



City-management experts William Sommers, Jake Dumelle and Roy Anderson are among the young (average age 29) enthusiasts the reformers brought in to help clean up Peoria.



City manager George Bean gets a sharp word from councilwoman Mrs. Myrna Harms, new majority leader and critic of the PCM-reform administration.

THE TOWN THAT REFORMED

By John Bartlow Martin

Corrupt and vice-ridden Peoria threw its rascals out and imported some bright young idealists to manage things. Now the town seems to hanker for the bad old ways.



Mayor Robert Morgan. The window was shattered by a bomb racketeers planted to cool him off on reform.

Over the years, Peoria, Illinois, has been known as a steamboat town, a whisky town, a railroad town, a river town, a convention town, a wide-open town. At one time it seemed less a city than a vaudeville joke. Renowned for its gambling, prostitution and political corruption, it was accounted almost a classic case of American municipal decay.

Two years ago the citizens voted to get rid of the old aldermanic form of government and to install the city-manager plan. The new administration assiduously scrubbed the city clean, amid loud praise. And then, in an election a few months ago, the people issued a somewhat murky mandate that seemed to indicate they thought maybe reform wasn't so good after all. Why and how did all this come about?

On a hot day in June, down by the edge of the Illinois River, where diesels honk in the railroad yards and men make earth movers in clangorous factories, heat and smoke and the stench from the stockyards press down on the gray cottages and broken streets in the section of town known as The Valley. High on The Bluff and farther out in The Knolls, the air is cleaner and traffic moves quietly past the man-

sions along Moss Avenue. Peoria is built on steep-rising hills above the Illinois River, and it is sharply divided into The Valley and The Bluff—the workers in The Valley, the owners on The Bluff.

Tall office buildings rise near the courthouse, set on a bench of land above the river, and out in the wide one-way street a neat policeman prowls up and down, chalking the tires of parked automobiles. ("We're pushing our chalking program vigorously," says the young man in the city administration who is giving me a conducted tour.)

The City Hall was built in 1897-99, and the copper on its dome is peeling away, and water has come through the roof, cracking the ceiling of the grimy council chamber. The new administration has cleaned the tobacco juice of years from the marble walls of the first-floor hallways, has auctioned off the old spittoons, has put fluorescent lights and brand-new steel desks and business machines into the ancient offices.

Across the street from City Hall is a parking lot where once stood the headquarters of the gambling syndicate—a gambling casino, an accounting office and a tavern. Citizens who received traffic tickets used to go into the tav-

ern and drop the tickets into a little box, and on Friday someone would go over to City Hall and fix all the tickets. And from this headquarters, too, the gamblers brought their monthly tribute, paid directly into the city treasury—as much as \$69,000 in one year.

“The town is down”—everyone says so. No more organized gambling, no more organized prostitution. The bars, once crowded, are almost deserted. The three large gambling casinos near City Hall which for years offered craps, poker, roulette and horse betting are closed. Slot machines have disappeared. The houses on The Line, the red-light district famed throughout the Midwest, are dark. A bartender says, “This used to be the best town in the country. Then we got a reform administration. Now it ain’t worth a damn.”

Students of local lore trace Peoria’s predilection for frontier-style living to the roistering steamboat days. The town’s recent history has been enlivened by gunplay and the periodic bombing of the homes of law-enforcement officials. Peorians talk about corruption the way people elsewhere talk about baseball.

Off and on, Ed Woodruff was Peoria’s mayor for twenty-four years. An old-timer politician recalls fondly, “Old Ed Woodruff.



Union spokesman Richard Estep and councilman James Manning led the recent campaign to “save Peoria” from the reformers. Result: in the elections only one PCM-approved man won—and he had renounced PCM support.



VOTE FOR INDEPENDENT COUNCILMEN
“PEORIANS for PEORIA”

The opposition likes to caricature Bean as the man who wants his own way with the taxpayer’s pocketbook.

There was a man that was a liberal. What made the town a wide-open liberal town was that Ed Woodruff started in 1903 and lasted till 1945. If some reformer got in for a while and the town was slowed up a little, he’d get back in and open her up. He poured out the jobs and seen that everybody made a little money and catered to The Valley and never paid any attention to the Association of Commerce. He never took a quarter himself. ‘Course, he didn’t mind his friends makin’ some of it. And he made the gamblers bring it in at campaign

time. But, hell, they overdid it. They put slot machines in drugstores and school zones and groceries and beauty parlors.

