

# City Beat

*There are eight million stories in my albums. This is one of them...*

Anton Joseph "Tony" Cermak (May 9, 1873 – March 6, 1933) was an American politician who served as the 34th mayor of Chicago, Illinois from April 7, 1931 until his death on March 6, 1933 from complications of an assassination attempt nearly a month earlier.

Cermak was born to a mining family in Kladno, Austria-Hungary. He emigrated with his parents to the United States in 1874. Cermak grew up southwest of Chicago, and later moved to Chicago. He began his political career as a precinct captain and in 1902 was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives. Seven years later, he would take his place as alderman of the 12th Ward. Cermak was elected president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners in 1922, chairman of the Cook County Democratic Party in 1928, and mayor of Chicago in 1931. In 1928 he ran for the United States Senate and was defeated by Republican Otis F. Glenn, receiving 46% of the vote.

As Cermak climbed the local political ladder, the resentment of the Party leadership grew. When the bosses rejected his bid to become the mayoral candidate, Cermak swore revenge. He formed his political army from the non-Irish elements. Cermak's political and organizational skills helped create one of the most powerful political organizations of his day. With support from Franklin D. Roosevelt on the national level, Cermak gradually wooed members of Chicago's growing black community into the Democratic fold. Walter Wright, the superintendent of parks and aviation for the city of Chicago, also aided Cermak in stepping into office.

Voter disgust with the corruption of then Chicago politics and its inability or unwillingness to clean up organized crime in Chicago were cited as major factors in Cermak capturing 58% of the vote in the mayoral election on April 6, 1931. Cermak's victory largely ended the Republican Party's power in Chicago; indeed, all the mayors of Chicago since 1931 have been members of the Democratic Party. For nearly his entire administration, Cermak had to deal with a major tax revolt. From 1931 to 1933, the Association of Real Estate Taxpayers mounted a "tax strike." At its height, ARET had over thirty thousand members. Much to Cermak's dismay, it successfully slowed down the collection of real estate taxes through litigation and promoting refusal to pay. In the meantime, the city found it difficult to pay teachers and maintain services. Cermak was obliged to meet President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt to 'mend fences' and get money to fund essential city services.

While shaking hands with President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt at Bayfront Park in Miami, Florida, on February 15, 1933, Cermak was shot in the lung and mortally wounded when Giuseppe Zangara, who at the time was believed to have been engaged in an attempt to assassinate Roosevelt, hit Cermak instead. Once at the hospital, Cermak reportedly uttered the line that is engraved on his tomb. Speaking to FDR, Cermak allegedly said: "I'm glad it was me instead of you." [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton\\_Cermak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton_Cermak)]

