

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Democratic Party of Trumbull County Project

Councilman Sam V. Rizzi

O. H. 273

SAM V. RIZZI

Interviewed

by

Mark Dittmer

on

June 13, 1977

SAM V. RIZZI

Sam Rizzi, a plumber by profession, has developed into being an important leader of the Democratic Party of Trumbull County. Mr. Rizzi first became active in local politics in 1962. Sam was representing a plumbing association trying to make a change of code before the Warren City Council. The city council caucus refused to hear Mr. Rizzi's change of plans. This denial angered Rizzi to the point of running for city councilman in Ward 5 in Warren.

Rizzi served as a city councilman from 1964 until 1969 in his ward and also served as councilman-at-large from 1969 until today. He is presently serving his fourth term. As a city councilman, Rizzi has worked diligently in water projects for the county and is also a member responsible in bringing mercury lighting to the Warren community.

Mr. Rizzi has been named the Ohio State Plumbing Contractor of the Year in 1969 and the National Plumbing Contractor of the Year in 1970. Mr. Rizzi presides in Warren with his wife, Irene, and is the father of three children.

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INTERVIEWEE: SAM V. RIZZI

INTERVIEWER: Mark Dittmer

SUBJECT: Councilman experiences, City Development

DATE: June 13, 1977

D: This is an interview with Mr. Sam Rizzi for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program. Today's interview is located in Warren, Ohio on June 13, 1977 at 8:00 a.m. The topic discussed will be on the history of the Democratic party of Trumbull County by Mark Dittmer.

Now first, Mr. Rizzi, I would like to ask you to give a description of your family and political background and relate whether whom or who has motivated you to go into the field of politics.

R: What motivated me was at a plumbers association one time, they wanted a change in the plumbing code and I was designated to go down to City Council, this was in 1962, and the change was from galvanized piping to copper piping. So I went down there. I went in the caucus room with City Council and then they refused me and I was mad and as I turned around I said, "I'm going to be one of your opponents next year." I stuck to my word and I ran and I won, and I've been in politics ever since.

D: Can you give a description of your starting point up till now?

R: Well, I ran in the primaries in 1963 and I won and I ran in the general elections in 1963 and I won and I took office. I was Fifth Ward Councilman on January 1, 1964. I served three terms in the Fifth Ward, that was six years. Then I ran for Council-at-large and I've been there eight years for Council-at-large, four terms. This is my fifth term now running for Councilman.

D: What are the fundamentals of being a Councilman and what are the problems involved?

R: The biggest problems are financial problems. The duties of a Councilman are as legislator. If you're ward Councilman, it is seeing that everything in your ward is going all right. You take the complaints and try to fulfill the complaints, but the biggest job is being the legislator, making laws.

D: Can you give an analysis of your main political philosophies and creed and how you put them into practice, if you have any political philosophies you follow by?

R: After every general election I forget about the parties and I just work for the benefit of the citizens. I don't go down any party lines or anything, I never did. That's why a lot of the other Councilmen are mad at me. They always try to beat me, but they never do.

D: As far as the main politicians of the city working with the Councilmen, are there any kinds of difficulties between the Councilmen-at-large. Essentially, I don't see exactly what the fundamental purpose is, is it related with the mayor's office?

R: No, a Councilman-at-large runs city wide. There are three elected, there are always three. Then we have eight ward councilmen and they just run in a designated area, in a ward. Councilmen-at-large have just as much right, they have anymore right than a ward councilman. We do work closely with the mayor. He tells us his programs, what he wants done and we study them. We have committees, so we just do work with the mayor.

D: What are some of the main issues that you fought with or fought against during your years in the service in Trumbull County?

R: One of my biggest issues was in 1966 or 1967. We didn't have any mercury lights in the city of Warren and crime was high. So I sponsored legislation and I had a big fight. All the other Councilmen wanted to tax the people for the new mercury lights and I said no, "We're going to take it out of the income tax. It took me three readings and I had to go almost three months. I finally got six votes to pass it. That was my great achievement, I think, of being in council. There was no cost to the taxpayers.

D: What were some of the other problems that exist today?

