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Watergate Turns Town Around

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PARMA, Ohio, June 15—Parma is a tidy town, a city really, with lawns so trim they could have been hand-plucked and row on row of modest frame-and-brick houses that all look freshly scrubbed.

The slightly more than 100,000 residents (up from 28,897 in 1950), make up Cleveland's largest suburb, the ninth largest city in the state.

But even some of its best friends are quick to say that "Parma has an inferiority complex," apparently fostered or made worse by years of so-called Polish jokes that have left the city with an almost indelible bowling shirt and white socks image.

No matter, Parma still swims pretty close to the mainstream of America. Close enough so that it was one of the few cities visited by President Nixon in his limited campaigning last fall.

And Parma, logn a Democratic stronghold, rewarded him, as its self-respect swelled a bit, by voting by a sizable margin to re-elect the President.

What better place to sample the impact of the Watergate affair on middle-Americans who rallied to Mr. Nixon's banner in November?

Few Concede Nixon Vote

One of the most noticeable effects as the scandal has unfolded each day in newspapers and on the radio and television is the difficulty in finding anyone in Parma these days who will concede having voted for Mr. Nixon.

"When they ended the war in Vietnam, all those Nixon guys came out, and we knew who they were," said Bill Brake, president of Local 1005 of the United Auto Workers, which fought a losing battle to line up the more than 7,000 workers in the local Chevrolet plant behind Senator George McGovern, the Democratic candidate. "Since this Watergate things, we don't hear much from them anymore."

Watergate has obviously cast some shade on Parma's moment in the sun as a place that even a President would visit. And the Polish stories, known around there as "Parma jokes," continue.

Little wonder residents are defensive enough about their city to be planning "Proud of Parm Days" later this month.

Actually, while it has a large Polish population, it also embraces in its 19.7 square miles a great many people of German, Ukrainian, Slovak and Hungarian stock. Most of these residents are second- and third-generation Americans who moved to Parma from Cleveland's West Side in search of single-family homes and a bigger back lawn during the nation's great migration to the suburbs that began after World War II.

Ripe for Appeal

Although they have a strong leg up on middle-class status, a lot of them remain blue-collar union members—and most are Democrats. But they understood and approved of President Nixon's calls for "peace with honor" in Vietnam and "law and order" at home.

So when Mr. Nixon decided to take his suburban motorcade through town last



John Petrushka, Mayor of Parma. He feels his constituents are unhappy with Nixon Administration.



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fall, he knew the climate was right for mass defections by Parma's type of Democrats.

And defect they obviously did. The President received 25,800 votes to 17,800 for Mr. McGovern, whereas in 1968 Hubert H. Humphrey carried the city with 19,000 votes to 15,500 for Mr. Nixon and 5,500 for Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama.

Sitting in his expansive office in the modern Italian sandstone City Hall, Mayor John Petrushka, a tall, dark-haired Democrat who has held the position since 1967, tried to assess the effect of Watergate on his constituents recently.

Growing Concern Seen

"They're getting more concerned than they were originally," he said. "First they thought it was more political, but now it appears there was no concern for personal rights at all."

Declaring that a lot of Parma Democrats "just wouldn't accept McGovern," he added.

"Most people won't admit they voted for Nixon, but they're not happy with the things that are taking place. They're not happy with the way Government is being run. To put it simply, they think that the Government is geared too much to big business."

As for the Watergate case itself, the Mayor said that he thought the people "expect some of this in politics, but they don't expect bugging and zreaking and entering; that's going a little bit too far."

In a series of interviews

here this week with officials, union leaders and other residents, it became apparent that most were following Watergate developments more closely since the televised Senate committee hearings began than they had the early disclosures in the case.

Upset by Corruption

Some are angry. Others are still bored or confused by the daily details. But most seem upset with what they view as a corruption of the political process that has shaken their faith in government.

While not everyone blames the President directly, even those who feel he had no role in the matter believe he was ill-served at best by his associates.

At the low, brick senior citizens center next door to City Hall, Bill Daffner, a white-haired 80-year-old, paused with his wife, Nell, as they were leaving the afternoon card game, to discuss Watergate.

"It's a mess," he said. "It's unfortunate that President

Nixon should have placed his confidence in what he thought were trusted men. In my opinion, he was betrayed."

One of the few Democrats who conceded that he had voted for Mr. Nixon, Mr. Daffner said that he was "not at all convinced that he knew what was going on, since he was so busy with his China and Russian trips."

"I'd be very sorry to hear that he did," he added.

Marie Rebinske, a Republican, still sitting at a table with Gladys Stephen, said that she thought the President "probably could do a lot of talking, but he doesn't want to involve anybody."

Optimistic View

"But I think he's going to come out all right," she concluded.

In another room, shooting pool for nickels with four friends, Elmer Hoker said adamantly, "All they've got to do is put Nixon in jail. I'm no Nixon man. I think he knows all about it. If he doesn't, he's a damned fool to be President."

A housewife on Keystone Road, who did not want her name used, said:

"I don't like — and never liked — Nixon. I believe he was involved. He couldn't have been that stupid not to know what was going on."

Sitting at the bar in the clubhouse at the municipal golf course, an 18-hole, former private course near City Hall that Parma bought out a few years ago, Walter E. Minch, the local Democratic leader, sat discussing Watergate with Stanley H. Wojas and Francis Dobbins, two of the seven Democrats on the nine-man City Council.

"I think the resentment runs strong," said Mr. Minch. "I think it hurt us in November, but in the next election, I think it will help us."