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The Merchant Regime’s failure in the 1870s to change unpopular policy priorities opened the way for the Populist Regime and a new era in urban policy making. The Populist Regime was a pliant weave of middle and working class elements, the policy making emissary of the assertive new segments in the evolving system of social stratification. Populist elements overran old policy making organizations and founded aggressive new organizations. From this institutional setting, the new policy making regime emerged, and for a period of eighteen years it addressed the policy concerns and priorities of the more pluralist society of the late nineteenth century. The Populist Regime, the only regime to rely heavily on the formal mechanisms of government, did what the Merchant Regime refused to do: it slashed municipal budgets for economic development and urban growth and steered policy toward distributive services and redistribution of wealth. This chapter recounts the regime’s internecine clash of values and the emergence of a new network of policy making institutions.

AN UNEASY MARRIAGE: PROFESSIONAL AND WORKING CLASS IDEALS

From the beginning the Populist Regime was a regime partitioned by inimical ideals: the universalist professional ideal of middle class professionals, managers, and clerks, and the more parochial working class ideal of native born and foreign born newcomers. These incompatible ideals set the regime ideologically at odds with itself. At the outset, both ideals served a common purpose: residents of Cleveland should be served fairly and impartially by local governmental institutions. Consensus, at the beginning,
was achieved on policy priorities. Since Merchant Regime economic development policy satisfied business infrastructure demands, money now could be directed to other policy priorities. And all Populist Regime factions agreed that urban growth policy had been mismanaged by the self-serving merchants and deserved a lower priority status. Most significantly, the new regime censured the merchants’ low priority service distribution and wealth redistribution policies as pinch penny and so self-serving that they failed fairly and impartially to serve all constituencies in the city. In the early years of the regime, the twin motivating ideals were more cohesive than divisive.

The glue of the middle class professional ideal was its definition of policy making as an impartial and representative process. The professional ideal drew on the newly current assumption that the industrial environment rather than personal failure bred clients for service distribution and wealth redistribution. Distributive services and wealth redistribution could be delivered efficiently and impartially if management was in the hands of professionals and if more money could be allocated for these policies.

These expressions of professional goals, taken at surface value, also mirrored the aspirations of the working class. But the working class ideal, in contrast to the middle class professional ideal, was a stew of both modern and traditional elements, the latter of which eventually proved incompatible with the modernist professional ideal. However, as long as the modernist element governed workplace relationships and the traditionalist element applied to the neighborhood, the divisions within the working class ideal could be reconciled.

The modernism of the working class ideal followed from the divisions of the workplace into skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled, and idle workers. Workplace challenges were met by labor unions and labor-oriented political organizations and parties. From these organizations came an apparently modern agenda calling for wage and hour regulations; guidelines for the labor of women and children; health, safety, and sanitary standards for the workplace; and some visionary discussion of the proper relationship between government, business, labor, and the citizen, especially the empowerment of workers in local, state, and federal politics. These economic and political agendas gave the working class the appearance of being one of the most progressive elements in American society. This agenda, when it appeared on the printed page rather more so than when it was hand lettered on placards, appealed to the fair-mindedness of middle class professionals.

Less understandable and less susceptible to integration with the professional ideal was the strong traditional component of the working class ideal. Traditionalism in the working class ideal stemmed from the social
divisions of the working class, those of national origin, race, sex, and religion. What the first working class generation had in common was their overwhelmingly rural origins. Many were former agricultural workers with traditional rural values, and rural values buttressed the traditional component of the working class ideal.7

Working class traditionalism rested on home, family, church, and neighborhood. These institutions offered continuity and stability in a modernizing world. The workers, American and European alike, migrated from so-called mechanistic societies in which the values of home, family, church, and neighborhood define human behavior in fixed categories grounded in tradition and custom, not in reason, law, contract, or behavioral science. Tradition gave the working class fixed standards and goals and set limits on human aspiration.