“Old Ed had an old houseboat called the Bumboat hauled up on the bank of the river, and he and his cronies used to run the city from it. That was where they chopped the heads off”—that is, dispensed patronage. “They’d go down there and they’d eat and drink and—you know, decide the city policies. He was a tough Republican, but he’d play with them Democrats. He didn’t bar any holts.”

There were no application forms for city jobs till the present administration came in. Excluding firemen and police, the city employed about 200 people, and they were swept out when the mayor’s office changed hands. Even policemen were fired and replaced with friends of politicians. Who ran the police force? “Well,” says a veteran policeman, “there were twenty-two aldermen. And each alderman had five friends. How many’s that? About a hundred and ten?”

The present chief says, “I run the police department.”

In 1951 the state legislature authorized Peoria to adopt the city-manager plan if it wished. Civic groups formed the Peorians for Council-Manager. They say that membership was open to the public, but PCM critics say PCM was a closed corporation. Mostly, PCM was led by men who live on The Bluff and represent the business interests of Peoria.

One of its young leaders, Joe Kelly, a customer’s man in a stock-brokerage firm, a big, crew-cut man of thirty-two, has said, “They were all just good citizens sold on the idea of the need for the cleanup of the city—bad streets, bad street lighting, plus the general decrepitness of the city. The president of PCM and the campaign manager were both leading

Jaycees. One was voted The Outstanding Young Man of 1951. We put out literature. We set up a speakers’ bureau and talked to five hundred organizations. The opposition was terrific.” It came from organized labor and old-fashioned politicians. But the plan was adopted, 15,000 to 7000.

The next step was to elect a mayor and eight councilmen in nonpartisan balloting. PCM decided to endorse candidates.

Kelly has said, “Not everybody thought we should. But there has to be some group to get good people to run for government. If not, the government will fall back to the grafters and crooks. To get a top industrialist or any honest man to run for

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Under the reform regime, police padlock houses on “The Line,” Peoria’s infamous red-light district.

The Town That Reformed

(Continued from Page 27)

public office is very, very hard. They won't subject themselves to politics."

For mayor PCM slated Robert Morgan, an upright man of forty-three, long active in civic affairs, a brother of the president of PCM and himself a leading lawyer who represents corporations in their dealings with labor unions. For councilmen PCM slated the president of the LeTourneau earth-moving-equipment-manufacturing company, the comptroller of a washing-machine company, the employee-relations manager of Caterpillar Tractor, a merchant, a mover, a newspaper distributor, the president of the Women's Civic Federation, and a banker.

Independent candidates filed against them. The campaign was noisy. PCM was accused of being a machine, trying to run the city. But PCM elected the mayor and five councilmen, giving it a 6-3 majority in council.

Council, taking office in May of 1953, hired as the new city manager George Bean. Bean, a professional city manager of seventeen years' experience, was then managing Grand Rapids, Michigan, and could not come to Peoria till July. Mayor Morgan and council, however, lost no time in commencing reform.

Mayor Morgan recalls, "The job of sewer superintendent had for years been a sinecure for the retired head of the bricklayers union. We called him in and asked what his duties were. He said, 'I help Mr. Kosanovich.' Kosanovich was his assistant. We asked when he helped him. 'When he needs help.' So we just cut off his job and elevated Kosanovich. That made the bricklayers mad, of course." They also appointed a new police chief, fire chief, comptroller and street superintendent. And Mayor Morgan ordered the police to begin raiding gambling games and brothels.

Actually, big-time organized gambling had already stopped, ruined by political turnover, the enactment of a Federal law taxing gamblers, and the murder of the head of the gambling syndicate. Under Mayor Morgan the police closed the surviving poker games and lotteries. Prostitution, however, was still running wide open. "We had to root 'em out," police chief Frank Evans recalls. They made more than fifty raids on brothels.

The court fined the keeper and the inmates \$200 apiece. This was costly; a raid might cost a madam \$1800. (Fines have totaled about \$25,000.) Moreover, after the police raided a house three times the city asked the state's attorney to obtain an injunction padlocking the house permanently as a public nuisance. Once somebody planted a dynamite bomb at the mayor's house and blew a hole in the foundation. But the police raids continued. Soon The Line was down. The police think a call-girl operation has begun. Now and then, they find a girl in a car or a tavern.

Such furtive operations do far less damage than a wide-open line: they do not corrupt officials or spread disease. The month the raids started, 130 new venereal-disease cases were reported in Peoria, and the average for the preceding two years had been eighty-eight new cases a month. In 1955 it has been twenty-six.