- R: Our biggest problem is our Sanitation Department. We went down to landfill and we thought that we were going to be ahead money, but here it's costing us money to go down there and that's what that meeting is about this morning. We need new trucks. I did go down to Alabama to see a sanitation department down there. They had what they call a bailing process and I would like to get into that. You can give over a ton of garbage and they'll put it on a cubical, they just compact it. Now that's going to run us about a half a million dollars and I think we should take it out of our community development fund money so we don't have to increase our garbage rates. We could do that half one year and half the other. That's what I'm going to propose.
- D: Talking about the party itself, when do you think the Democratic Party in Trumbull County was at its peak?
- R: I think they're now at their peak. We have more Democrats in office now than we ever had. Just like when I took office in City Council in 1964, we had six Democrats and five Republicans. Today we have ten Democrats and one Republican and also the majority of our county are Democrats. We just have two Republican county commissioners and all the other offices are all filled by Democrats.
- D: Is there any reason for this build up?
- R: We did have two Republican presidents here the last, maybe that had something to do with it.
- D: Okay, you've speculated on its highest, can you speculate on its lowest ebb?
- R: Gee, not since I've been in office. It has always been going up and up. We can't capture any more seats, you know, offices even in the state level and the federal.
- D: Do you ever remember a time when the Democratic Party was at their lowest?
- R: No, I don't, not since I've been in.
- D: Talking about the parties, who's your favorite local politician past or present in Warren?
- R: You mean the one I admire?
- D: In Trumbull County.
- R: In Trumbull County, Reid Batton, Judge Reid Batton. I admire him a lot. He has good philosophies.

D: Can you expound upon why he has motivated those views?

R: He runs a good office and he's a good speaker. If you ever listen to him speak he's always handing you "Democrat, Democrat." He's just a great guy, he is.

D: Campaign policies here in Trumbull County, do you remember any unusual circumstances that ever went on in a campaign or is the Democratic Party cohesive during campaigns?

R: They're not in the primaries, but they do get together in the fall. Like last fall I was on for County Commissioner, we were really united, I mean all the offices. We met and everywhere that we went we just really stuck together. We all talked for one another at meetings. We were really united last fall, that was the best I've ever seen.

D: You don't remember any unusual circumstances that happened during a campaign, strange things that happened?

R: You do find it in the city, like a lot of times on election day you know we usually have a sample ballot, and this happen a few years ago. On one part of town maybe they would have your name scratched off the ballot and have somebody else's, you know, the sample ballot. Things like that, but that happens everywhere.

D: As far as the future of the Democratic Party in Trumbull County, do you see any changes overall or do you think it's going to keep the way it is as far as the future of the party?

R: No, I don't think there would be any changes. It has always been for the working man, middle class. I don't seem to foresee any changes.

D: Changing to the national scene as far as the past, in the 1940's and 1950's most Democratic Parties throughout our cities were controlled by legal machines and today it seems to be going into the past as far as Mayor Daley has overheard. Do you see any resurgence for this?

D: No, I don't think so, I think it has passed to have one man dominating all the power. I think it has passed.

D: What do you think of the two party system?

R: It's good. I believe in the two party system. The only thing I don't believe in is the Independent Party. They never run in the primaries and they always run in the

general. A lot of them are just Republicans and Democrats that probably switched over. They try as an Independent, but I've never seen too many Independents win in this area.

D: As far as the proceedings for the local mayor's office in Warren compared to, or the City of Warren, compared to Youngstown or Girard, are some of these areas run the same?

R: Well, Youngstown has a charter form of government. You get like Girard and Warren and Niles, they would be called a strong mayor form of government. That's the only difference there. The mayor, he is the administrator and the council is the legislature; you have the two branches.

D: As far as running a format, Trumbull County is different?

R: You mean the county?

D: The county format against Mahoning County's format?

R: Youngstown would be different. He appoints the chief of police, the Mayor of Youngstown, and the firemen. Now you get Warren, they're not. If one is in office during the civil service and a new mayor comes in they still stay there and then if they do retire then the mayor in office at that time has the right to appoint a chief, a fire chief, or a police chief.

D: But as far as just administration differences, is there?