The professional ideal, however, had no such sense of limits. It was a boundless ideal buoyed by notions of rationality, choice, change, and limitless potential. The working class ideal dismissed these notions as fantasy, as values and aspirations that, even if true, certainly did not apply to working class people. This was the source of the split between professionals and the working class factions in the Populist Regime, the fault line that ultimately divided the Populist Regime.8

A TYPOLOGY OF POLICY SETTING ORGANIZATIONS

The populist era was a transitional period in Cleveland’s institutional history. The emerging system of social stratification and the parallel cultural ideals were accommodated, albeit uneasily, by the evolving organizational structure of the early industrial era. New taxonomies of organization emerged which gave expression to the traditional merchant ideal and the modern entrepreneurial and professional ideals as well as the partitioned working class ideal. The resulting organizational network was a patchwork of all four ideals. Several of the modern organizations played awkward host to the regime’s rival ideals.

Business Organizations

The business organizations of the industrial era not only transformed the local economy and tied it to the emerging national industrial economy, but they also were the incubators of the entrepreneurial, professional, and working class ideals dominant in the age of industry.
The buoyant merchant ideal was an outgrowth of the countinghouse, the institutional backbone of the Merchant Regime. As a business organization, it played a middleman’s role in an economy that transshipped goods from city to regional hinterland and back. Countinghouses were small wholesale jobbing operations owned by individuals, families, or partnerships. Alfred Kelley’s was typical: an owner-operated business employing clerks and a small contingent of unskilled laborers to perform loading dock mule work. At one remove were local banks. Banks financed the countinghouses and were keenly interested in the same policy issues as their customers. Countinghouse owners and bankers doubled as the mayors and city councilmen and wed themselves to urban policy driven by transportation infrastructure and boosterism. Boosterism drove countinghouse owners to vigorously support an economic development policy of long-distance transportation connections to link their town, the imaginary new Athens, to an only dimly perceived larger commercial world.

The industrial era transformed the export sector of Cleveland’s economy and brought with it new forms of business organization and the new values that would undergird policy making. The first industrial era business organizations, those producing nondurable goods, differed only slightly in ownership, management, and operations from the countinghouse. The key difference was that the nondurable goods manufacturer hired more labor than the countinghouse. But its markets were also local and regional and its interest in policy making was primary in a good regional system of roads.

Large-scale durable goods production gave birth to very different forms of export sector business organization. From the 1870s to the turn of the century, durable goods manufacturing organizations evolved from local family owned businesses, to partnerships, to local corporations, to multi-localational corporations. These new business organizations were founded by visionary, risk-taking entrepreneurs. As these organizations grew, they required sophisticated managerial competencies to solve complex production and distribution problems, compelling founding entrepreneurs to hire professional managers, technicians, and white collar clerks to attend to the details of daily management. These businesses soon evolved into military-like command and control organizations managed by bureaucratic hierarchies. These organizations employed a highly segmented labor force of white and blue collar workers, assigning to each worker a specific task and a specific supervisor. From top to bottom, from middle class white collar manager to working class blue collar laborer, these corporate employees
created the professional and working class values of the new entrants in the evolving industrial era system of social stratification.11

A modern corporate culture emerged. The late nineteenth century business organization was an incubator for the conflicting ideals of its employees: entrepreneurial, professional, and working class. Ultimately, the professional ideal of managed change triumphed.12 Professional managers and white collar clerks pioneered imaginative and effective new bureaucratic management techniques for business organizations, techniques which in turn were transferred to bureaucratic units within the municipal government and charitable agencies. The traditional values of the working class, held in check by the bureaucratic units within the industrial corporation, took root in municipal government.13

Small businesses, of course, continued to exist in Cleveland, and they typified businesses in the local sector of the economy. In the industrial era, small business owners no longer saw themselves as provincial counting-house merchants but instead performed as entrepreneurs who, with some hard work and luck, might emerge as the next Rockefellers, Hannas, or Mathers. These men, retailers, building contractors, and small-scale real estate operators, had a large stake in urban growth policy, and these local sector entrepreneurs aggressively lobbied city council to make their voices heard. Local sector businessmen were gamblers who believed in the idea of urban growth at any cost. In the name of growth, these small business entrepreneurs made insistent demands on the municipality on behalf of publicly funded urban growth schemes intended to extend the boundaries of settlement.14

After the speculative bubble in urban land burst following the Panic of 1873, for which local growth policy enthusiasts were justly blamed, the Populist Regime held real estate operators and utilities companies at bay until the mid 1880s, when the regime relented and sanctioned privatized urban growth schemes anchored by franchise agreements. These small task driven businesses were not only impatient with the municipality’s cumbersome bureaucratic procedures, but they also resented the working class patronage network at city hall.

