

OUR CENTURY

1978

AT A GLANCE

Schools a study in disarray

The Cleveland schools were, if possible, in worse financial difficulty and disarray than the city. Voters soundly defeated a 9.9-mill levy in February and again in June. The school board feuded with Charles Leftwich, whom federal Judge Frank Battisti had named desegregation administrator.

In April, Battisti in effect turned over control of the system to Leftwich. Paul Briggs, who had been superintendent for 14 years, resigned. "It is difficult to understand how to administer a school system if major departments are no longer responsible to you," he said.

The board laid off 300 teachers; enrollment had dropped 12 percent in two years, and Battisti ordered the closing of 25 schools. Arnold Pinkney resigned as board president and was replaced by 24-year-old John M. Gallagher.

A federal appeals court overturned Battisti and returned control of the system to the superintendent, but the feud continued. Battisti found the board in contempt of court. Gallagher faced a date in another court for "mooning" a passing motorist from the back seat of a car.

Busing was still scheduled to start Sept. 7, a year after it was first expected, but the bickering continued. On Aug. 26, Battisti, blasting the board for its lack of cooperation, postponed action again, until February.

A teacher strike delayed the opening of school for a month. In November, the board submitted a 3.7-mill stopgap levy. The voters thrashed it.

The arctic cold that ended 1977 refused to go away. Then, on Thursday, Jan. 26, came the "storm of the century." The temperature fell from 44 degrees at 3:40 a.m. to 5 degrees at 10:20 a.m. The barometer at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport dropped to 28.28 inches, the lowest reading ever recorded in Ohio. Seven inches of snow fell atop the 13 inches on the ground.



It was a winter that sacked these Clevelanders on Public Square.

50 hastily opened shelters.

Drifts were 7 feet high in Kirtland Hills. Cars were stranded everywhere. The Ohio Turnpike closed from end to end for the first time. Mail delivery was halted for the first time since the Big Snow of 1950.

Five days after the storm, Cleveland James Truly was found in his truck under a 20-foot drift near Mansfield — cold and thirsty but unhurt. For the winter, Cleveland had a record 90.2 inches of snow. Cleveland had had its two coldest winters back to back.

As if Cleveland didn't have enough turmoil, in October a grand jury indicted Council President George L. Forbes, five other council members, two former members and 10 others, including Forbes' driver-bodyguard, Curtis Watkins. They were charged with 498 counts of bribery, theft in office, extortion and other crimes.

All but one of the elected officials was black. Blacks, charging racism, rallied to their defense. Business leaders raised a defense fund; they looked on Forbes as their champion against Mayor Dennis Kucinich. Squire Sanders & Dempsey, the Illuminating Co.'s law firm, volunteered Charles Clarke, one of its top lawyers, as lead defense attorney.

The FBI got Raymond Ferritto and Jimmy "the Weasel" Fratianni to testify against other defendants in the Danny Greene murder trial. They were among 129 witnesses in the 79-day trial, longest in local history. The jury convicted four defendants, but not James "Jack White" Licavoli or John Calandra, two of the FBI's top targets. However, both were sent to prison in 1982 on racketeering charges growing out of the Greene murder. Tony Liberatoro, another mob figure, was convicted of bribing a secretary to steal the FBI file on Licavoli. The mob had lost its leaders.

Cleveland had had a professional hockey team since 1929 and a National Hockey League franchise for two years. But after another losing season on the ice and at the box office, owners George and Gordon Gund threw in the towel. They got league permission to buy the Minnesota North Stars and merged the teams in Minnesota.

Walt Frazier, the former New York Knicks' all-star, helped the Cavaliers to a 43-39 record, but they lost to the Knicks in the first round of the playoffs.

F.J. O'Neill bought the Indians and brought back as president Gabe Paul, who proceeded to trade Dennis Eckersley to Boston. Eckersley would pitch another 20 years in the majors.

The Browns drafted linebacker Clay Mathews in the first round. The team improved to 8-8, just missing the playoffs.

'Boy Mayor' leads battle into default

By Fred McGunagle

"I personally do not want to go through a period of confrontation the next two years," said Council President George L. Forbes while, at his elbow, mayor-elect Dennis Kucinich beamed his agreement.

