

point of view

ROLDO BARTIMOLE

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STOKES, FORBES

"I have my way of fighting and I understand it. I understand that if you have a sore that is festering under the scab, the only way to treat it is to pull away the scab, give the sore some medical attention, some light and fresh air, and let it heal.

"To believe that because you do not disturb the scab or because you wrap the sore in very fresh, sanitary, pure white bandage you are healing the wound is wrong. You can't treat that sore unless you expose it. There is no way around it.

"You must grab the scab, pull it off, and expose the sore in all its ugliness, its rot, its stench, its own kind of sickness. That is the way I approach Cleveland and national politics."

That is former mayor, now chief municipal court judge Carl Stokes' assessment of how he faces political confrontations, as outlined in his book, "Promises of Power."

He apparently hasn't changed his approach.

Stokes' direct challenge to council president George Forbes represents a confirmation in action of his political dictum.

It also represents one of the bitterest conflicts between two former political allies, both substantial political operatives, that I can remember.

Stokes, after a break in relations surfaced, struck Forbes on two levels where Forbes could be most vulnerable: his emotional language, and his dealings that seem to benefit himself and his friends financially.

By publicly opening these areas Stokes

almost made it necessary that the news media follow up.

Said Stokes: "He (Forbes) has turned out to be a foul-mouthed, unregenerated politician of the most despicable sort and I think he ought to be out of office."

He went on further in a WERE radio interview to slam Forbes on typically foul language, charging him with calling blacks, "niggers," and black women lawyers, "black bitches."

He then charged Forbes with political influence in helping his friends and suggested that Forbes might be rewarded in return.

"How he (Forbes) subsequently benefits from that I would not dare to speculate upon," said Stokes after relating that a Forbes law partner held a contract with Standard Oil of Ohio (SOHIO) for security on its new building. It was a project Forbes pushed heavily and wanted no public discussion.

Forbes, in the past few years, has expanded his private business dealings, using his wife, Mary, as the official owner, into housing, broadcasting and other businesses, including an outdoor movie theater with former council president Jim Stanton, a major foe of Stokes during his term as mayor.

That makes it hard for a newspaper like the Pee Dee to ignore, as it has, the implications of Forbes business dealings.

Stokes went as far as calling for Forbes removal from office and suggested that he'd help in achieving that aim, according to a Pee Dee account.

The split thus seems a chasm that the

best of peace-makers would have trouble bridging. In fact, little public response in defense of either has been evidenced. Most seem to want to stay clear of the battle.

Forbes must, or should, be worried because he has most to lose.

Further, Forbes has not had to face politically as formidable an opposition as Carl Stokes when his own political life hung in the balance.

There's an important strategic difference in the political styles of the two black political leaders. While Stokes has an appealing personal political style when campaigning, he also has relied heavily upon organization.

Forbes has tremendous personal political skills. But he has never really moved beyond his ward where he has near complete safety. He has not, however, attempted to build a political constituent base beyond that.

In an open political battle with Stokes that would be a serious disadvantage.

Stokes in 1970 organized the 21st District Caucus when the Democratic party, ironically, refused to seat George Forbes as vice chairman.

Stokes was able to use that power base in 1971 to knock off the Democratic party favorite Tony Garofoli in the primary. He also was able to punish three sitting black council members, defeating them. That should be a haunting memory to Forbes.

If Stokes, via the 21st District Caucus, decided to back council challengers, he could very well control two or three votes of black council members.

It's not hard to figure out what that would mean when Forbes barely survived a vote for council president last time, only after one black vote, under tremendous pressure from black leaders, was changed and a coup to dump Forbes fell apart.

A political figure close to both says that Forbes doesn't realize how angry Stokes is over rumors which he feels he traced clearly back to Zeke Forbes, George's brother. This person also believes that George didn't have anything to do with the rumors.

He does warn, however, that George should not underestimate Stokes, as many have done politically to their detriment.

The rumors involve a story that goes back in Cleveland history when Stokes was mayor and a boycott of McDonald's

hamburger chain challenged the franchise over black ownership. Many prominent blacks were involved but only two were charged with blackmail - Rabbi David Hill, who fled, and Jim Raplin, who was jailed.

Rumors have been circulating that he was returning and making a deal with county prosecutor John Corrigan. Somehow Stokes' name was linked.

Corrigan's name has been anathema among blacks, particularly political figures who feel he has used his office to go after them on issues he's never done when white pols were involved.

Corrigan has had disputes with Stokes and Forbes, pursuing the carnival trial with the latter.

Stokes wrote in his book: "In 1970 when we told the top men in the county Democratic party that we wanted black councilman George Forbes to be a vice chairman, most of them agreed except Corrigan. He alluded to some corruptness on the part of Forbes and declared that Forbes was not going to be an officer of the party, and the others fell into line behind him. They could not buck him, because he could turn loose his office on anyone of them and make life very uncomfortable. Two years later in 1972, Forbes aligned himself with the white Democrats, and John Corrigan supported him to be one of the three county co-chairman of the Democratic party. In April, 1973, the white Democratic councilmen voted for Forbes to become the first black president of city council. Had Corrigan's opinion of Forbes changed so profoundly in three years ?

Some people feel that Stokes is paranoid about the rumors but he apparently felt that they could be extremely dangerous to him.

The rumors definitely have been peddled around and they have a viciousness about them.

Forbes' success in making money and gaining power in Stokes' absence from Cleveland probably helps fuel the resentment.

Stokes apparently feels that he played a major role in opening economic possibilities for Cleveland blacks with his four-year term and at great personal expense. And he wasn't rewarded well enough.