When Manager Bean arrived he found the city's affairs in a deplorable state. This did not surprise him.

Bean, a tall, red-haired man of fifty-five, said recently, "The city-manager plan is a tool that desperate people reach for when everything else has broken down. Peoria's services were ineffective. There was a big backlog of needed physical improvements after forty years of neglect, and the city was broke—we had three hundred thousand

dollars in unpaid bills. The budget had been unbalanced since 1948."

One of Bean's aids recalls, "Nearly all the department heads were about sixty-five years old. Everything was obsolete. They were using old incandescent lamps in the drafting department; I worked there awhile and kept getting headaches from the poor lighting. Some department heads never got to travel around to see what other cities were doing."

William Sommers, the new personnel officer, says, "In the old days the aldermen would hire men for the street department, then lay them off, mostly old men, couldn't work anywhere else, old winos, helpless drifters. So the street department was really a kind of relief agency. I felt sorry for the old guys. But you can't run a street department that way. We've been building up personnel files. We introduced physical examination, probationary six months' period, progress reports, training program and a merit system."

Manager Bean began his work in Peoria by recruiting a professional staff. All five of his recruits were young and all but one came from outside Peoria. Jake Dumelle was twenty-eight when he became Bean's administrative assistant, a mechanical engineer with a degree in public administration who had been assistant to another city manager. Dumelle brought in a classmate, Roy Anderson, a thirty-year-old certified public accountant, to replace the city comptroller. William Sommers, with a graduate degree from Harvard in public administration and experience with the Colorado Municipal League, became personnel officer at the age of twenty-seven. Dean DuBoff, an architect just out of the Navy, was the only local man; he became director of inspections. The youngest of all was Dan Hanson, who, at twenty-four, was hired away from the Chicago Motor Club to become Peoria's first traffic engineer.

The young administrators are bouncy and bright and eager. One of them said recently, "It's surprising how much we get done at staff meetings, considering the number of prima donnas there are among us." On an average they possess two college degrees each. Their average age is now twenty-nine, all but Dumelle are married. They sometimes refer to themselves as "the crew-cuts."

Watching them at work, you get the impression they care more deeply about the city than many people who have lived here all their lives. Their youth and eagerness have led them to make some "boners," as they term them. Manager Bean has said, "Young people tend to go too fast." Once the traffic engineer, Dan Hanson, began enforcing the parking-meter ordinance on Monday until nine o'clock at night, something that hadn't been done for years. Police handed out 300 tickets in one night. Amid loud public outcry, council changed the ordinance.

Dumelle recalls, "Once council bought some parking meters to be paid for at two thousand dollars a month out of revenue. The comptroller thought this was silly and asked the manufacturer for a five per cent discount for cash, got it, issued tax-anticipation warrants, and paid them off. Council didn't find out about it till the end of the year. The comptroller hadn't consulted them and they were indignant. He couldn't understand that as a private CPA he had had only one boss, but now, as a public official, he had more than a hundred thousand. A lot of public relations is needed in this work. You get in a town like this, you can't change it all overnight."

When Hanson, the traffic engineer, came to Peoria he spent about six months con-

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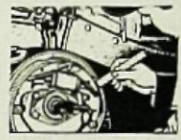
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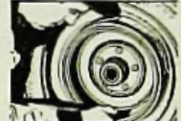
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piling facts about traffic—accident statistics, law violations, traffic flow—then waded in. He installed new street-name signs throughout the city. He adopted a city-wide through-street plan. He changed bus routes. He painted forty-five miles of center stripes and lanes. Perhaps his biggest job was removing a lot of stop signs.

Hanson said recently, "Under the old form of government, aldermen were deluged with requests for stop signs. Stop signs were erected at every place where a near miss occurred, or where there was a school, or where the alderman's wife was involved in an accident. The city has sixteen hundred street intersections and it had over thirteen hundred stop signs. We went to the council with a plan to remove three hundred and ten signs. They adopted it. Since then we've had only three petitions asking that signs be reinstalled."

A blond young man, crew-cut, pink-checked, short and compact, Hanson spends as much time as he can driving around and looking for traffic trouble spots. One day recently he left the downtown district and headed up The Bluff on Knoxville Avenue, traffic swirling smoothly along on new pavement, and he said, "Along here is the first place in the city that we installed rush-hour parking control. They'd tried it several years ago and it lasted thirty days—too many complaints from the neighbors. When we got ready to do it, the captain of traffic and I went to every house along here, door to door, and explained why it was necessary. We've had very few complaints."