R: No, there isn't too much difference.

D: What are some of the main issues going on right now as far as urban renewal in Warren, or is there going to be a resurgence or kind of build-up?

R: I think they're just about finished because urban renewal now is a community development. They changed that and how long the government will finance community development I don't know. Urban renewal is finished as far as . . . The new name now is community development. We have more of a say-so with the money that comes from the government into community development than we had with urban renewal. It was rough, you had to go by the law. The community development is more lenient, it gives us more power and how to use the money for costs.

D: Do you think Warren's a stagnant town as far as . . .

R: No, I don't think so. People say it, but I don't think so. I think it will be revived.

D: In what way?

R: I think downtown will be fixed up if we can only get those absentee landlords to do it. All those buildings downtown are all owned by people that live out of town. They're working on it now, like they're building a new senior citizens building. That's with community development money. And we're going to have a big parking area. Some day I do believe that we're going to have a farmer's market down here like they have in Youngstown. Then we have what we call a seecology, that this summer we're going to clean up all these areas, cut the grass, and do the ditching. No, I don't think it's stagnant.

D: Having talked to Commissioner Pestrak about some of the problems in this area, he brought up the point that Trumbull County is having a problem getting industry into the area.

R: Well, the reason for that is sewer and water. Now if the commissioners would work with this we wouldn't have any problems, like that golden triangle, you know, that piece of annexation with Packard Electric and all those plants. They want to come in, but the commissioners have stopped us. They do have our sewer and water, the only reason they want to come in is the sewer rate will be cheaper, the water will be cheaper, and their fire insurance will be cheaper. Then we are running sewers up there on the southwest side, that will be a good development.

D: Why can't the commissioners agree on it?

R: I don't know. I know we've lost in the appellate court and now it is in the State Supreme Court. We don't have any industry in Warren, they're all on the outlying areas. The reason they're there is because of Warren, we gave them our sewer and water just like Lordstown out there. I was on the water committee when that came up and I fought for the waterline out to Lordstown. That put the city in debt 1.7 million dollars, and we can't pay anything on the principle until 1999. That created lot of jobs. That created Lordstown. That was the City of Warren that did that, but we didn't get the credit for it though.

D: As far as city development with this new industry going up in Conneaut and places like that, it seems like there will be a shift of population or at least a part of Warren might even go up there.



- R: Oh yes, you'll see part of it go up there, but I think it'll benefit this area too. Some of that money will trickle down this way, it always does, because we have a lot of unemployed in Warren and Youngstown. No, that will be good for our area even if it is up in Conneaut, it'll benefit us. A lot of people that still live in Warren will probably, maybe drive up there, back and forth to work.
- D: Do you think the administration offices in Warren and Trumbull County are efficiently run and what do you see are some of them . . .
- R: No, I know the biggest problem.
- D: What is it?
- R: Everybody wants a little identity. They want to stay there and they don't want to work together. Just like a few years ago now, Howland Township trustees wanted to work on that agreement we had, but then Bazetta Township reneged. They would have had sewers and water, they could have had everything out there. Every time they were going to lose in taxes, we were going to give it to them back, an incline service like blacktop and stuff like that to make up the difference. Howland trustees were in favor of it, but Bazetta Township wasn't. That would have been a great thing for this area.
- D: As far as trying to keep a small town image or the problem of keeping Warren seems to be coming out as being the aggressor as far as trying to mop up on some of these small areas. I can't see it in that manner, but this is the way these outside places look at it.
- R: No, the reason they look at it is because we are the largest city in Trumbull County and those little townships wouldn't be out there if it wasn't for the City of Warren. We had the sewer and water.
- D: Well, how should that really benefit them?
- R: Well, you have to have water and sewers to build homes, and factories. You must have sewer and water, that's one thing that's holding everything up, but nobody wants to get together. The county and the cities ought to get together and sit down and talk about it. Just like in a committee up in Lordstown, I talked to them to give them water because they are now a village; we never annexed them. So we're in the water business and I was up here selling water. I have ordinances out in tonight's meeting.

