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WHAT HAPPENED?

The conflict between management and labor is as old as capitalism itself. On one side you have the administration, with pencils and paper and telephone buttons nearby. Meanwhile, the workers toil in the fields, streets or factories, producing the necessary goods and services, always struggling for a little fairer share of the pie. Each side is isolated from the other; workers rarely seeing the inside of an office--administrators rarely raising the sweat upon their brows. The whole arrangement is almost tailor-made to breed misunderstanding, mistrust and division--perhaps by ancient design.

By this point in time, almost everyone in town has heard something about the city employees' attempts to gain formal recognition from City Hall, in the form of appeals to logic and reason, all in vain. Following several lengthy debate sessions at City Commission meetings in October and November, the Commission finally voted "no" to the question of recognition of the United Public Employees Association of Lawrence (UPEA) by a 3-2 margin.

This was a shameful thing. All of our city employees are engaged in providing the most vital functions which any community could demand. We continually cry for better police and fire protection. We want our garbage picked up. We want our streets and sidewalks kept in good repair. We want clean and safe park facilities as well. The men and women who provide us with these services are dedicated to doing a good job. An overwhelming majority of the nearly 220 municipal employees involved live right here in Lawrence. They need services too--and they have a first-hand understanding of the problems associated with their procurement--perhaps better than anyone else in the community--including the Mayor and the City Manager. The failure of the City Commission to unanimously recognize the UPEA is nothing less than an insult to the integrity of every policeman and woman, every firefighter, street worker, sanitation worker, and parks and recreation worker in Lawrence.

