

McKeldin's View

Baltimore: 'No Mean City'

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Baltimore

Patron of Arts

In the chandeliered, red-velvet-curtained mayoral office of the nation's sixth-largest city, urban renewal blends with history and elegance, and the virtues of democracy are extolled along with those of French leather.

For the man behind the big desk at the end of the long room, sporting a yellow flower in the lapel of his immaculate brown suit, is a most unusual mayor indeed. *Jan 2, 1965*

Theodore Roosevelt McKeldin is a Republican, in a city where Democrats outnumber Republicans by more than four to one. But he doesn't let it bother him.

Volcanically voluble, devoted to English magazines, Paris, art and theater as well as slum clearance and property taxes, he is serving his second term, after two terms as Governor of Maryland.

"And," he says, the words tumbling over themselves at headlong speed, "I'd rather be Mayor of this city than Governor of the state. It's a bigger challenge.

"Whether our democracy is to exist or be destroyed, its fate will be decided in the great metropolitan centers.

"Here, in the cities, is enormous poverty. Here is an economic and social revolution. Can we find solutions?

"Of course we can. It's no worse than the revolution our fathers faced in 1861. We can beat it. The challenge is to do it."

Hopes Outlined

And as he proceeded to outline the hopes and problems of Baltimore, sometimes pacing the rich carpet as he reached out for the words to clothe his enthusiasm, he painted a picture similar to the one in many cities across the country.

"We need money," he said. "We have a property tax — \$4.14 now on a 60 percent assessment. I don't think it's so high, but the people do, and if they do, then it's high and that's that.

"I'm asking the City Council — 21 Democrats — for a license tax. Philadelphia has one.

Louisville, Ky., has one. St. Louis has one.

"With it I could tax everyone who works in Baltimore, not just the people who live in the city. It would be 1 percent of a man's annual wage, taken out by the employer and sent directly to City Hall. How we need this money!

"It would bring in about \$22 million a year, six million dollars alone from the people who come in from around about to work each day. . . ."

Council Balk Seen

For all the Mayor's enthusiasm, chances are that the City Council will refuse to vote the tax. He is prepared for a fight, however — and has certainly managed to work some political magic in the past.

The question of money is a key one for him, as with other mayors. Without it, he says he cannot go ahead and do all the welfare work that has to be done across the city.

Already vast programs of urban renewal are being financed largely by federal

money, along with private capital and city funds. Like other mayors, Mr. McKeldin is anxiously awaiting more federal money from President Johnson's antipoverty program.

But — "we need more," he says — and is off around the room again, ideas flying like sparks from a fire.

And Then, Automation

He launched into the problems brought by automation.

"Recently a big factory here — airplane parts, weaponry — laid off 1,200 men, skilled mechanics, earning between \$9,000 and \$12,000 a year, with records of 25 years service," he said.

"Machines had made them redundant. They'd been told, 'This is it.' I stood next to one of the men at a Christmas celebration last year. 'No one wants my kind of work any more,' he said. 'I'm 52. My child has had to leave high school. My life insurance policy has lapsed. I'm grateful for unemployment compensation, but trying to find a job is such a business. . . .'"

The Mayor paused, shifted in his chair, and went on:

"These are the problems that confront us. We have to find solutions. We will. These men" — he was in top gear now — "can't be permitted to walk the streets in numbers without endangering the form of government as we know it."

Appalachia, Too

The Mayor spoke of the poor people of the Appalachian mountains, some of whom come into Baltimore and other cities to try and find work.

"Their coal has gone — finished, no more," he said. "They have 10 to 14 children. They are so uninformed they don't know how to get relief."

"Someone said to me the other day: 'These people are a disgrace.' Well, they're not. You and I—we're the disgrace if we don't find ways to help them. They're our people! Are they to be the end-products of our society?" *Jan 2, 1965*

Mr. McKeldin is a Republican, but not in the Goldwater tradition. He was the speaker who put Dwight D. Eisenhower's name into nomination at the Republican Convention of 1952. Today he is a strong backer of Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller of New York.

U.S. Aid the Answer?