Driving on, Hanson pointed to a set of traffic lights and said, "Here's a new intersection we synchronized. We put in green arrows to let them turn on the red and head for downtown; then we laned it off-center to give 'em room to turn, and we took off parking on one side. That's the kind of stuff we're always looking for."

In an outlying neighborhood, seeing a motorcycle policeman lying in wait for stop-sign violators, he said, "He's not there just because he happens to live nearby or anything. He's there because they've analyzed the accident reports of several months and found that they were caused by stop-sign violation at about this time of day. It's really scientific now."

Enforcement and engineering were getting results. Last year only three people were killed in traffic accidents—fewer than ever before. Injuries and accidents declined. In 1953 the National Safety Council ranked Peoria's traffic-safety program forty-third out of fifty cities. Last year it ranked third. "So," Hanson said, "we feel something's beginning to happen. Of course, it's slow. You can't move any faster than the town will let you."

At the end of its first year in office the new administration issued a report to the people, pointing proudly to its achievements. Peoria had been termed an "All-American City" by the National Municipal League. The administration had improved the city's housekeeping, bought new equipment, bought a new police headquarters, improved law enforcement, cut accidents, taken politics out of city service, and balanced the budget. It had balanced its current budget by funding \$300,000 of unpaid bills, by re-enacting a city vehicle license which the outgoing aldermen had repealed, and by imposing a new cigarette tax.

But it still had not solved its basic financial problem. The city badly needed \$20,000,000 worth of new streets and sewers and other capital improvements. To raise the money the council submitted to the people a proposal to levy a one-half-cent city sales tax. It promised to cut back the property tax and take off the vehicle license and cigarette tax. But labor viewed this as an attempt to shift the tax burden to the workingman. And the Association of Commerce objected that a city sales tax would

drive shoppers out of the city. The proposal was beaten 4 to 1.

How did Peorians like their new government? Most of them liked the vice and gambling cleanup, though some felt nostalgia for the old days. They liked the housekeeping improvements in general, though many grumbled specifically about the streets. Many said they didn't know whom to complain to, now that councilmen were not elected from wards. Some said the new administration's innovations had been abrupt and arbitrary. Some said the new regime was too costly and had raised taxes; they complained about Bean's \$18,000 salary and about "the outsiders" he had imported to run the city.

Organized opposition came from tavern-keepers, who felt the cleanup kept big conventions away and hurt day-to-day business, and from organized labor. The state Federation of Labor has long officially opposed the city-manager plan as not being representative government. Labor was not included in the original PCM which brought the manager plan to Peoria.

The new administration fired a city painting contractor and merely hired a painter; this antagonized the union. The administration ended "labor patronage"—took the job of sewer superintendent away from the bricklayers union, the job of building commissioner away from the carpenters union. It bought cigarette-tax stamps from a nonunion company, offending the printers union. It bought prison-made traffic signs.

Dick Estep, who speaks for the AFL, complains bitterly about PCM. "They sold the people on the idea that this type of government was going to be independent. No politics at all. But PCM has a slate, it has a treasury, it has officers—to me, it's just a political party." And Coy Lutes, of the United Auto Workers (CIO), said, "We're not against the manager form as such, but only against the way in Peoria it has been packed with management people. They are all antilabor to start out with."

The administration faced its first test in the councilmanic election of 1955. Four councilmen had to stand for re-election. Three of them originally had been supported by PCM; the fourth, a labor man, had not. This time PCM endorsed them all. The labor man promptly renounced PCM support. PCM began running ads praising him; he ran ads denouncing PCM. Otherwise the campaign was quiet until the last couple of weeks. Then all the independents began attacking PCM. An organization called Peorians for Peoria sprang up to aid the independents. Its cartoons caricatured Bean. Its ads kept asking: "Who Is Mr. Syndicate?" and hinting that Bean

was "Mr. Syndicate" and was involved in some devious plot of an unspecified nature. It said, "Mr. Syndicate Ordered IT for Grand Rapids and Now Peoria," not saying what "IT" was. Voters were urged to "watch tomorrow's newspapers for details" and to "Save Peoria" on April fifth.

PCM disclaimed to answer any of this. Its ads simply praised the incumbents and recalled the bad old days of the aldermanic system: "inefficiency," "waste," "payroll padding," "graft," "shady deals." One of the independent candidates, James J. Manning, a shrewd, genial former alderman who had become a symbol of the old regime, promptly ran an ad listing numerous members of the old regime and asking whether PCM was accusing these "distinguished Peorians" of chicanery.