The Populist Regime made policy when values were in transition from traditional to modern. It was a regime conflicted by merchant, entrepreneurial, professional, and working class values systems. Modern values were manifest in the many types of Cleveland business organizations that the Populist Regime tried and largely failed to bring under its policy making umbrella. But the traditional values of the Populist Regime originated in the neighborhoods.
Neighborhood colonies and neighborhood organizations

Neighborhood colonies supplied the traditional element in the Populist Regime. Within heterogeneous cities are homogeneous colonies or neighborhoods peopled by individuals of similar rankings in the class, status, and power hierarchy. People within these colonies have institutional allegiances, such as membership in a church, and create organizations, such as ethnic social clubs and political ward organizations, and use both to advance their commonly held goals. The geographical layout of the neighborhood colonies was ordered by the newly emerging streetcar system. Colonies formed around the radial streetcar lines like stepping stones in a series of pathways running east and west from the central business and industrial districts, the classic hub and spoke configuration of American cities. Each colony formed its own organizational base from which to influence urban policy.

Neighborhood colonies had political ward organizations, ethnic or American social clubs, churches, saloons, worker organizations, charitable agencies or branches of citywide charitable agencies, and in some cases foreign language newspapers. These organizations were the vessels of the working class ideal represented by city councilmen who were the point men for the working class ideal, the champions of the urban policy priorities of particular neighborhood organizations. But the highly parochial rhetoric of each colony obscured the fact that working class colonies demanded citywide urban policies that were service and neighborhood oriented. From the working class colonies came much of the political pressure to reorder urban policy priorities, trading economic development and urban growth for a greater emphasis on service distribution and wealth redistributions.

Each of Cleveland’s working class colonies was a mosaic of policy shaping organizations. The ward clubs, ethnic organizations, churches, and saloons that made up the policy making institutional base of the neighborhoods were anything but professional and bureaucratic. These organizations had one leader, however brief his tenure, and many impatient, combative followers who placed priority on neighborhood service distribution services and wealth redistribution patronage rewards.

The municipal government

The institution from which key urban policies ultimately flowed was the municipal government. Organizationally, municipal government was both
structurally flawed and ideologically conflicted, externally between the opposing claims of the regime’s constituencies and internally by the tension between professional and working class ideals. Nevertheless, the Populist Regime relied more heavily on the formal structure of government than any subsequent urban regime.

The Populist Regime spanned the administrations of nine mayors (1879–1900) who served under two city charters (1852 and 1892). Cleveland’s municipal charter of 1852 was a “weak mayor” system of government that gave the city’s chief executive officer few policy making or administrative powers. The mayor’s duties were limited to presiding over city council meetings, compiling the annual reports of the city’s departments, and making policy recommendations to city council in the annual address.

The 1852 city charter awarded real administrative authority to an unwieldy network of elective and appointive supervisory boards, commissions, and committees. Those who served on them were a band of unpaid elected officials, citizen appointees, councilmen, and career public servants, appointed variously by the mayor, the council, local judges, county commissioners, and the governor. Administratively, the boards, commissions, and committees were accountable to no one. They were required only to present an annual report to the mayor, which he in turn submitted to the city council.¹⁹

Budget making and taxation were the responsibility of city council. In annual addresses to the city council, mayors attempted to set policy priorities with budget and tax rate recommendations. Although the mayor’s policy guidelines and budgetary and revenue advice were sometimes heeded, the city council was more than capable of frustrating mayoral pretensions to leadership with independent action. Neither the mayor, nor the city council, nor the boards, commissions, and committees were legally accountable for the monies spent by the municipality.²⁰

