

The

READER

Friday, January 12, 1979 Volume 6, No. 15

CHICAGO'S FREE WEEKLY

People's Choice?

In two vigorously independent wards, the Machine has selected aldermanic candidates through the "citizens' search" process.

After all, ward bosses are citizens, aren't they?

By Don Rose

Last year was the year of the political miracle.

Or so certain ward committeemen would have you believe.

In the last weeks of 1978, the Democratic Machine bosses in two *Reader*-area wards abandoned their tradition of back-room slatemaking in favor of an open "citizen search" process, just like the independents use.

Or so certain ward committeemen would have you believe.

The miracle-performing committeemen are Danny "I can get you into subsidized housing if you vote my way" O'Brien of the 43rd Ward, and Neil "I may be a lightweight but I'm the best the Machine has to offer" Hartigan, of the 49th.

Both committeemen were faced with finding candidates for stiff aldermanic races against independents: incumbent Marty Oberman of the 43rd is expected to win again (but not without a struggle), and David Orr, a Mundelein professor long active in Edgewater-Rogers Park community affairs, is putting together a powerful campaign in the independent-minded 49th. (Four years ago independent Mike Krelloff lost the 49th by only a few hundred

votes, and in 1976 Hartigan could not even carry his own ward while running for reelection as lieutenant governor because he was teamed with Michael Howlett.)

So, either working together or coming up with the notion independent of each other, O'Brien and Hartigan late last year ran little public charades, under the guise of openness, to do what they had decided to do in the political back rooms in the first place.

Meanwhile, in the Fifth Ward, which is so independent that it even beat the Machine out of the committeeman's job, a genuine citizens' search took place, just to remind people what the process is all about. More of that later.

O'Brien's "citizens' search committee" got off to an appropriate start when he named Adrienne Levatino—the Machine candidate Oberman clobbered in 1975—as cochairperson of this very open-minded meeting.

Oberman, of course, was invited to present his credentials to O'Brien's civic gathering, but Levatino tipped her hand just a bit by launching an attack on him in the course of announcing the meeting. Her cochairperson, Terry Newman, struck the

keynote with his comment that Oberman "is too busy criticizing the mayor and his administration..."

O'Brien went even one better by indicating his own displeasure with Oberman, but lauding Oberman's predecessor, mentor, and ally, Bill Singer. O'Brien later indicated he would have been eager to endorse Singer (whom he of course opposed bitterly when Singer was in office), but he just couldn't find it in his heart to endorse Oberman—who votes and works much the way Singer did.

Thus it was not very surprising to the independents who went to observe this "coalition of independent and community organizations" that the place was peopled with precinct captains, Democratic officials, and other assorted jobholders—along with a couple of bona fide community figures for window dressing.

There, on November 30 at DePaul University, were Ed Rosewell, the county treasurer; Sally Berger, head of the city's embattled health service agency; Steve Roman, head of the city's landmarks commission; Rick Alberts, head of the Lincoln Park urban renewal office; and a batch of real estate men who are O'Brien's

ronies. Then there were just ordinary precinct captains such as Chuck Renslow, John Kelly, Tim Fitzgerald, and many of their patronage-fed brethren.

Oberman wisely did not walk into the bear trap O'Brien baited, but five other candidates—all apparently understanding they were really seeking the Machine's blessing—presented their credentials.

After they all spoke, making attacks of varying strength against Oberman, Singer was introduced by O'Brien as the "granddaddy" of the 43rd Ward—but gramps was not permitted to vote. Singer told the assemblage that he was supporting Oberman.

The second candidate to present his credentials created a stir among the independent observers. He looked like a slim clone of Oberman. He was Ira Robert "Call me Bob" Strizak, a young trial lawyer with a big law firm that represents the interests of the First Ward of the City of Chicago.

He of course criticized Oberman for being "negative" about the mayor and the Machine—but he of course said he was going to be independent minded because of the ward's known independence.

Strizak acknowledged he had no previous political experience. The only community leadership he has exercised has been as president of his tennis club—which, God knows, may be qualification enough to hold office in Lincoln Park.

Therefore, it was even less surprising to learn a few days later that this very independent-minded search committee had selected Strizak as its candidate.

The *Lincoln Park Press*, a pro-Machine "newspaper," headlined: "Ira R. Strizak 'citizens' choice."

The *Near North News* simply put it, "A slatemaking committee appointed by Democratic ward committeeman Daniel P. O'Brien Jr.... picked Atty. Ira Robert Strizak..."

Only slightly less subtle was the handiwork of Hartigan, who has managed not to screw up the government for the past two years because he has not held public office during that time.

First Hartigan decided to push incumbent Esther Saperstein down the political stairs. Four years ago he pleaded with the less-than-with-it septuagenarian to give up her state senate seat and run for alderman because only she could save the ward from the pestilence of independence. As noted, she barely staved off the challenge—but her subsequent performance, even by Machine standards, has been zilch. Further, she angered people in the ward by pocketing her full senate salary before quitting to join the City Council—something then possible under a now-closed legal loophole.

To replace Saperstein in the upcoming aldermanic election, Hartigan handpicked a slightly bland Loyola professor, his neighbor, Homer Johnson, because he would be a good academic opponent for Mundelein professor Orr and because of Johnson's many efforts on behalf of the committeeman.

Johnson, who once actually headed a neighborhood organization in Rogers Park, superficially appears to be community oriented. But he served as chairman of the Bilandic-for-mayor campaign in the 49th Ward in 1977 and also was the chairman of the short-lived campaign to get Hartigan slated for secretary of state, among other services to the Machine.

Rather than simply announce his endorsement of Johnson—whose petitions were passed by Hartigan precinct captains—Hartigan set up a citizens "advisory" committee to hear all candidates objectively and open-mindedly, then pass their wisdom on to the ward committeeman.

