

OUR CENTURY

1977

AT A GLANCE

A winter in the deep freeze

The National Weather Service called it the coldest weather "since the founding of the republic." Record lows chilled the Midwest and Northeast. Cleveland had no temperature above freezing for 38 days. On Jan. 17, the thermometer dropped to minus-17 — 10 degrees below the old record — and stayed below zero for 55 hours. Gas companies shut off supplies to industries.

Cincinnati hit 25 below. Dayton was without electricity. Schools closed. Gov. James Rhodes urged homeowners to reduce thermostats to 65 degrees in daytime and 55 at night to conserve gas. Retail stores were to be no more than 60 degrees.

On Jan. 28, 60-mph winds swept Northeast Ohio. The weather service called it a blizzard, though only 2 inches of new snow fell; the 13 inches already on the ground were whipping around, blinding drivers and closing Cleveland Hopkins International Airport and the Shoreway.

By Jan. 31, 2 million workers across the nation were idled by fuel shortages. The average Cleveland temperature for the winter was 19.8 degrees, the lowest ever. Eventually, 29 Ohio counties, including Lorain and Medina, were declared federal disaster areas.

A devastating report by the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board accused the Illuminating Co. of a series of antitrust violations designed to force Munny Light out of business. Among them: CEI had rigged its Munny interconnection to cause power failures, then tried to get the affected Munny customers to switch to CEI.

The board ordered CEI and four other private electric companies to stop blocking Munny's access to cheaper out-of-state power. The companies appealed. The city filed an antitrust suit against CEI and CEI sued the city to collect \$17 million it was owed for past power purchases.

Mayor Ralph Perk and City Council agreed to sell Munny to CEI for \$158 million over 30 years. Municipal Court Clerk Dennis Kucinich filed 28,000 signatures to force a referendum, but a court ruled the issue off the ballot. That left the issue up to council and the incoming mayor — Dennis J. Kucinich.

In a seemingly unrelated event, six local banks routinely "rolled over" the city's one-year notes. That meant they gave the city new loans to pay off the old loans.

The new council would have 10 new members. Eight incumbents were thrown out by voters; all had voted for the National City Bank tax abatement. James Boyd lost his Ward 18 seat when he was convicted of seeking a bribe to support rezoning for the Cleveland Clinic.

The defeated members included the last two Republicans — the mayor's son, Ralph Jr., and Albert Ballew. Republicans had controlled council as recently as 1941. Among the newcomers were James Rokakis, at 22 the youngest councilman ever elected (Kucinich had been 23), and 26-year-old Mike White of Glenville.

It was a boom year for the underworld. In May, John Nardi, known as the "caretaker capo," was blown to smithereens outside his Teamsters union office by a car bomb. In October, Danny Greene was blown up as he left his dentist's office. Greene was believed to have planted the bomb that killed Shondor Birns in 1975.

In December, federal officials indicted nine crime figures for Greene's murder. They included James T. Licavoli, reputed head of the local Cosa Nostra.

It was 80 miles away, in a Youngstown suburb, but Cleveland felt it like an earthquake. On Sept. 19, Youngstown Sheet & Tube Division of the Lykes Corp. announced it was shutting its Campbell works and putting 5,000 employees out of work.

How could it happen? Northeast Ohio had always believed its economy was strong — as strong as steel. Clevelanders reassured themselves that it couldn't happen here.

The Cavaliers had picked the wrong year to have their 1975-76 "miracle" season. Drafting late, they were unable to pick up any top stars from the defunct American Basketball Association. Still, both The Plain Dealer and the Press picked them to win the National Basketball Association championship.

They started fast but leveled off. Then, in February, Nate Thurmond tore cartilage in his knee. He tried to return in the playoffs, but played only one minute. The Cavs were eliminated by the Baltimore Bullets and Thurmond retired at age 35.

The Indians signed free agent Wayne Garland to a 10-year, \$2.3 million contract. He had won 20 games with the Baltimore Orioles, but tore his rotator cuff. He managed to win 13 games while losing 19 for the Tribe. Dennis Eckersley pitched a no-hitter and Andre Thornton hit 28 homers, but the team struggled. Manager Frank Robinson was fired in June and replaced by coach Jeff Torborg. The team finished 28 games out of first.

Forrest Gregg's Browns won five of their first seven games, then lost their last seven. Owner Art Modell fired Gregg and hired Sam Rutigliano to take over in 1978.

The year ended as it had begun, with 13 inches of snow on the ground in Cleveland and 30 in the snow belt. December temperatures dropped the chill factor to minus 54. As the year ended, there was no let-up in sight. Clevelanders had one consolation: The winter of 1977-78 couldn't be as bad as 1976-77, could it?