Because accountability was lax, fiscal abuses and outright incompetence were frequent and frustrating. Mayoral pleas to council for support on charter reform were ignored, as were other attempts to reform the system. In 1873 Mayor Charles A. Otis argued that a measure of administrative accountability from the boards, commissions, and committees could be achieved if the members’ services were paid for rather than volunteered. “Gratuitous service,” Otis warned, “is expensive.”²¹ His successor, Nathan Perry Payne, rejected the idea of paid commission members, claiming that “It should be a source of great pride to every citizen of Cleveland that her best men are glad to serve on her various boards and commissions without pecuniary compensation.”²²
A few years later, the Populist Regime removed Cleveland’s “best men” from the various boards, commissions, and committees. Cleveland’s first Populist mayor, R. R. Herrick, explained this situation by saying that the city government was obligated to be representative of the city’s various neighborhood colonies and their “peculiar ideas.” Viewing this rationalization from four years’ distance and considerable experience as a city councilman, Mayor John H. “Honest John” Farley disclosed that the lack of mayoral power and failed oversight by the appointed boards resulted in a situation in which the city council was besieged at budget time by utility company lobbyists and by city departments packed with patronage appointees.

By the late 1880s, mayoral impotence was the object of gallows humor. Mayor George W. Gardner likened the mayor to “a ship’s figurehead, except that he is animate.” In 1888, Mayor Brenton D. Babcock took leave of office, “Being still of the opinion that numerous recommendations and voluminous matter in the annual message will be little favored and as little heeded by your body (the city council), that your patience may not be wearied nor you be permitted to lapse in slumbers of forgetfulness, I shall claim your attention for a few minutes only while performing my last official act and bidding you a final adieu.”

Mayor Babcock noted that city council was not the only obstacle: “There is but little opportunity for the nominal chief executive to render valuable service to the general public” because “nearly every executive department of the city government is practically independent. . . .” During the scandal-plagued Gardner administration (1885–86, 1889–1891), the habitually absent City Treasurer Thomas Axworthy at last turned up in Canada sporting a bankroll of $500,000, money he had “borrowed” from the city treasury. Even after a year of angry finger pointing, the combatants failed to untangle Axworthy’s bureaucratic lines of accountability.

The bureaucracy was not only independent of the mayor and city council; it was also conflicted by incompatible class ideals. Administrative departments grew only by grudging accretions during the Merchant Regime, but the Populists gleefully added employees to pay off political obligations and dispense city services. Experts in accounting, engineering, and public health were added to the city’s payroll at the same time as deserving friends of city councilmen were hired as clerks and laborers. The experts were guided by the professional ideals and the patronage employees were guided by the working class populist ideal.

Some administrative departments were segregated by ideal, but when a mingling of the conflicting ideals took place within a single key department, friction was inevitable. In the police department, for example, a hierarchy of
professional officers supervised the work of beat-walking patronage employees. The police department was administered through a paramilitary line and staff system of command and accountability. It was independent of the mayor and virtually independent of the Police Commission. The department policy and procedures manual provided a job description for each position in the organizational hierarchy, detailing responsibilities and lines of authority and accountability. The chain of command ran from the police superintendent to captains, lieutenants, detectives, sergeants, and patrolmen. Higher ranking line officers were aided by staff assistants. The higher ranking line officers and staff assistants were professionals, while most sergeants and virtually all patrolmen were patronage appointees.\textsuperscript{31}

The bureaucratization of public safety exasperated populist Mayor John H. Farley because it sacrificed neighborhood service delivery at the altar of managerial apparatus. Sergeants, he complained, were too preoccupied supervising patrolmen to arrest a disorderly drunk. “We also have detectives, too proud and too capable for drunks and disorderlies” and lieutenants “who keep watch over empty station houses.”\textsuperscript{32} Farley defined a captain as a man of a rank so “unfortunate that it deprives the public of his services” and charged that the superintendent and assistant superintendents were men whose ambitions and rank exempted them from making arrests. Farley added that the hierarchy, the job descriptions, the detailed responsibilities, and the lines of authority and accountability created some policemen “splendid in their contempt for other grades, jealous of the rest of the force and of each other.”\textsuperscript{33}