Nearly everyone expected the PCM candidates to sail through. So, when the blow fell, it was a heavy one. Not a single PCM man won except the labor man who had repudiated PCM endorsement.

What had happened? Almost nobody interpreted the election as a repudiation of the city-manager plan itself. Most people, PCM and labor leaders alike, thought the election indicated resentment of "PCM domination." Mayor Morgan attributed the result to the small vote—"the agingers always get out and vote." The vote was indeed very light—only 41 per cent of the registration. But it was light all over town and one of the elected councilmen said, "If The Valley had got out and voted, we'd have beaten 'em worse." How did he account for the light vote? "It's the same all over the country. The people figure why should they vote; they got a nice big house, nice big car, they got television, they got everything they want, they got money." He found the people's mandate somewhat cloudy. "The people definitely want a change. You've got to change something." Probably, he thought, they wanted better streets and alleys and more stop signs.

After the election, many people expected that Bean would be fired forthwith. Citizens bought chances in a pool, betting on the day of the month the city manager would be fired. The night the new council was inaugurated a sizable crowd turned out. But Bean wasn't fired, and four months later he still hadn't been.

Council, however, adopted a resolution asserting its authority over the manager and its sole power to determine policy and limiting the manager's authority to administering council's policies. Council established committees to "investigate" city problems. The independents say that formerly one or two PCM councilmen, meet-

ing secretly with Bean, made major policy decisions and presented them to council for rubber-stamp approval. They insist that they will scrutinize the city's every act and return government to the people.

They have certainly worked at it. The former council had met only twice a month, and then only briefly; the new council holds long meetings twice a week or oftener. Council voted to "adopt a policy of having windows of city buildings washed every two months." Council voted to reinstall stop signs at one intersection whence Hanson had removed them. Council spent weeks studying the comparative merits of a brass pump and a cast-iron pump on a new fire truck. As a consequence of this attention to detail, business is transacted slowly and major problems tend to pile up.

Bean appears to have adopted a strategy of asking council's guidance before making the most unimportant decision. Possibly he hopes to bore council to death, so that it will restore to him some of his duller prerogatives. Council leadership has devolved upon two holdover anti-PCM councilmen—Robert McCord, an attorney; and Myrna Harms, a young woman of considerable charm. At almost every council meeting one of them takes a pot shot from the floor at Bean or PCM. Recently, Mrs. Harms' criticism of fire-department purchasing blew up a scandal that resulted in a vitriolic dispute between Mrs. Harms and Mayor Morgan, the indictment of the fire chief, and a councilmanic vote of confidence on Manager Bean, which he survived, 6-3.

Bean, a hotheaded, upright man, has tried to avoid brawling with his critics. He said recently that the manager plan functions best in cities where the manager and council feel a mutual confidence. That this is no longer so in Peoria disturbs him, not only because he is involved but because the plan itself is involved.

Why has a government so widely acclaimed aroused so much opposition? Some has been aroused by councilmanic headline hunting. But PCM invited opposition at the outset by failing to embrace all segments of the city, including labor. PCM was blinded by its mistrust of politicians. It blamed all the city's woes on them and said that ousting them would solve all problems. It forgot that politicians perform a real service: they respond to the people's wishes. PCM leaders neglected to do this. The councilmen, enthusiastic about the plan and anxious to make progress rapidly, were too eager to hand over responsibility to the manager. The administrators reckoned too much with slide rules and too little with people. Their determination to solve the city's financial problem led them to propose the unpopular sales tax. And yet surprisingly few people in Peoria seem to think the manager plan is on the way out. Many people, however, do think the city may return to the ward system of electing councilmen, to meet the most widespread objection to the plan: people feel their government is remote.

Recently the state legislature authorized council to enact a one-half-cent city sales tax without referendum, and it did so, repealing the vehicle and cigarette taxes. The new tax solves Peoria's financial problem. It will mean better streets and sewers. But it is still an unpopular tax.

The election demoralized Bean's aids. Councilmen talked of abolishing some of their jobs. Recently, however, the staff has taken heart. One of them said, "At first the election seemed a repudiation of everything we stood for. But maybe it was good for us. We experts have a tendency to take ourselves too seriously, to think that 'papa knows best,' to just go ahead and do things. In administrative government you forget that politics underlies everything in a democracy." THE END



"Hi, there. You fellers done your good turn today yet?"

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