

# Five days of a coup that shook City Council

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East Siders — three blacks and eight whites.

Borrowing from Forbes' winning strategy in keeping his own council majority intact, the group decided on a black for council president, Lonnie L. Burten II, and a white, Polensek, for majority leader.

Palace revolts have happened, successfully, in Cleveland before.

The last one, put together just before the Nov. 26, 1963, vote that replaced Council President Jack Russell with James V. Stanton, required, ironically, Forbes' vote.

There was one essential difference: The 1963 revolt was kept secret until the caucus vote. Some of the conspirators even sat in cars the night before the vote, watching the homes of councilmen whose commitment was in doubt to make sure they had no surprise visitors.

"We had a real good security operation," recalled former Councilman Paul DeGrandis, a leader of the dump-Russell drive who was out of council at the time. "Russell and (former Council Clerk) Thad Fusko were riding high at the time. They didn't think they had any problems."

Why wasn't the Burten-Polensek coalition kept secret?

"I thought it would leak out somehow," Polensek said. "The people (in the coalition) had some moral character. They couldn't go in and lie to George's face."

The idea of a black-white, East Side-West Side coalition to replace Forbes had been on Polensek's mind for weeks, he said. He began to put it all together the day after the election.

As the days passed, Polensek said, he and Councilman John J. Lynch each tried to line up support for a bid at the council presidency.

As the coalition began to form, it became obvious that Polensek and Lynch would have to compromise — both could not seek the presidency.

"That was one of our strengths. If needed, we knew we would compromise for our goal — a change in council leadership," Polensek said.

Before and after the City Council meeting last Monday, small gatherings were held. Burten was approached. Councilman Tyrone Bolden and Councilman-elect Larry A. Jones were brought in. A larger meeting was arranged for the next morning in Polensek's campaign office on St. Clair Ave.

Councilmen began arriving singly and in groups. Burten and Bolden arrived in the afternoon. Councilman-elect John Zayac, who flew back to Cleveland under another name to keep his return

secret, arrived in the evening.

The hours wore on. The participants had soft drinks and munched on doughnuts, potato chips and cookies. They sent out to a nearby fast-food outlet for lunch. Burten, a vegetarian, ordered a hamburger — without the meat. It became an encounter session.

"The whole day's process was basically getting things off people's chests," Polensek said. "It got hot. We told each other what things we didn't like about each other. About past campaigns and about the way things worked in council."

"It was a healthy thing," Polensek added. "We talked about our ability as a team, about our ability for success and survival, about how we were up against great odds."

"We talked about our neighborhoods. We found out what makes each of us tick. Under George, that never would have happened."

It became clear during the meeting that to forge a winning coalition, Burten would have to be council president and Polensek would have to step aside and be majority leader.

Polensek said he had no problem with that. "You feel comfortable with Lonnie. He doesn't lie to you, and the basic foundation of any relationship is honesty."

Finally, at 1:30 a.m. Wednesday, Burten called the roll. The count was unanimous for the Burten-Polensek team.

The reaction?

"Electricity," Polensek said. "Unbelievable excitement. I didn't think anything like that could happen so quickly. It was one of the best times I had."

The coalition was announced at noon Wednesday and throughout the day, the group stayed in touch by telephone. Things began to get mean Thursday morning, when the Call and Post, Cleveland's black weekly newspaper, appeared on the newstands.

Headlines screamed, "Burten Fronts Racist White Challenge to George Forbes" and "Burten Turns On Forbes With Help From Polensek." A front page editorial was headlined, "We Will Lose," and an editorial cartoon showed Polensek riding on Burten's back.

"We just knew the tone of the whole thing had been set," Polensek said. "That the blacks were Uncle Toms and the whites were using them."

"The blacks were really getting it. It was the most vicious attack from the black community. Not from the people, but from the politicians. It was the movers and shakers."

Pressure on the three blacks

kept building. Councilman Michael R. White, D-24, called Burten a Judas and said he was destroying black unity by opposing Forbes.

"If any white elected official came out and said that, they would have been ripped by the media," Polensek said. "But (county Democratic chairman) Tim Hagan was the only one to speak out. I've got to commend him."

Telephones kept ringing at the offices and homes of the three blacks. Ministers called, as did politicians and businessmen, Polensek said.

Finally, Jones capitulated late Thursday. The coalition for a new council leadership was stopped. It is not broken, however, said Burten and Polensek.

"We are going to try to stay together on future issues," Burten said. "We may not always agree, but we will stay together."

## Premarital agreement is ruled valid; he's out

BOSTON (AP) — A premarital agreement that cut a husband out of his wealthy wife's estate if the couple divorced is valid, the state Supreme Court says.

The ruling came Friday in a dispute between two physicians — the former Barbara E. Malinckrodt, who lives in Texas, and David P. Osborne Jr. Married in 1967, the couple divorced in 1975. The court concluded that, under the premarital agreement Os-

borne signed, he was not entitled to alimony or a share in a \$60,000 wine collection, \$225,000 in jewelry or \$448,000 in art works.

Polensek said the pressure brought by Forbes' friends and colleagues created sores that are "not going to heal. What his people demonstrated the past three days was the most low, gutter politics I have ever seen. It was all black and white, or financial considerations. It came down to pure racial politics at its very worst."

Through all this, Forbes remained uncharacteristically subdued, preferring to allow others to rally support for his cause. When the three blacks returned to the fold, the council president acted oblivious to the turmoil around him.

"I didn't start any split within council," he said. "All I did was leave town and return to find out I didn't have a job. One thing is for sure, I won't leave town again."

Forbes also spoke of extending an olive branch to his opponents,

but it was unlikely most of his opponents would be quick to grab it.

Burten had a final comment. "This is not an ending. It's a beginning," he said.

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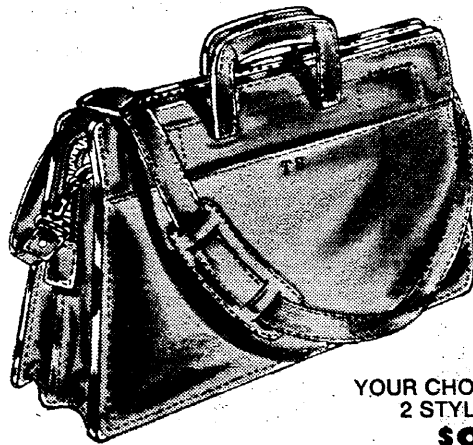
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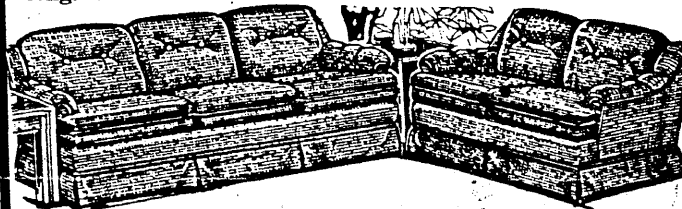
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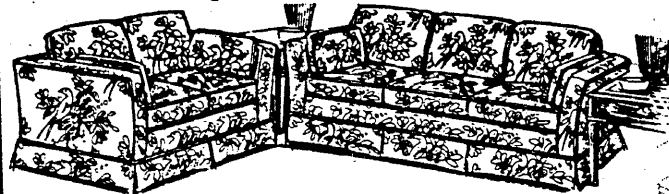
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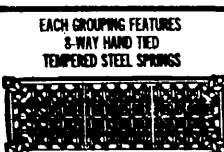
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