Farley’s plea was for replacing the cumbersome managerial apparatus with neighborhood patrolmen free to arrest criminals, corral the disorderly, and make the neighborhoods safe for decent citizens. Honest John Farley’s plea went unheeded. The working class ideal of Mayor Farley assumed delivery of neighborhood services with a minimum of bureaucratic fuss. He blamed bureaucracy for elevating some men above others without apparent reason and for obscuring the mission of the police and other departments in a jumble of rules, policies, and procedures.\textsuperscript{34}

Charter reform was at last embraced as the antidote to the weak mayor system. A new “Federal” charter, awarded by the state legislature in 1891, was enthusiastically supported by businessmen and professionals who trumpeted the new charter as the stake in the heart of Cleveland’s mounting legacy of bad government. The Federal charter, so labeled because it was grounded in the principle of separation of executive, legislative, and judicial functions, created a strong mayor system. The mayor was at last empowered to appoint his own cabinet of municipal department heads.
(subject to the approval of city council). Businesslike management accountability was expected to follow.\textsuperscript{35}

It did not. The Federal charter served, among other things, to reorder the power relationships among Cleveland populist politicians. Until the advent of the Federal charter, leadership in both political parties was dominated by Cleveland city councilmen. The parties, then as now, were devoid of principle and were too myopic and self-serving to see policy making whole. Party leaders were immersed in the remunerative particulars of distributive policy, patronage, franchise awards to utilities, and municipal service contracts to their friends in the neighborhoods. The party rank and file, composed of subaltern city councilmen and precinct committeemen, seldom challenged the leadership because they were divided against each other by ward and neighborhood turf wars.

But the appointive power granted to the mayor by the Federal charter vaulted the municipal chief executive to center stage in the fractious environment of local party politics. From 1892 forward, the mayor of Cleveland was a force to be reckoned with in party councils. Populist mayor Robert E. McKisson seized upon the advantages bestowed upon the mayoral office by the charter and built a powerful patronage network among workers at City Hall. In this he was aided by Harry “Czar” Bernstein, a city councilman and neighborhood boss whose power in party councils was decidedly second rank to the mayor. But even a powerful political “boss” under the Federal charter could not improve the operations of Cleveland’s municipal government.\textsuperscript{36} The strong mayor system made the mayor “stronger” and subdued but did not tame city council.

A major aspect in both the 1852 and 1892 city charters, and a major factor in the longevity of the Populist Regime, was the that the charters facilitated the proliferation of wards. In 1860, Cleveland’s 43,417 residents lived in eleven wards. In 1890, Cleveland’s 261,353 residents lived in forty-three wards. The increase in the number of wards may be viewed simply as a consequence of a sixfold population increase, but more pointedly, the proliferation of wards was a direct result of the Merchant Regime’s growth policy of annexation, for each annexed settled territory became a new city ward. The increase in the number of city councilmen coupled with the weak mayor charter meant that the city council would be the body most responsible for making urban policy during much of the Populist Regime. The voices of the neighborhoods were never more clearly heard than during the Populist Regime. The strong mayor Federal charter might have entirely silenced the voices of the neighborhoods but for the proliferation of wards. The policy preferences of the neighborhoods continued to be heard in Cleveland City Council until a series of lawsuits and charter reforms in the
first decade of the twentieth century attempted to introduce nonpartisan elections, at-large representation, and a reduction in the number of wards from forty-two to twenty-six.\textsuperscript{37}

The organizational base and the sustaining value system of Populist Regime Cleveland were in a state of transition. Business organizations were making the transition from commercial era countinghouses to industrial era corporations, but the process was not yet complete. An ideal appropriate to the function of the industrial era business had yet to evolve. Which of the three contending ideals—entrepreneurial, professional, or working class—was the right ideal for guiding the industrial business organization into the new century? The municipal government, the institutional offspring of the merchant ideal, was wholly inadequate as a policy making vehicle for the industrial city. The municipal government was structurally flawed, but it was also split by the incompatible professional and working class ideals. The professional ideal of middle class managers seeped into the municipality from the industrial corporations. The traditional element of the working class ideal entered from the neighborhood organizations that elected the city councilmen, who in effect ran the city and set policy priorities. During the Populist Regime attempts at reforming existing organizations and reconciling ideals proved futile, so the regime made do with the institutional base it had. Nevertheless, the Populist Regime was able to reorder policy priorities even if operational consistency was elusive.