Kucinich-Feighan duel heats up city

By Fred McGunagle

Not since Tom L. Johnson's tent meetings had Clevelanders been so involved in a political campaign.

Three major mayoral candidates criss-crossed the city nightly, campaigning in bingo halls, bowling alleys and back yards. Fewer than 4,000 votes separated the three in the primary. The two survivors challenged each other to debate. They debated in libraries. They debated in television studios. They debated in churches. They would have debated in a used-car lot if asked.

This time, the margin was less than 3,000. What followed were the most tumultuous two years in Cleveland history.

Three times, Republican Ralph Perk, aided by the blunders of his opponents, had won election in Democratic Cleveland. For six years, he had staggered from financial crisis to financial crisis by selling city assets, inveigling federal funds and robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Perk's "average Clevelander" didn't hold that against him. Nor was there great concern that the mayor had set his hair on fire at a welding show, proposed old ships as "floating hotels" or ordered garbage collectors to distribute what was intended to be a scientific pornography survey.

But now Perk had touched nerves. He backed a \$51 million "People Mover" with unmanned cars carrying passengers above downtown sidewalks. He proposed selling Munny Light (later called Cleveland Public Power) to satisfy the city's debt to the Illuminating Co. He backed multimillion-dollar tax abatements for the new National City Bank Building, a proposed Standard Oil Co. headquarters near the Terminal Tower and the remodeling of the Sheraton Cleveland as Stouffer's Inn on the Square.

Dennis Kucinich, clerk of Municipal Court, opposed all of them. As a young councilman, Kucinich had been instrumental in Perk's first election when he told Clevelanders, "It's all right to vote for a Republican." Now he announced he would run for mayor. He campaigned citywide, firing off proposals like a firecracker shooting off sparks.

A Democratic convention endorsed State Rep. Edward Feighan, a former seminarian and English teacher. Few Clevelanders knew who he was; fewer could pronounce his name. But council members introduced him around their wards and he handshook his way through Cleveland on rapid cars every morning. Council President George Forbes unleashed a series of attacks on Kucinich.

Meanwhile, a confident Perk sang "Melody of Love" in Polish to supporters and, at 63, stressed his experience and maturity; Kucinich was 31, Feighan, 30. Perk's attitude suddenly changed when polls showed Kucinich ahead. He redoubled his pace. "He's lying about everything," Perk said of Kucinich.

The City Club debate was typical of the campaign. Perk told Kucinich, "If you're willing to stand there and lie about my administration and look into the camera, I don't appreciate it and I don't think the people appreciate it."

Kucinich replied, "There are explanations that are due the people of Cleveland that can't be satisfied by attacking me." The gentlemanly Feighan tsk-tsked, "This is pretty much what we've been seeing and hearing. The people want to hear about the issues."

The Press backed Feighan. The Plain Dealer endorsement said, "Nominate Perk, Feighan," though voters could choose only one. In other words, anybody but Kucinich.

The primary election vote count was a cliffhanger: Kucinich 40,154, Feighan a surprising 39,742, Perk 36,498. Perk's 24-year public career was over.

That night, Kucinich and Feighan appeared on WJKW Channel 8. As soon as the camera was turned on, Kucinich challenged Feighan to a se-



Dennis Kucinich, the "Boy Mayor," celebrates his victory over Edward Feighan in the hottest mayoral race the city had known since the days of Tom L. Johnson.

ries of eight debates. "I'll accept a hundred debates," Feighan answered.

They were off. It was the "Ed and Dennis Show," East Side, West Side, sometimes twice a night. They delighted crowds by standing toe to toe, challenging each other's answers and bringing to mind Johnson's description of a campaign as a school for citizens.

It was soon clear there were no significant differences on issues. Both opposed selling Munny Light. Both opposed the National City and Sohio tax abatements, though Feighan said he might back abatements "used wisely" — to create jobs or aid homeowners.

It became a question of style: "Steady Eddie" vs. "Dynamic Dennis." On the Near West Side, Kucinich promised to protect low-income residents from being forced out by high rents, then repeated his promise in Spanish. In a black church, he quoted Scripture: "For the sake of Zion, I shall not keep still!"

"Amen," shouted the congregation. When neighborhood groups made demands, he told them "You want it? You got it!"

Feighan declared: "I refuse to go around from neighborhood to neighborhood making easy promises to lure votes, promises I know cannot realistically be delivered."

Perk endorsed Feighan. So did Sen. John Glenn. Kucinich won backing from Rep. Louis Stokes and Sen. Howard Metzenbaum. He added County Commissioner George Voinovich, who said: "Of the two guys available, he can get the job done."