The honeymoon was short. Kucinich rejected a \$41 million federal grant for the People Mover downtown and vetoed eight ordinances, mostly for abatements and subsidies. Council overrode the vetoes by overwhelming votes.

Kucinich's radical young Cabinet alarmed business leaders. The finance director, 24-year-old Joseph Tegreene, had no finance experience. One appointee, though, was an immediate hit.

As sheriff of San Francisco, 41-year-old Richard Hongisto had been a defender of gays and the poor. Now, in Cleveland, he sought advice from neighborhood groups and patrol officers. He traveled the streets at night, rescuing motorists from snowdrifts and taking part in arrests. He cut police response time by 23 percent.

So it was a shock on March 23 when word leaked that Kucinich had told Hongisto to resign. Kucinich said Hongisto had refused to accept civilian control. Kucinich's critics said his problem was that Hongisto had become more popular than the mayor.

Hongisto now said Kucinich had pressured him to "punish" his opponents on City Council and give vice squad appointments to "people of questionable ethics." He accused Sherwood "Bob" Weissman, the mayor's executive assistant, of "management practices of abuse, abrasiveness, riding roughshod over other people."

At a joint press conference televised live on Good Friday, Kucinich gave Hongisto 24 hours to back up his charges. Then, apparently on the spur of the moment, he fired him.

Calls to The Plain Dealer ran 25-1 against Kucinich. Opponents started a recall petition drive, but struggled to get signatures. Then, on April 10, City Council voted to investigate a "midnight raid" by administration officials on the office of Economic Director Joseph Furber.

Kucinich exploded. He called council "a group of lunatics" and "a bunch of buffoons. It's hard to believe that so many people can be so stupid," he said. "If they're not stupid then they are crooked, or maybe both."

Infuriated council members joined the recall drive. Realizing his mistake, Kucinich issued a rare apology. But Weissman didn't get the word. On the same day, he assailed council and business leaders in a speech to the Harvard Business Club. The recall leaders soon reached the required 37,000 signatures.

Meanwhile, Kucinich attempted to block subsidies for a Republic Steel Corp. ore dock. At a July 10 council debate on the issue, Forbes declared Kucinich out of order. "I'm the mayor. You can't censor me," Kucinich protested. "I'm the council president and I run these meetings," Forbes answered. He ordered Kucinich's microphone turned off.

With the mike off, Kucinich stood shouting, "I will not be silenced! This is a crooked contract! This is a crooked contract!" He stormed out of the meeting with his Cabinet behind him.

Kucinich sued to block the recall vote. Then, when he lost, he declared, "Bring on the recall!" Meanwhile, Republic Steel decided to build its dock in Lorain. Sohio canceled plans for a new headquarters behind the Terminal Tower. Kucinich touched off a two-day police strike when he fired officers who refused to patrol in public housing projects.

The Plain Dealer, the Press, the Call & Post, the Republican and Dem-

ocratic parties, the AFL-CIO and 24 of the 33 council members urged Kucinich's recall. The mayor fought back with television commercials showing business bosses cutting up a cake shaped like City Hall.

The vote was Aug. 13, the first Sunday election in local history. The result, after a recount: for recall, 60,014; against 60,250. By a margin of less than 0.2 percent, Kucinich hung on to his job.

A chastened Kucinich greeted the outcome with Lincoln-like "malice toward none and charity toward all." But he made an exception: "I don't feel I have to be a hostage of the banks."

Tegreene was inexperienced, but by March he figured out that the Ralph Perk administration had been dipping into bond funds for city operations. He told Kucinich, but — so Tegreene said years later — the mayor refused to believe there was a crisis.

Bills were piling up. The Illuminating Co. demanded payment for power it had been supplying to Muny Light (later to become Cleveland Public Power). The city's credit rating was lowered, then lowered again. Council refused to accept Kucinich's plan to sell unused land and insisted that he sell Muny to CEI.

Cleveland's "boy mayor" was now a national figure. In September, he was invited to address the National Press Club on "urban populism." He told how he had battled the "business elite" on behalf of "the poor and working people." Business leaders steamed, especially Brock Weir, chairman of Cleveland Trust Co., the city's largest bank.

Back in Cleveland, the situation was growing desperate. A confidential report to Kucinich showed \$52 million missing from bond funds, including \$17 million taken during the Kucinich administration. The city would be broke by February.