Of course, Stokes left Cleveland for some 10 years. In that time events didn't stop.

But his victory as many court judge showed that he remains a formidable political force. His name remembered

not only for his achievements but because his brother Louis has kept the name before the public, in high regard.

And the use of the 21st District Caucus in both the dome and school hotel fights shows that Stokes can still move people, even if he isn't on the stage personally.

Stokes must realize now too that he missed by small chances a much more historic role in politics.

Stokes hadn't meant to be mayor of Cleveland but had sights on national politics as a congressman.

As a state legislator, he pushed for a district which could accommodate a black candidate. But court action held up the creation of the district and three weeks after becoming mayor, the seat opened after a Supreme Court ruling.

"It was my district," he wrote of the 21st. "I had fought for it. Now three black Democratic councilmen lined up to run for it - George Forbes, Leo Jackson and George White. They hadn't supported me in my fight against the party to create a district a black could win in and I'd be damned before I'd let them reap the benefit.

"I ran my brother Louis - who had been one of the lawyers who argued the case - and put behind him all the machinery which had just elected me as mayor." Stokes adds that his brother soundly defeated all three, even in their home bases.

Stokes and Forbes became closer when Carl was mayor and Forbes a leader for him in council. But Forbes returned to the party when Carl left.

One can't underestimate the potential effect of the Stokes-Forbes rift, particularly in an election year.

Stokes has the reputation of striking out fast and hard at anyone who has or he perceives has attacked him. And he perceives this rumor spreading as a vicious attack that could seriously damage him.

Unless Forbes can patch this up it could be a long year for him.

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DOME

Dome-mania is back.

All the politicians and civic leaders are lining up and the Pee Dee and the rest of the news media are counting noses to check if they are all straight in line to give away the public money.

Wouldn't it be refreshing if those forces got together to solve the problem of homeless people or how people in need might get food and proper housing.

But no. Instead, the news media - cheerleading as usual for vested interests - are pushing the politicians to tap the public till for the multimillionaire team owners, their multimillionaire ball players, concessionaires, and those who can charge off their taxes on loges and good times.

Have you ever seen the media crusade for the interests of poor people the way they crusade for the rich ?

Cleveland would fall into a hole if we don't - on the public dole - build a dome for Art Modell and the gang that will buy the Indians.

So line up, Mayor George Voinovich. Line up, Gov. Dick Celeste, Line up, Mary Boyle, Tim Hagan and Virgil Brown. Line up, council members.

And do your duty. Represent the rich and the wealthy. Isn't that why you're there ?

And get ready, people. A few more political careers have to go the way of Vince Campanella.

* *

MODELL

Art Modell, Browns owner, has been doing as well in court as his team has on the field.

Modell lost another legal battle in his long tussle with minority owner Bob Gries.

The Ohio Supreme Court over-ruled an appeals court ruling that would have denied the Gries family a second slot on the Browns' board of directors.

The ruling upheld Gries' contention that a family deal had insured two of seven board seats.

Gries, of course, is still outvoted.

This victory follows last year's verdict that Modell had to pay back to

to the Browns, \$6-million paid for the sale of the Cleveland Stadium Corp. to the Browns. Modell owned most of the CSC and Gries had charged Modell with self-dealing by having the Browns buy CSC for an inflated price.

Judge John Angellotta ruled surprisingly almost totally in favor of Gries and suggested that Modell might be made to pay the considerable legal fees of the plaintiff, a considerable blow to Modell.

And the legal fighting between the two hasn't ended with more court dates upcoming.

* *

Lynched

There's a good reason the latest Cleveland Electric Illuminating Co. (CEI) effort to obtain Muny Light by a long-term lease won't fly.

It's called politics.

In this political year, with his colleagues facing fights for four year terms, John Lynch showed his political acumen by launching his mayoral campaign with a CEI missile dud.

The quickest look at figures showing how voters last reacted to a sale of Muny Light to CEI should reveal to Lynch that his proposal would be greeted about as well as an iceberg arriving at a sunny beach resort.

Even George Forbes has cold-shouldered the proposal.

Lynch apparently thought he could lure a couple of west side council members and fuse them with Forbes delivering black council members votes.

But the vote showed that support for Muny was heavy in 1979 in black wards when the city last voted on the issue of selling Muny.

For instance, Earle Turner's ward had a 54.7 per cent pro-Muny vote. (Figures revised to fit new wards, as compiled by the city).

Artha Woods' Ward 6, 52.2 per cent for Muny; Larry Jones, 69.2 pro-Muny; Fannie Lewis, 51.7. Even George Forbes, 48.5 per cent against the sale.

West side council members, of course, have to consider their ward votes: Helen Smith, 74.2 per cent pro-Muny; Jim Rokaksi, 76.3 per cent; Joe Cannon 78.1 per cent; Dale Miller, 67.5.

It's highly unlikely council members want to take on such an emotional issue in an election year. Lynch, whose ward went 77.3 per cent for Muny, should be aware also that the only vocal support he's receiving comes from John Zayac (59.6 per cent).

If that isn't the kiss of death, that phrase has no meaning.

* *

New design

If Point of View looks different it's because it is.

POV was originally designed by John Morrell in 1968 when it started.

Morrell left town and returned. When we met recently he wanted to know if I were still putting out that thing. Yes. He thought maybe it could use an updating, graphically. So here it is.

Morrell did the first wall mural in downtown Cleveland some 17 years ago with his integrated park bench still at East 9th and Rockwell.

point of view

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*"I shall continue to be impossible
so long as those who are
now possible remain possible."*

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MEANS RENEWAL DUE**

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