

New York Politics '93

by Murray N. Rothbard

It's 1993, and this means that the quadrennial political extravaganza has hit New York City. New York's mayor, other high elected city officials, and the city council, are all up for election this year.

New York is of course a famously left-wing city, and has therefore, sometimes slowly, sometimes rapidly, been going down the tubes for decades. But while the city may be overwhelmingly leftist and Democratic, a complicating factor is race. New York has always been a hotbed of ethnic and racial conflict, but in the days of the old-time political bosses, the guys in the smoke-filled rooms could come out with electoral tickets that were carefully racially and ethnically balanced. Now, however, that primaries, in the name of "democracy," have destroyed the old-time pols and their control of the political parties, ethnic and racial conflict has become naked and unalloyed.

In 1989, New York elected its first black mayor. David Dinkins, famously dubbed the "fancy *shvartze*" by Jewish comedian Jackie Mason, first defeated long-time mayor Ed Koch in the Democratic primary, and then went on to defeat Rudolph Giuliani, the Republican-Liberal candidate, in a narrow squeaker in the general election. The city was hungry for racial harmony, and Dinkins, even though a down-the-line leftist, was perceived as "unthreatening"

because of his habitually soft-spoken, nerdy, and worried demeanor. Koch, in contrast, was a typically loud-mouth, perpetually kvetching (complaining) and egomaniacal New Yorker, in politics a "moderate" (English translation: left neocon). Because of the differences in style, Koch was considered a racial aggravator, while Dinkins was held up as a "racial healer."

In the closely fought general election, Giuliani, being almost as left-liberal as his opponent, could not fight on ideas, and so he battled on general style. Giuliani's only claim to fame was as a tough prosecutor, particularly his reign of terror as U.S. Attorney against Wall Street investment bankers and traders who dared to compete effectively with

the Rockefeller World Empire. And so Dinkins the black "healer" ran against Giuliani, the proudly proclaimed tough SOB. It should be no surprise, given our present political culture, that "healing" managed to win against to-the-knife toughness.

For the past four years, Rudolph Giuliani has been "mayor-in-exile," waiting to run again this year. In the meanwhile, Dinkins's reign has been an admitted disaster, as the city has sunk even further into poverty, bums-in-control-of-the-streets, and racial conflict. Dinkins the fancy leftist "healer" has turned out to be Dinkins the fancy leftist who has been totally ineffective at his presumptive healing task. New York City contains three broad ethnic groups: whites, blacks, and Hispanics (in effect Puerto Ricans). In 1989, the whites were overwhelmingly for Giuliani, blacks for Dinkins, and the PRs, the swing votes, were two-thirds for Dinkins. Now, however, the increasingly disillusioned Hispanics are reportedly split fifty-fifty.

And yet, oddly enough, Dinkins is still the favorite, largely for lack of an attractive alternative. Giuliani's chances are better this time, however, and not only because the PRs are more favorably inclined. The big difference is campaign staff. The 1989 Giuliani campaign was a technical disaster, with Giuliani coming across as both mean and wooden. This year, Rudi has hired as his manager the legendary Grand Old Man of political consultants, who virtually pioneered this profession, Little Napoleon David Garth. Garth, who has been around since the 1950s, has won five out of seven mayoral campaigns. Garth's first step was to "humanize" Rudi as much as possible, in the process changing his severe hairdo which had tried unsuccessfully to cover up his bald area.

More substantive, however, was Garth's brilliant decision to revive the old New York City tradition of "fusion" campaigns. New York has been overwhelmingly Democratic for a century, and so the way that Republicans can win the mayoralty is in the name of "reform" and "fusion" – that is, a fusion of Republicans and other self-proclaimed "clean government" elements ("clean" largely because they had had few opportunities at the public trough). In fact, there used to be a small but important liberal-wealthy WASP "City Fusion" Party which stood ready to lend its patina to Republican fusion candidates. The most notorious beneficiary of this "fusion" gimmick was the much-beloved ultra-leftist mayoralty of Fiorello La Guardia during the 1930s.