CEI began seizing Muny Light and Water Department trucks to satisfy its debt. Weir demanded payment of a \$5 million Cleveland Trust note due Dec. 15. Five other banks, which had previously routinely "rolled over" each year's debt, called \$9 million also due Dec. 15. The Plain Dealer revealed that seven of CEI's 11 directors were also on the boards of the banks.

Kucinich proposed saving money by laying off 600 employees, including 400 police officers and firefighters, if the banks held off. He proposed a \$50 million bond issue to pay the Muny debt to CEI. He even agreed to seek an increase in the city income tax, something he had steadfastly refused to do previously.

City Council was adamant. Forbes said, "I spoke to the chairman of Cleveland Trust and he indicated he could go with the sale of the Municipal Light Plant."

Weir said later he had not specifically demanded the sale of Muny, merely a plan acceptable to council.

There were dire predictions: Default would mean mass layoffs, a halt to capital improvement, a state takeover. Out-of-town reporters flocked to Cleveland to cover what promised to be the first default of an American city since the Depression. (New York had been unable to pay more than \$4 billion in 1975, but called it a "moratorium.")

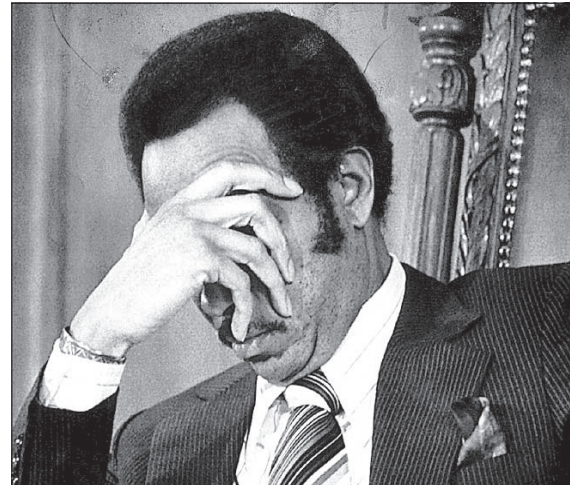
With the climactic council meeting scheduled for Dec. 15, Forbes again said he believed "Cleveland Trust could change its mind if Muny Light were sold."

Again Kucinich refused. He challenged council to put a 0.5 percent income tax increase on the ballot "and then see if Cleveland Trust is willing to destroy this city in the interest of CEI." Weir said Cleveland Trust's main office would stay open until midnight in case he relented.



PLAIN DEALER FILE PHOTOS

George Forbes and Dennis Kucinich promised to be friends, above, but the political honeymoon didn't last. At right, the council president expressed his disgust during a discussion of the city's financial situation in December, after the slide into default.



Dennis Kucinich pins a badge on his new police chief, Richard Hongisto.

As the clock above Forbes' head ticked down to midnight, he called for a vote on Kucinich's income tax increase. The motion to bring it to the floor failed 17-16. Cleveland was in default.

On Dec. 22, Kucinich and council agreed to submit both the Muny Light sale and the 0.5 percent income tax increase to voters at a special election Feb. 27, 1979. The banks agreed not to press for payment in the meantime, forestalling city layoffs.

Had they reached the same agreement seven days earlier, there would have been no default.

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With default nearing, Dennis Kucinich withdraws his money from Cleveland Trust.

LOOKING AT A YEAR

Feb. 15: Leon Spinks upsets Muhammad Ali to win the world heavyweight boxing championship.

June 6: California voters approve Proposition 13, mandating a huge decrease in the state's property taxes.

June 10: Affirmed captures the Triple Crown of horse racing with a victory in the Belmont Stakes.

July 25: The world's first "test-tube baby," Louise Brown, is born in a British hospital.

Sept. 18: President Jimmy Carter announces a peace agreement between Israel and Egypt at what becomes known as the Camp David summit.

Oct. 23: Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, archbishop of Krakow, becomes the first non-Italian pope in more than four centuries.

Nov. 29: A mass suicide by members of the People's Temple in Guyana claims the life of 909 followers of the Rev. Jim Jones.

Dec. 31: Ohio State University football coach Woody Hayes is fired after punching a Clemson University player during the Gator Bowl, played two days earlier.

Died: Hubert Humphrey, Gold Meir, Margaret Mead, Norman Rockwell, Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul I.