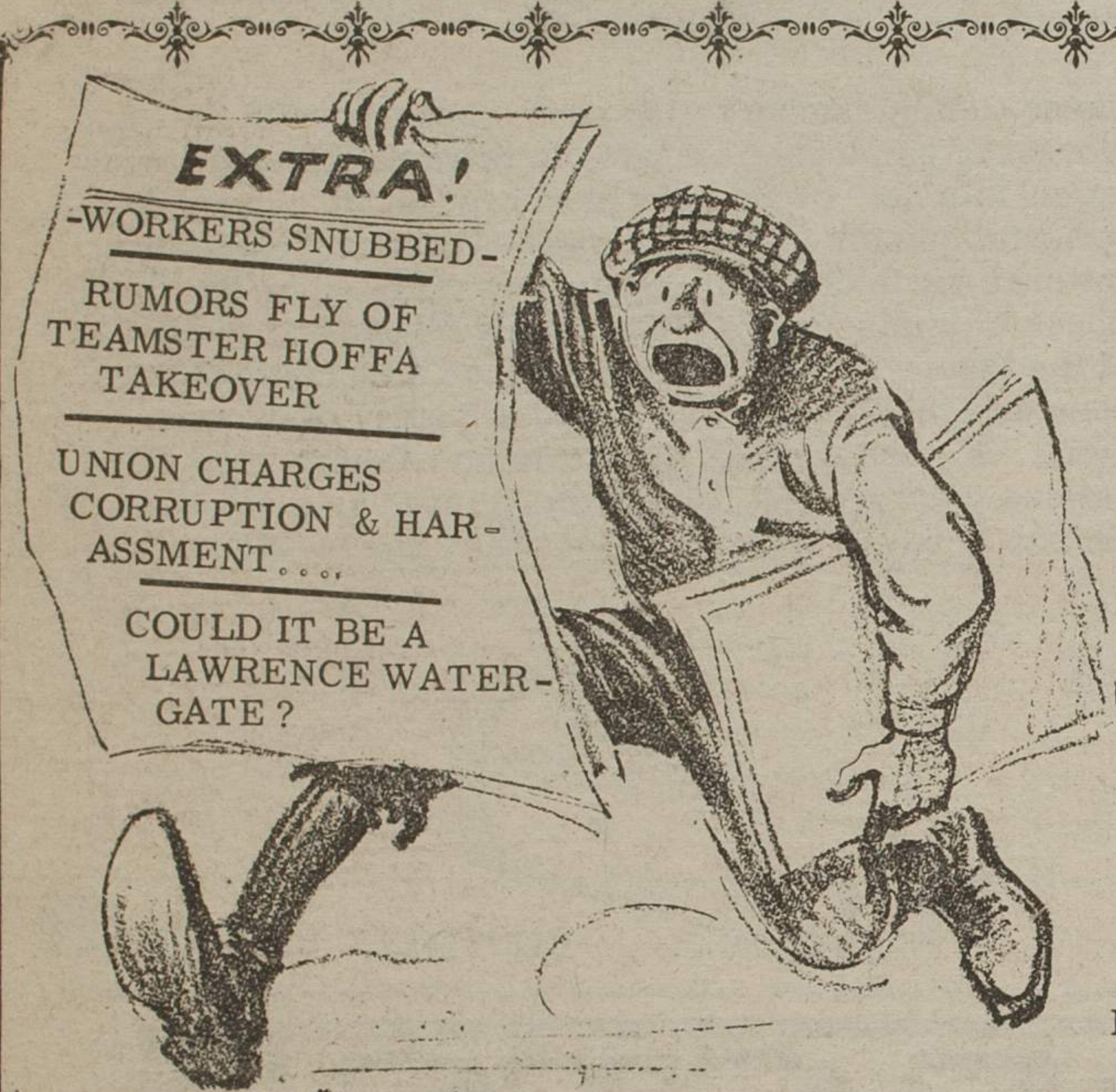


The PUBLIC NOTICE hereby takes a firm stand in the support of the right of municipality workers of Lawrence to organize themselves for the purpose of collective bargaining...in defense of their jobs and their integrity. We also support their demand for a system of binding arbitration, by law, as set forth by the Public Employees Relations Board of the State of Kansas. Until city workers have a legitimate voice in the management of their own affairs, they will remain in a subordinated position, treated insipidly as upstart children. Until they are recognized as dignified individuals, with Constitutional rights, there will be no peace in labor-management relations at City Hall. And so...in keeping...the workers will now speak for themselves...

November 6, 1975

AN APPEAL TO THE PEOPLE OF LAWRENCE, FROM THE UNITED PUBLIC EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION OF LAWRENCE (Firefighters, Sanitation Employees, Street Department Employees, Police Officers, and Parks and Recreation Dept. Employees)

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PUBLIC NOTICE

LAWRENCE, KANSAS

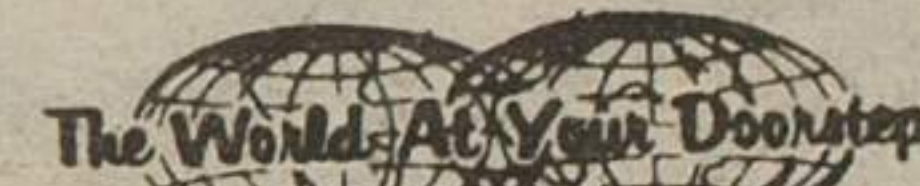
DECEMBER 1975

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 2

THIS IS YOUR PAPER. ALL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PUBLIC NOTICE ARE ENCOURAGED. WRITE BOX 114

Inside

- Barkley Clark talks about the Haskell Loop...page 12.
- Ever been to the Garden of Eden?...page 4.
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The Game Goes On; Something Has Gone Wrong



HE Sixties rediscovered ecology. We and our environment are one. We can't escape it, we are in a place, not apart from it.

Another 60's rediscovery: the subtle effect of form on meaning. Body language suddenly told us a total communication included message plus what a person's body did when he talked. If a person crossed his legs when he talked one thing was meant, if he kept his legs apart, another. On a group level, teachers found that interesting lectures wouldn't guarantee a lively class. The whole feeling of a group could be changed by arranging chairs in the room in different ways.

Let's carry these discoveries into an analysis of what happens every Tuesday night at 7:00 in downtown Lawrence Kansas on the 4th floor of the tallest building in town at 9th and Mass.

