Francisco group's studies. Grdina said that the San Francisco group could not contribute anything because they did not know Cleveland. SCSC responded that the Chinatown group was from a neighborhood similar to St. Clair-Superior and that SCSC felt it could learn from them. Finally, Grdina said she felt the HUD technical assistance grant was a waste of the taxpayers' money. That was true, SCSC said. Because of city hall opposition, the money had been given to another city.³⁰

Significantly, the coalition response did not mention, and did not even attempt to answer probably one of the most cutting charges of the Kucinich administration, that they were front groups for corporate power in its battle with Kucinich. Ron Jaksic commented on this:

Foundations give you parameters. They don't dictate specific activities. Coalition groups were not going to be told what to do unless it was something they wanted. It was so far fetched. They were fighting some of the same corporations in different ways at different times [as the Kucinich administration was].³¹

Kucinich finally became so exasperated with the groups that he asked for a meeting with Bishop James Hickey of the Cleveland Catholic Diocese to complain about the Catholic Commission's involvement with groups that were in conflict with him. In the highly polarized world of Cleveland politics during the Kucinich era, the Catholic Commission was under suspicion by all. At the start of the Kucinich administration, his opponents criticized the groups for making Kucinich look good,

and giving him de facto support. Now, the groups were looked upon by Kucinich as being in an unholy alliance with the banks and corporations in an effort to destroy his administration.

At the time, Kucinich was stonewalling a number of community groups on issues around which they were organizing. Kucinich's feeler to the Catholic Commission began with a call to commission director Harry Fagan.

Kucinich asked him to meet him at Tony's Diner, a place he had popularized during his administration. Fagan refused the invitation, saying that he did not speak for the neighborhood groups. Kucinich called Bishop Hickey, who, with Kucinich on hold, called Fagan and told him "The mayor is on the phone and he said you won't meet with him." Fagan agreed to meet at the diocesan offices with the mayor and the bishop, at the bishop's request. Reverend Ed Camille, another staff person at the Catholic Commission, was also a part of the meeting. Fagan told the Bishop what Kucinich was going to say: that the commission was sponsoring paid outside agitators and added, "Ed (Camille), you take the 'paid' part. Bishop, you take the outsider part, and I'll take 'the agitators'."

True to his prediction, the meeting took place, and Kucinich leveled the expected accusations. Rev. Camille said the mayor had to be kidding about paid agitators. The organizers worked for miserable salaries that could best be called stipends. The bishop said, "Outsiders? Well, I'm an outsider. I came here from a college in Rome." Fagan finished by saying that the only agitator he was aware of was in his wife's washing machine. The meeting ended.

The next day, Kucinich announced that the Citizens to Bring Broadway Back neighborhood would get its fire station and other demands would be met, as well. But Kucinich never forgave Fagan, and the rift between the groups and his administration became permanent.³²

There were many different explanations on what went wrong with relations between the groups and the Kucinich administration. On one level, the organizations found the demeanor of the functionaries of the administration intolerably arrogant. As George Barany of BWCC said, "These people came in with a head of steam, and we as organizers thought we were arrogant. They put us to shame." Kucinich was blamed for setting the tone of the administration, but most of the organizers and leaders of the community groups focused their wrath on his staff members, particularly Bob Weissman.

Beneath the issue of Kucinich's staff, was the central issue of who would control the neighborhood agenda and who really represented the interests of the residents of Cleveland's neighborhoods. Tom Gannon stated, "They had a mentality that once they were elected, they were the sole representatives of the people."

Gannon said that after the brawl at the 1978 Neighborhoods Conference, that attitude became clear. "I think what they had said was that the community groups were not controlled by them, could not be controlled by them, and if they couldn't be controlled by them, then they should be destroyed or silenced. I think that it was

their paranoid attitude, and [their] need to control.”³⁴ Kathy Jaksic of SCSC commented on the central issue in her neighborhood in the Kucinich era: “I think it was a question of authority. Who was going to decide for this neighborhood?”³⁵

Many people feel that the Kucinich era was a historic opportunity that was lost forever. Frank Ford, who worked for the Ohio Training Center and who went on to become director of Union Miles Development Corporation (UMDC), commented on these missed opportunities to build a powerful urban populist movement from the grassroots to city hall.