- D: Do you know the other side's view?
- R: I guess everyone wants to have their little power, their little kingdom, and maybe they don't want to give it up.
- D: So it's something similar to Cleveland?
- R: I don't know too much about Cleveland. I think we have 25 square miles in Trumbull County. We have 25 townships, 25 police departments, 25 fire departments and 25 street departments. That's ridiculous! We ought to have one big metropolitan area, then it would really save the taxpayer's money. That is in 25 square miles, 25 police departments, plus the city, so you'll have around 30.
- D: Where would you have it all centered, in Warren?
- R: No, they could have it in satellite places, all around.
- D: If you have 25 street departments, everybody is plowing snow. That's ridiculous. I talked to the County Highway Department one time and he said just a few more pieces of equipment and he could plow all of Trumbull County. Everybody had to have their own little department. That's really wasting taxpayer's money.
- D: So you want Trumbull County to work as just that large county?
- R: Sure, that's the way it should be. It should be one big metropolitan area.
- D: Do any other counties in Ohio work this way?
- R: I don't know, but I can see it because we are very heavily populated. This is the heaviest population of the state right up in this northeast part. This is really heavily populated, but for 25 square miles that's ridiculous having 25 of this and that. That's not doing the citizens justice, it's just costing everybody money. You go start plowing snow and you stop at that line, or you just keep going right? You go right to the boundary line and you stop and you turn around.
- D: What are some of the other fundamental problems?
- R: Like I say, the biggest problem is water, sewage finances that run government. They're always looking for a dollar all the time. If it wasn't for Uncle Sam, everybody would be in poor shape.

- D: As far as the taxation process, where do the city's taxes go to?
- R: Most of our taxes go to the general fund, that's the police and fire department and the streets. They get the gasoline tax. They operate that way. The sewer department get theirs from the sewers. The money that we charge to the home owners, and sanitation is almost self-sustaining. We don't get too much from real estate taxes, we get very little. If it wasn't for our one percent income tax we would be in trouble, the City of Warren, that's our biggest bulk. We're anticipating four million dollars this year. As for real estate taxes, we don't get hardly anything.
- D: So you would like to see Trumbull County come, as far as the administration's workings and all the county functions, together as a metropolitan?
- R: Oh, I do, oh yes, it would be the best thing to do.
- D: Wouldn't this be rejected by the smaller areas outside?
- R: Yes, I know it would. Yes, even the adjacent areas like Howland, well maybe not Howland, but Bazetta and Warren Township, they wouldn't do it. They would raise cane.
- D: So this is more a process of just actually more modernization?
- R: Sure it is, sure it is. That will be the coming thing. I don't know if I'll be around to see it, but that'll be. See, what they do is they go by population. Like the City of Warren, maybe they'll have two on that commissioner's board and you go by that. Niles will have more county commissioners, you go by population, but they'll never go for it.
- D: Okay, I have a few more questions. If you were ordained the head of the Democratic Party as Chairman, and if the Chairman had power, what type of platform would you run and what type of changes would you like to see come about?
- R: I think it's run all right now the way it is.
- D: Are there any other changes you would like to see?
- R: No, it's run right now. Doc Timmins is our County Chairman and Mitchel Shaker is our Secretary. They're doing a good job. A lot of people don't think they are, but they're doing a good job. They don't get

involved like Youngstown. Mahoning County politics get involved in primaries and our Trumbull County Democratic Party doesn't. They don't get involved in any primaries, they do in the generals.

D: Do you think labor agreements with the Democratic Party in Trumbull County will keep in tact or do you think it's eventually going to split off?

R: You mean labor?

D: Right, labor.

R: Labor and Democratic Party?

D: Right.

R: No, I think they'll be stronger than ever myself.

D: Do you think the two can function without each other?

R: No, no, they need both because you have to have members if you want a good party and you need labor. They have the members. But labor, in the last few years, have been more lenient. They have been endorsing Republicans right along with Democrats. They have been changing the last few years. They don't all go down as straight Democrats. The last few years they have been changing; they've been endorsing a few Republicans. I'm glad to see that, I mean they're endorsing a man, not the party.

D: In the past the Democratic Party in Trumbull County has been called a political machine. We're a highly developed political system. Do you think this is the case today?

