

New York mayoral campaign failed to face issues

by Dennis Speed

“And of much of Madness, and more of Sin,
And Horror, the soul of the plot. . .”

—Edgar Allan Poe, *The Conqueror Worm*

New York City has chosen a new mayor, a replacement for the 1977-89 reign of Ed Koch, as Democrat David Dinkins defeated Republican-Liberal Rudolph Giuliani in the Nov. 7 elections. The horrifying, but unavoidable truth of this election, is that the citizenry failed to impose a standard of reason and decency upon the candidates, the political parties, and communications media, to force the greatest crisis in urban American history to be at least confronted, if not solved.

The campaign was criticized universally for its mud-slinging and failure to focus upon the impending catastrophe facing New York, manifest in collapsing hospital care, labor unrest, homelessness, and crime. Yet one cannot doubt that the financial and cultural controllers of the city—the Anglo-American establishment—shaped this campaign in precisely that way. The media fixated the electorate’s attention on the easily found flaws of both candidates, to the exclusion of discussion of the most important issue to face voters in this city since 1896—the total overhaul of local government proposed by the city’s Charter Revision Commission. This was approved by voters by a 3-2 margin.

Revolution from above

The charter revisions may be the final step in the destruction of this once-great city. The new charter will do away with the city Board of Estimate, and turn the vast powers associated therewith over to the mayor, a nest of unelected city agencies, and a part-time City Council. It will virtually eliminate the borough president system of government which has administered the five counties that make up New York City throughout the 20th century.

New York City’s Board of Estimate, in existence since 1898, was ruled an unconstitutional body by the U.S. Supreme Court in March of this year. The Board of Estimate had significant power over city contracts, the awarding of city franchises, and the municipal budget. It was a body which included the mayor, the Comptroller, the City Council president, and five borough presidents.

The Supreme Court ruled this body unconstitutional on the grounds that it violated the “one man, one vote” principle.

This decision was touted as a defense of minorities and the poor; the borough president of Staten Island and Brooklyn each wielded the same power on the board, yet Brooklyn’s population was over twice that of its sister borough. But apparently, it was conveniently “forgotten” that this problem had been solved prior to 1958 by giving the presidents of the most populous boroughs (Manhattan and Brooklyn) two votes each, and giving the other borough presidents one vote each. Why was this earlier-adopted system of “weighted voting” not simply re-proposed?

The Board of Estimate was originally created to *halt* corruption in New York City. The new system, with its creation of a drastically strengthened mayor and a multitude of unreachable bureaucracies, threatens to drown the city in a cesspool of graft and influence peddling. The charter revision will: 1) abolish the Board of Estimate; 2) expand the city council from 35 to 51 members, shrinking each councilmanic district; 3) create a 13-member city planning commission. Power over contracts will now shift over to the office of the mayor and the City Planning Commission. Seven of the commission members will be appointed by the mayor. The City Council will now approve the city budget, and will also decide any land siting questions.

Traditionally, however, it has been through the offices of the borough presidents that ethnic groups and minorities have risen to prominent political status in New York City—including black Mayor-elect David Dinkins, formerly Manhattan borough president. Moreover, the borough president essentially received “on the job training” as a “mayor” of his borough, while at the same time deciding upon essential financial and economic decisions for the benefit—or detriment—of the city as a whole. This “unifying” function will be destroyed by the revisions; already, elements in Staten Island have placed a bill in the state legislature calling for secession from New York City. The city will be “Vietnamized” into “strategic hamlets” to be managed by faceless technocrats, such as Robert Kiley, present head of the Manhattan Transit Authority, and the “mechanic” for the genocidal Operation Phoenix scorched-earth policy in Vietnam.

New York City faces what will emerge as its worst fiscal crisis since 1975. By the time Mayor Dinkins takes office, there will be a \$1 billion budget deficit. Mayor Koch has

already proposed the following budget reductions:

- \$3 million in library cuts, expected to lead in reduction of hours;
- \$3 million in cuts to cultural institutions;
- job cuts including the elimination of 455 civilian positions in the Police Department; 151 street cleaners; 68 fire marshals; 175 park maintenance workers; and 250 administrative positions at the Board of Education.

Less services, more cops

As reported by the *Daily News*, Oct. 25, "There were no layoffs [proposed] but the size of the workforce will decrease by 3,357 through attrition. The city still will hire more than 3,200 cops over the next eight months. . . . Koch announced the changes at a packed City Hall press conference attended by Wall Street executives and bond experts, nervous about the city's fiscal stability." The shift in social policy is made clear: less services, more security forces. Felix Rohatyn, the creator of the corporatist Municipal Assistance Corporation and an economic adviser to Dinkins, has emerged once again as the likely executioner for the fiscal "final solution" required. "Mr. Dinkins also has said he would receive economic advice from a board that would include: American Express Co. Chairman, James D. Robinson III; investment banker Felix Rohatyn; leveraged buyout expert Reginald Lewis; and attorney Joseph Flom," according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

Already on Oct. 20, a major sell-off of city bonds had occurred, when news leaked that the city had a \$530 million budget gap. The New York real estate market has experienced significant softening over the past weeks, partially attributed to the cumulative effects of Oct. 19, 1987, and the new Oct. 13, 1989 crash. Nothing, therefore, is intended to be left to chance in a Dinkins mayoralty; Dinkins has been criticized for having personal tax and other financial problems almost hourly over the past weeks. He will be extraordinarily reluctant to challenge these forces.

The reputation of Dinkins's opponent, former U.S. Attorney Giuliani, as the "world's greatest prosecutor," nose-dived with the resurfacing of the scandal of Daniel Perlmutter, a former Assistant U.S. Attorney under Giuliani, who was convicted of stealing over \$500,000, as well as large amounts of cocaine, from the office safe in 1984. Giuliani's annulment of his 14-year marriage to Regina Peruggi, on the grounds that he suddenly realized that they were second cousins, has been described by critics as a model of what Giuliani might mean by the phrase "virtue is a lack of opportunity."

In a Giuliani world, the world of the all-powerful prosecutor, there can be no scruples. In a Dinkins world, there must be the appearance of scruples. The tragedy is that the continuing complacency of the electorate makes it nearly inevitable that the hero of this "immorality play" will be the Conqueror Worm.

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