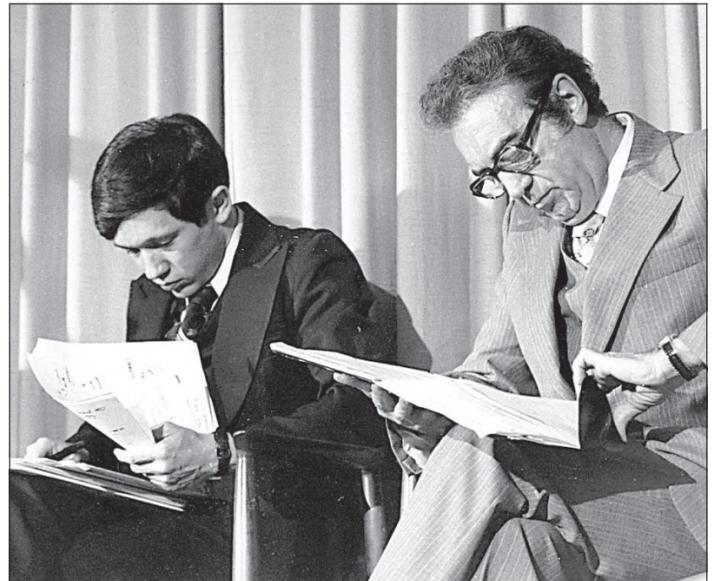
The shocker came on Oct. 30 — a Page One Plain Dealer editorial headlined "Kucinich for Mayor." It conceded that the paper had backed Perk and Feighan in the primary, but said it had promised to keep an open mind and "Kucinich has shown a greater awareness of the problems in the city and how to address them."

Kucinich crowed, "This is definitely the turning point." Feighan said, "Our faith in the intellectual honesty and consistency of the editorial board of The Plain Dealer has been shattered."

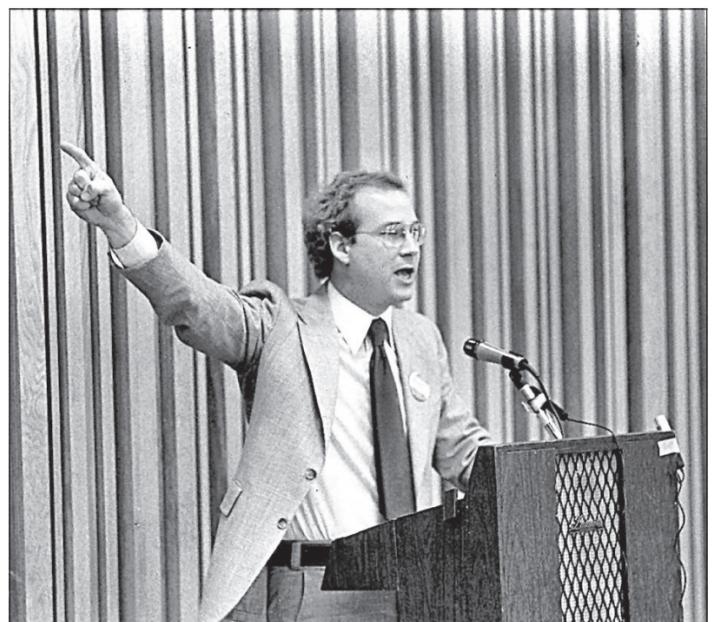
The vote was as close as in the primary: Kucinich 93,047, Feighan 90,074. As he conceded defeat, Feighan summed up the previous two months. "This is a campaign the likes of which this city has never seen before," he said.

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The election was the end of the public service road for Ralph Perk, right, shown here preparing for a debate with Dennis Kucinich.



Edward Feighan played "Steady Eddie" to his opponent, "Dynamic Dennis" Kucinich.

LOOKING AT A YEAR

Jan. 17: "Let's do it," says Gary Gilmore, seconds before his execution in Utah for the murders of two college students.

Feb. 1: More than 80 million Americans watch the final episode of the television mini-series "Roots."

Feb. 25: Ugandan President Idi

Amin takes 240 Americans hostage after President Jimmy Carter denounces the Uganda's human-rights policies. They are released March 1.

Mar. 28: In the worst aviation disaster in history, 574 die as two jumbo jets collide on a runway in the Canary Islands.

May 18: Menachem Begin is

elected Israel's new premier, defeating Labor Party candidate Shimon Peres.

June 20: Oil begins flowing through the 799-mile-long trans-Alaskan pipeline.

Oct. 21: Son of Sam killer David Berkowitz is found fit to stand trial

for the murder of six people in a year-long, New York killing spree.

Dec. 12: Ed Koch is sworn in as mayor of New York.

Died: Charlie Chaplin, Elvis Presley, anti-apartheid crusader Steve Biko, Groucho Marx, Phillip Wrigley, Joan Crawford, Werner von Braun, Bing Crosby.