He sees no other way but federal help if American cities today are to meet their obligations. "It's not possible for the cities to do it alone," he said.

"We have in Baltimore a tobacco tax as well as our property tax, but it isn't enough. We get some help from the state, yes, but not enough."

Mayor McKeldin has a reputation in Baltimore for sticking to his principles, never fearing to express an opinion, and being able to sway the votes of enough Democrats to get things done.

He has no patience with politicians whose acts are geared to vote-getting—and

businessmen in the city say he is sincere in his attitude.

One of his moves was to push through a civil-rights program which is the strongest of any Southern city.

Baltimore is the first city below the Mason-Dixon Line. Its population of 950,000 is about 35 percent Negro.

One-Third Negro

For many years, Baltimoreans have chafed because their city was comparatively little-known for its size. "How many millions have driven to Washington, looked over toward us, and just seen a gray, drab haze?" One businessman asked me. "It's only now that we're doing something about it."

To the visitor, it appears that a large part of downtown Baltimore is currently being torn down and rebuilt. Gaping holes and tall cranes are everywhere. The Mayor leaps into an explanation:

1943 Started Renewal

"Years ago, you couldn't believe the slums we had here," he said. "Speculators bought up old houses, Negro families were packed in, and the result was awful. This is an old city, incorporated in 1729. The buildings are old."

The first urban renewal move came in 1943, when Mr. McKeldin was serving his first term as Mayor. He located a new complex of homes for Negroes in the Cherry Hill area, over loud protests from other sections of the community. *Jan 2, 1965*

In 1905, he campaigned to build a new state office block in the Mount Royal area of town. Business followed, and private enterprise, in the form of the Greater Baltimore Committee, Inc., organized a gigantic 33-acre, \$140 million project for downtown called the Charles Center.

The committee — formed by 100 of the city's leading businessmen, and aided by the Committee for Downtown and the City—drew up plans, decided what was needed, and generated action.

Key figures were the head of the planning division, David A. Wallace (now professor of city planning at the University of Pennsylvania) and the founder of the committee, mortgage banker James W. Rouse.

Mr. Rouse and Mr. McKeldin admire each other. Mr. Rouse praised the Mayor to me; the Mayor spelled out Mr. Rouse's name so that I could make no mistake, and called him one of the foremost men in the city.

Mutual Admiration

Work on the Charles Center continues. Basically, the center is a unified complex of new office building towers, linked by pedestrian walkways, plazas, and retail shops.

Details were explained to me by the committee's executive director, William Boucher III, high in the \$11 million dark-glass and aluminum tower called One Charles

Center.

It is a sister block to the Seagram building on Manhattan's Park Avenue, designed by the same architect, Ludvig Mies van der Rohe.

Mammoth Plan Formed

When Mr. McKeldin was re-elected Mayor in 1963, he called Mr. Rouse and other committee members together, and suggested another mammoth planning scheme, now called the Inner Harbor-Municipal Center Study.

The committee sent for Professor Wallace to do the planning. As Mr. Boucher explains it, the project will cost \$260 million, covering 128 acres of the heart of Baltimore.

Actual cost to the city will be \$30 million. The rest comes from private and federal funds. The committee hopes to complete it well within the forecast time-span of 20 to 30 years.

Old buildings are coming down. A new municipal building, a new court house, 3,700 dwelling units, 55 acres of parks, and one million square feet of new office space will take their place.

Credit to McKeldin

The committee gives the Mayor full credit for initiating the plan.

Mr. McKeldin was so anxious for me to know about the plan that he whisked me out of his office and down the hall to a model. There he went over it in detail, while his secretaries looked vainly for him under the chandeliers.

After talking for 75 minutes with vim and vigor, the Mayor said good-by, pressing upon me a signed copy of a book he has written about Baltimore called "No Mean City."

He repeated his conviction that, though the problems of the city today were grave, "We can solve them." And went back to his paintings and his urban renewal.

This is the last of five interviews in which big-city mayors in the East assessed urban problems.



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Theodore R. McKeldin

Ponders commuter tax