And so David Garth proceeded to reconstitute the Fusion concept. He also proceeded to revive the old, time-honored "balanced" ticket of ethnic and geographical groups as well as parties underneath the "fusion" umbrella. The three major offices are mayor, city council president, and comptroller. City council president is an office similar to the U.S. vice president; the office-holder succeeds the mayor (president) upon death, and presides over the city council (U.S. Senate). Hence, while important sounding and officially Number 2, the office-holder has virtually no real function; hence it gets no respect. Indeed, in the latest constitutional "reform" in New York, there was an almost successful attempt to abolish the office altogether.

Instead, the Old Guard managed to save the post, and, as "compromise," changed its name to public advocate, an absurd term which draws only a horselaugh from knowledgeable New Yorkers.

To fill the three slots, there are four possible parties: Republican, Liberal, Democrat, and Conservative. The Liberal Party was founded by Social Democrats, in particular the Hat Workers (under Alex Rose) and the Ladies Garment Workers (under David Dubinsky), in the 1940s as a secession from the Communist-dominated American Labor Party. It now remains, since Rose's death, a patronage fiefdom under its maximum boss Raymond Harding. The Conservative Party, to its credit, spurned Giuliani this time as well as last, noting Giuliani's liberalism, and has now nominated on its own line the estimable George Marlin, a young bond-dealer and editor of the collected works of the great G.K. Chesterton. But the Liberals are in Giuliani's camp this time as well.

Dave Garth also had to juggle ethno-religious balance, as well as geographic balance from New York's four major boroughs: Manhattan, Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. In the ethnic balance, there was no need to consider a black, since Giuliani is implicitly, though of course not explicitly, running on a white racial slate against the Dinkins (black) domination of New York.

Rudi Giuliani is a Republican-Liberal from Manhattan. For public advocate, Garth reached into the Brooklyn Democrat Party, and chose City Councilwoman Susan Alter. Not only does this bring in both the populous borough of Brooklyn *and* Jewry, but Alter's husband is a prominent Orthodox Jew, which both cements and dramatizes the reaching out to Brooklyn Jewry, which in contrast to left-liberal Manhattan Jewry, tends to be Orthodox, socially conservative, and has also been embroiled with blacks in the most conspicuous confrontation of Dinkins's mayoralty. In the late summer of 1991, long-standing tensions erupted between blacks, who tend to be more militant in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant section than are the blacks in Harlem, and the Hasidic Jewish community of neighboring Crown Heights. When the Lubavetcher Rebbe was returning in an auto caravan from his weekly visit to his wife's grave, a driver of one of the cars went through a red light, caromed off another car, and ran over and killed a black kid. In their "rage," the black "community" of Crown Heights escalated their standard behavior, and rioted for three days, particularly seeking out Jews (that is visible Jews, such as Hasidics, who wear the garb of eighteenth-century Eastern Europe) to beat up. In the course of this continuing riot, blacks murdered a visiting Australian Hasid, Yankel Rosenbaum. The alleged murderers of Rosenbaum were freed by a predominately black jury; and while Brooklyn Jewry was "enraged," for some reason they did not "express their rage" at the jury verdict in the rioting, looting, and murdering way that the "black community" of Los Angeles "expressed itself" after the first verdict in the trial of the LA cops who beat up the criminal Rodney King.

This left the comptrollership, where Dave Garth pulled off another

coup. There were originally several people running against Dinkins in the Democrat primary for mayor, hoping that lightning will strike them as it struck Dinkins in the primary against Koch four years ago. One of them was Herman Badillo. Badillo is an odd case. A formerly beloved and most prominent Puerto Rican leader from the major PR borough, the Bronx, Badillo seemed to be the Golden Boy of Puerto Ricans in New York. He held many high city offices, including deputy mayor, but he never achieved the brass ring; running many times for mayor and never making it, Badillo has been out of politics for years, and was and is in danger of becoming the Puerto Ricans' Harold Stassen.