Thus, at the Loyola Park fieldhouse on December 3, the seats were filled with precinct captains and other associates whose letters of invitation told them to come at 2:30 PM, while the invitation to Orr and his supporters said 3 PM. The independents had to stand at the sides of the room.

The official committee members selected by Hartigan included Democratic state representative Mike Brady, Leah Bloomenthal, an employee of the Chicago Economic Development Corporation and a Machine precinct captain, plus many fellow captains such as Maria Berone and Jimmy Nolan. Then there were some neighborhood businessmen with ties to Hartigan, plus just a couple of genuine community people. (The final vote for Johnson was 17 to 3, which tells you just about how many

of the latter were on the committee.)

One neat Hartigan touch was to appoint Sister Ann Ida Gannon—once an aldermanic aspirant—to the committee. She comes from an old Machine family, but also was once president of Mundelein College, during which tenure she became known as a sharp critic of the liberal Orr, her employee.

Yet another deft move was the appointment of James Langworthy, executive of a savings and loan that had been under attack for redlining by the old Citizens Action Program (CAP), in which Orr was active and which was led by his present campaign manager, Mary Lou Wolff.

State representative Woods Bowman, an independent Democrat and Orr supporter, was invited to join as window dressing, but declined.

Orr decided to appear at the meeting, but made clear in his brief comments that he knew the deck was stacked. His appearance, he said, was in deference to the few genuine community people who really might want to hear what he had to say.

Attacks against him were then led by precinct captains Bloomenthal, Berone, and Nolan, among others.

Saperstein could not attend the meeting.

Naturally, the vote went overwhelmingly for the Hartigan candidate, whose campaign now is being run behind the scenes by Hartigan's brain, Phil Krone, the public relations man named by state senator Richard M. Daley to be "spokesman" for Checker and Yellow Cab companies during the recent corruption investigation.

Despite the miraculous selection of Strizak and Johnson in these "open meetings," the true citizens' search remains a useful and legitimate instrument, when used legitimately. It was created by north-side independents a decade ago to find a candidate against the Machine in a special aldermanic election in the old 44th (now the 43rd) Ward.

Then, several hundred people got together, listened to various aspirants, and chose a young lawyer named William S. Singer.

Such searches go on during most elections in independent areas, sometimes even if there is an independent incumbent.

Most recently it was put to use by Fifth Ward independents, where there is a sometimes-independent, sometimes-Machine incumbent alderman named Ross Lathrop.

During several long, sometimes tortuous meetings, dozens of people from all parts of the ward, including members of local community organizations, school councils, and independent political groups, listened to three candidates.

Among the group was former Fifth Ward alderman Leon M. Despres, the independent movement's only living saint. Also, retired state representative Robert E. Mann, dean of the House independents, plus many veterans of the wars of the Independent Voters of Illinois. The chair was Kale Williams, former head of the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Council and executive of a large nonprofit race relations organization.

Another member was Robert Grossman, president of Lathrop's campaign in 1975, but now deeply disappointed in his candidate's record and inability to service the community.

After a frivolous candidate was dismissed, the debate zeroed in on Lathrop and Larry Bloom, a lawyer, founder of the local community health center, and staff head of the legislative commission that created Mann's Lake Michigan Bill of Rights program. Bloom has been active in the local neighborhood organization and many independent political campaigns.

Lathrop's record came under sharp attack. It is a mixed bag, bewildering to his friends as well as his many antagonists. He was elected in a very close contest against IVI-backed black leader Al Raby in 1975 with the acknowledged help of the Machine, which pulled its key precincts for him.

After the election it was discovered that one of Lathrop's leadership group, Michael Igoe, secretary of the Cook County Board, raised thousands of dollars for him by putting the arm on county and city contractors. The funds, which financed most of the runoff

election, came from people who said they had never heard of Lathrop but received letters from Igoe—who had the power to grant or deny multimillion dollar contracts in construction and related areas.

Despres publicly called upon Lathrop to return those funds, but the alderman refused. (The funding scandal was first disclosed in the *Reader*; Lathrop's response was to write a letter to the *Hyde Park Herald*, which then exposed more.)

Lathrop would later vote with the independents on many issues, but with the Machine on crucial matters, presumably under Igoe's influence. Igoe, you see, was designated to become the next ward committeeman when Marshall Korshak retired.

Thus, one of Lathrop's early votes was in support of Mayor Daley's new personnel code—a package that demolished civil service and put vast new patronage-power potential into the hands of the Machine. Then Lathrop would vote for the Machine's 1976 city budget. Both the personnel code and the budget were opposed by the real independents, Oberman, Dick Simpson (44th) and William Cousins (Eighth). (Lathrop recently denied having voted for the personnel code during an IVI interview session, but was forced to tell the truth when documentation was offered.)

Later, he would vote on the council floor for Bilandic for acting mayor, while Oberman and Simpson abstained.

But following the astonishing defeat of Igoe by independent Alan Dobry in the ward committeeman race, and the crushing defeat of Bilandic in the Fifth Ward, Lathrop began voting more often with Oberman and Simpson—especially as election day drew closer.

These are some of the issues that led the citizens' search committee to vote 20 to 11 for Bloom over Lathrop. Lathrop, predictably, denounced the committee, whose endorsement he first wooed and sought, as "unrepresentative."

Soon after, the IVI would vote more than two to one for Bloom.

Lathrop then suffered the final humiliation of those who try to serve two masters: the Machine that elected him endorsed someone else; now his only chance for Machine support is that it will again go with him if he is in a runoff with Bloom.

Perhaps the Machine will then set up its own "citizens' search" to give him credibility.