City Commission meetings are held there.

The content of meetings varies (the Commission both designates National Beauty Parlor Week and decides the fate of neighborhoods) but the layout of the room, the manner of audience participation, the presentations by staff and so forth, in short, the forms of the City Commission, are relatively static.

The 60's discoveries have not been applied.

Imagine: The commissioners arrive in t-shirts and jeans and sit on canvas-bottomed fold-up stools. Or imagine: a plexiglass shield is installed between commission and audience while the commissioners, topped with powdered wigs and swaddled in robes, sit behind oak judgement benches. Setting makes all the difference in audience participation.

The commission and audience stare at each other. Stare in a bar and you're slugged, it's that potent an act. The advantage of the arrangement is that it allows the politician's eyes to be read by the audience (remember watching Nixon sweat on our TV screens?) while the politicians can monitor the audience.

The message back of it all is this: audience is one group, commissioners another. How to close the gap? Think of the situation of the planning director showing a site plan map to the commission. Rather than turn his back to the audience, block the map with his body and point things out to the commission without including the audience (every little movement has a meaning all its own), why couldn't those maps be cast onto the wall with a magic lantern so all could see? The psychic effect of this would be that the audience and commission were joining as mutual spectators.

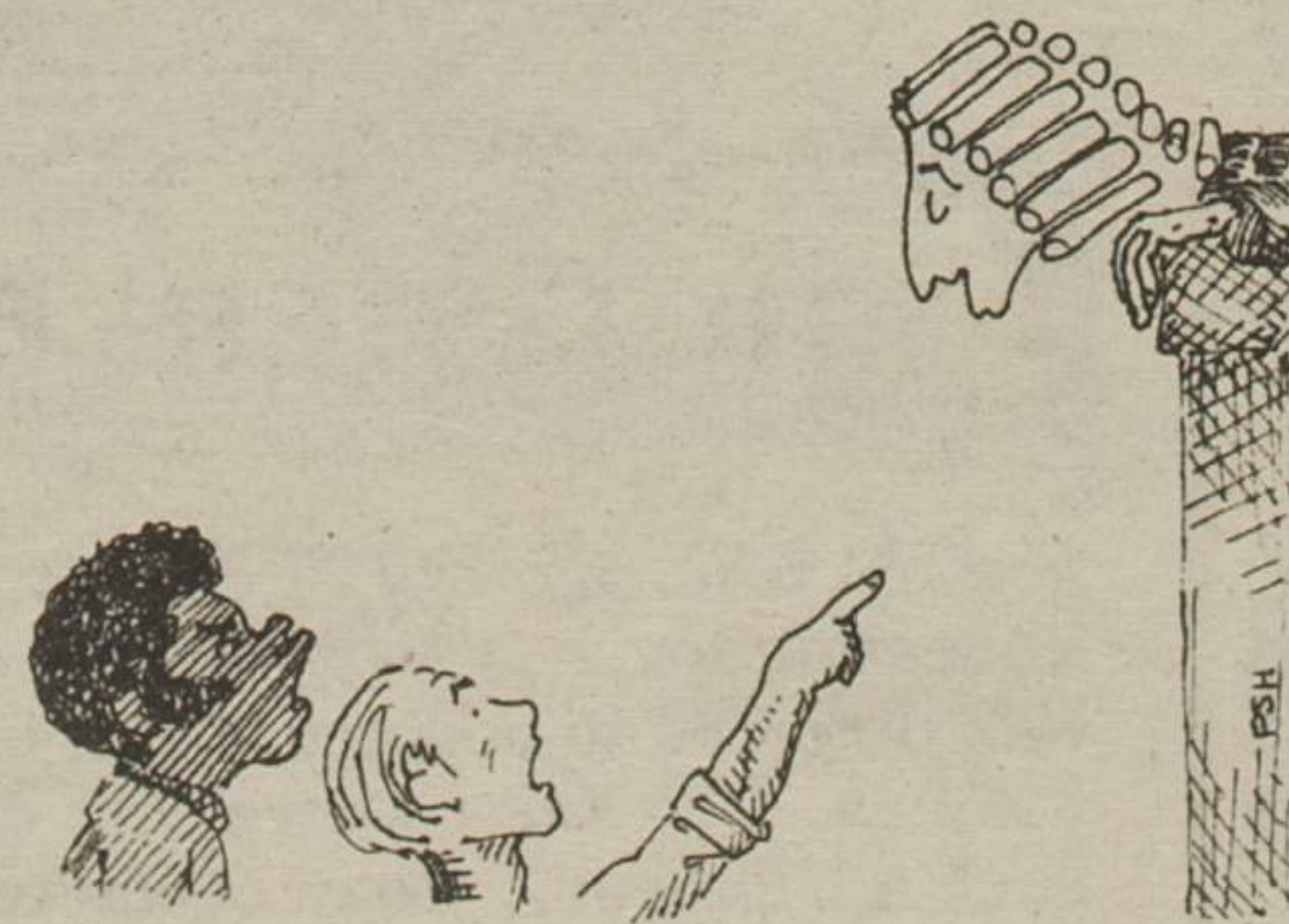
As it is, the impression left is that the commission members are experts, the audience hardly worth including in the discussion. Do they vote? No. Do they matter? No. That is the unspoken message.