R: No, I don't think so.

D: How's it different today than it was back then?

R: Years ago, what I hear from stories, they were really rough and I think it's more honest today.

D: Do you think Watergate did any good?

R: Oh yes, they put everyone on their toes probably. But I do think they are more honest than they were years and years ago.

D: Years ago, from what I've heard, they always used to take hush money, like we had that big sewer scandal in Warren. I don't know what year that was, but it was in

the early 1960's, 1961 or 1962. I don't think that will ever happen. There were three councilmen that went to prison. You don't remember that, but you heard about it. I don't think that will ever happen again.

D: As far as the politicians in Trumbull County, do you think there is an upsurge of our quality?

R: Oh yes, you're getting a better quality, high quality of men. There are a lot of young ones coming in and I'm glad to see that, guys that are 26 years old, 24.

D: Where do you think the youth vote in Trumbull County is or how come they don't really come out?

R: You know the youth don't go out to vote. They have that right to, but they don't. I thought when they changed the law to eighteen . . . but they didn't come out.

D: What do you think the main problem is here?

R: I don't know, it could be apathy, it could be anything. I think in the future they're going to change and they're going to exercise their rights because we have young blood coming in. They are pretty sharp, these young men, they are.

D: Do you think it is a fundamentally apathetic surge of the past movements of the late 1960's?

R: Oh, past movements, yes, I think so. Well, I think it will just wear out and they'll come back. We do have a lot of young votes in Trumbull County, but they don't exercise their rights. They could change everything if they wanted to.

D: As far as campaigns, how do you run your campaign or how did you run your campaigns?

R: I always ran my campaign myself.

D: By yourself?

R: Yes I do, with the help of my children and my wife. I never had a campaign committee, just the family, they all worked together.

D: Do you think that a person can be elected into a political office in Trumbull County without being endorsed by the Central Committee?

R: Oh yes.

D: Without extreme difficulty?

R: Oh yes, I think he could be elected.

D: Do you think the Central Executive Committee of the Democratic Party has any extremely fundamental strong points in the party?

R: Well, they come up with the ideas and everything, but it's the committeemen that do all the voting, the precinct committeemen. When Dr. Williams died he was treasurer. We had to make a new appointment and the Party wanted somebody else, but the precinct committeemen picked somebody else. I was at that meeting.

D: Fundamentally, they are not as strong as they used to be?

R: No.

D: As far as making decisions?

R: No, everything rests with the precinct committeemen. They're the ones that vote. In Trumbull County we have like 288 or something like that.

D: So this makes, fundamentally, the Party stronger in that area?

R: Yes, and the precinct committeemen are the strongest. That's the lowest ebb of politics, but they do have the power. If someone dies in office or leaves before their turn is up, they're the ones that pick it up, they vote on it in Trumbull County. Now, like in city council, if somebody resigns city council appoints a new one in their place, but in the county offices the Central Committee does the appointing.

D: As far as Republicans in Trumbull County, how can they have a resurgence or how can a person like Mayor Richards be elected.

R: Well, there's one case that he was a Republican and the Democrats put him in. If it wasn't for the Democrats, he wouldn't be Mayor.

D: So it was a tie over both sides?

R: Yes.

D: So the voters voted for the man rather than the party?

R: Yes. It is just like in the commissioner's office, we

have two Republicans. I haven't seen that for a long time. It was always two Democrats and one Republican.

D: Why are the two Republicans in office in the commissioner's office?

R: I don't know. They seem to be holding off or something, or seem to know what they are doing in there.

D: Bernard or Williams, are they working with Pestrak?

R: I don't think so. That's my opinion.

D: Just fundamentally political?

R: I think so. Walter is a good man, Walter Pestrak, but his hands are tied. He has two against him and he could never be Chairman.

D: Yes, I think that's so. There are two and they want to run it, run the show. Well, Walter is a good man. He could really run county government, but his hands are tied. That's why he wanted me in there really bad last fall.

R: Concluding now, is there anything that I haven't covered that you would like to talk about?

D: No, I think you have covered it pretty well.

END OF INTERVIEW