

## **Proportional Representation and Cold War Politics in the Western Reserve**

**Robert J. Kolesar**

In the 1920s Cleveland remained at the forefront of municipal political reform as it experimented with a plan of government that featured a city manager and a city council elected by proportional representation. Although abandoned in the 1930s, dissatisfaction with reform centered on the city manager rather than proportional representation; that Cleveland's voters endorsed the use of proportional representation for county elections in 1935 indicated it remained a viable reform. Nationally, proportional representation gained ground from the 1920s through the early and mid-1940s, winning adoption in, among other cities, Cincinnati, Hamilton, and Toledo, Ohio; New York City and Yonkers, New York; Cambridge, Worcester, and Lowell, Massachusetts. By the late 1940s proportional representation's fortunes changed dramatically. Its repeal in New York City in 1947, in a campaign which turned on the issue of Communist representation, led to its marginalization and demise as a reform option. In Cleveland, little memory was evident of proportional representation's use or purposes as it met defeat elsewhere in the 1940s and 1950s. Just as Cleveland and other northern cities were entering a period of momentous social and economic change, reformers lost a tool that might have greatly eased needed urban political transitions.