But focus on what is. Think about the fact that one addressing the commission must come forward to a microphone to do so.

Forget the fact that this form is entirely appropriate to a Christian culture that stresses the power and necessity of

witnessing before individuals and groups. You are sitting in the audience. You find something someone says objectionable. You may also find the distance to the microphone overwhelming. Your jaw locks. If you are a fool this is to everyone's advantage--as anyone who attends commission meetings and watches the ego freaks who love to hear themselves yammer and pontificate, will attest. But you can't separate those folks from a microphone anyway, so why disadvantage the more modest by forcing them across that gulf?



The bristlers step forward anyway. So do the trained talkers, the polished, the pros. Others just gulp, or feel the feathers in their stomach, or whisper to their neighbors, or do anything to keep from crossing the space to the mike.

If they got there, they might not be able to speak anyway. I once saw a man forget everything he prepared to say at the podium and talk nonsense for three embarrassing minutes. He never came to another meeting. Anxiety that rips out your memory is horrible.

The arrangement of furniture in the room pits staff and commission on one side of the room (the staff conveniently turned so it faces neither audience nor commission, but can pivot either direction) against audience on the other. I say "pits against" because that is the effect of the arrangement. They couldn't divide it more neatly with a black stripe.

Then there's the agenda. At his first commission meeting, a new attendee wonders about everything. No hostess hovers at the door to greet him with a mug of coffee and answers to his questions. No guide to city government is handed him, no pamphlet explains what appears on the agenda, or why. It is mysterious as church. No one could describe to the novice the process he has stumbled upon, since it is not a conclusion but a process. A most complex one. Commissioners and staff, involved for years, forget the awful initial ignorance. The spectator plays catch up ball.

Part of the bafflement is what the Hell everyone is talking about. A bond is no longer something you buy from Uncle Sam for 25 bucks, no it's a general obligation (or GO) bond, or a revenue bond. Understand? I didn't the first time I heard those words. What's an easement? a planned unit development? community development funds? general revenue sharing? Language turns into a gangster who fogs the room then clubs the unaware, who don't know, who just don't know, who can't know without a law degree or grad work in political science or sheer gutty persistence. We are put to sleep and then we sleepwalk our way out the door, yawning and wondering what happened when we reach our house. We won't return.

The layout of the room, the format of discussion and the talk itself drives people from commission meetings. You must be greatly ironic or patient to muddle through it, week after week. Only a few do. The pros. And then the enraged come, on an ad hoc basis. That's it. And that's how it will continue, until some consciousness of the effect of environment and form on audience participation emerges. I don't expect it will be soon.