I mean, he was handed a gift. A progressive mayor in any town, anywhere today, just think how they would have loved to have been in a town where there was that kind of neighborhood organizing. This town had more neighborhood organizing, more potential grassroots, low-income power than maybe any other city in the country. He didn't know how to use that.³⁶

A consensus of veterans of the era is that Mayor George Voinovich (1980-1988) was the beneficiary from Kucinich's disastrous relationship with the neighborhood groups. Tom Gannon described the difference:

George Voinovich would come out and say, 'You guys are a real pain in the ass, but I'm glad you're here. I'm glad because you're doing good things for the neighborhood, and we all want to do good things for the neighborhood. Even though you drive me crazy and give me a hard time, I'm sincere, and you're sincere, so we are all one big happy family.'³⁷

What was critical on the part of the neighborhood groups during the Voinovich era was a feeling that they were recognized and respected and would be listened to by a city administration, regardless what their other disappointments and disagreements with the administration might be.

There were a number of reasons for Voinovich's positive relationship with the neighborhood groups. First, Voinovich did not dwell in the same Manichean world as the Kucinich administration had. He recognized that there were not only friends and enemies, but also innocent civilians.

Voinovich was also a Republican in an overwhelmingly Democratic town. A fondness for confrontation politics would have been suicidal. As committed to Republican politics as he was, he was not a Reaganite, and was continuously going to Washington to plead the case of the cities before the Reagan Revolution. An example was his endorsement of the activities surrounding Reclaim America Week in 1982. Reclaim America Week, which was a rolling protest against the policies and priorities of the Reagan Revolution, was hardly a campaign designed to warm the hearts of traditional Republicans.

Further, Voinovich was not seen as the supreme political power broker of Cleveland politics during the 1980s. That title, along with all the credit and blame, fell to only one man, City Council President George Forbes. Cleveland during this period was akin to a constitutional monarchy, with Voinovich as the kindly and beloved king and Forbes as the despised, but effective prime minister. Voinovich could afford to be popular, thanks to George Forbes.

The environment that greeted community organizations when they began in the 1970s was different from the one that characterized the Voinovich years. During the Perk and Kucinich years, the community groups were fighting for recognition, respect, and some minimal responsiveness from city hall. They were met with fear, contempt, and intransigence.

By the time Voinovich came into office, city hall, was starting to learn its lessons on how to deal with the groups. Councilmembers and bureaucrats started to realize that they might gain from giving group representatives the time of day, and might gain some good will in the wards as well. City hall began to get used to a political environment that included organized neighborhood groups.

This is not to say the Voinovich era was a love fest, and there were no conflicts. There was plenty of conflict in the fight over community development funding on the Near West Side. Another example was Union Miles Community Coalition (UMCC) "hitting" the mayor at the airport with a demonstration, resulting in the mayor lecturing them on proper conduct but not exiling them from city hall as Bob Weissman had done.

The groups had changed the rules for city hall in dealing with the neighborhoods. City government became more responsive, and this change undermined confrontation tactics that were a hallmark of the groups. Their lightning was not stolen; it was denied a clear target. With the founding of the neighborhood development corporations, neighborhood groups became less the voice of grassroots democracy, and more the providers of services for neighborhoods and for councilmembers. The groups were incorporated into the same municipal system they had previously besieged.

The community groups and Mayor Voinovich were also on different time lines. Voinovich was just starting in his career as mayor. The groups, while vigorous on the surface and full of the old fire and arrogance, were terminally ill.

One source of institutional and financial support after another was drying up or pulling back. The Hickey administration of the Cleveland Catholic Diocese was ending. Harry Fagan was packing his bags. Major sources of funding and support from the federal government were ending with the advent of the Reagan era. Foundation support was either headed for new pastures or was getting increasingly nervous about the tactics of the community groups.

The focus of the neighborhood groups also changed with the prominence of such issues as SOHIO. Their targets were no longer located at city hall. There was less of a chance for the Voinovich administration to come into conflict with the

groups than there had been with Perk or Kucinich.

What Voinovich gave these groups was something few others had offered: respect. For the analysts of public policy who tally the scores of who won and who lost on a particular issue, this may not calculate. However, respect means the world for organizations that represent people who have always been ignored, discounted, and disrespected. The appearance of respect, above all else, may have been the key to Voinovich's peace with the groups.

Part 2:

CAMPAIGNS