What happened to Herman? He was prickly, but so are a lot of other politicians. He was and is far more intelligent than most politicians, but that might well be his problem: for he was too intelligent, too white (in both skin color and demeanor), and too moderate in his views to be considered an "authentic" *barrio* Puerto Rican by his ethnic confreres. He would never pass muster before some Puerto Rican Lani Guinier. Furthermore, he was and is married to a Jewish wife, and sometimes it seemed that Jews were more enthusiastic about Herman than were the Puerto Ricans.

Still and all, Herman threw his hat into the Democratic ring for mayor, and now, in 1993, his views had become far more conservative than his previous left-liberalism. But Badillo ran out of money early, and had to drop out of the mayoral primary. Hence, he was ripe for Dave Garth's coup. Badillo is now back, running for comptroller, on Democratic, Liberal, and Republican slates, with the warm endorsement of Giuliani. Not only that: his old friend Mayor Koch enthusiastically embraced Badillo, perhaps a harbinger of Kochian endorsement for Giuliani himself later in the summer or fall.

Everything was now in place for the Fusion ticket: Manhattan Italian Catholic and Republican Rudi Giuliani for mayor, Brooklyn Orthodox Jewish Democrat Susan Alter for public advocate, and Bronx Puerto Rican Protestant Democrat with a Jewish wife, Herman Badillo for comptroller.

What about the Democrat, or Dinkins, side? Here there are no "tickets," and it is every man for himself. Dinkins originally had a formidable primary opponent, Andrew Stein, now city council president and formerly borough president of Manhattan. Stein was slated to be the Jewish Golden Boy of New York politics. Blessed with a very wealthy, smart, and power-broker father, the publisher Jerry Finkelstein, there seemed to be no stopping Andy (who apparently changed his name to "Stein" in a feeble attempt at Anglicization). Moving up the political ladder, Stein supposedly had everything: money, good looks (his once callow youth now changing to fashionable graying at the temples), and a power-broker father. But there was one pall hanging over Andy: even in a profession not exactly peopled by intellectual giants, Andy became known as overweeningly, disastrously, DUMB. Being dumb is not necessarily a disqualification in politics, of course, but it means that he must be

careful to pick very smart managers and handlers.

Usually, Andy, aided by his pop, managed to pick smart advisers. But this year, he came a cropper. Raising and spending millions, Andy made the disastrous boo-boo of picking as his top political consultant one Phil Friedman, who made a series of terrible mistakes. Even now that Andy has dropped out of the mayoral race and fired his staff, he finds himself locked into an ironclad and long-term contract, in which he pays Friedman an enormous \$22,000 a *month*.

One of Andy's big mistakes was ideological. Sensing that the way to beat Dinkins was to Go Right, Andy had been getting increasingly conservative, hanging around the free-market think-tank, the Manhattan Institute, and picking up ideas for tax-cutting and privatization. Unfortunately, whether he knew it or not, Andy also picked up the other idea dominant among left-libertarian think-tanks: to combine free-market ideas in economics with leftism in social issues. As a result, Andy enthusiastically endorsed the pro-gay Rainbow Curriculum, which the heroic Queens parent, Mary Cummins, managed to stop permanently in the board of education; and Andy marched in every gay parade he could find. While the idea of "fiscal conservatism"-and-social leftism may be big at preppie/yuppie cocktail parties, there are not many votes for this combo out on the hustings. Hence, the public support for Andy kept dropping like a stone, and he was finally forced, by his own political allies, and despite his money and Koch's endorsement, to drop ignominiously out of the race.

What to do? Poor Andy was reduced to running for re-election to his own city council president (oops, public advocate) seat. But Andy's election is far from assured. Before he even gets the general election, he faces a crowded and formidable group in the Democrat primary.

In addition to facing La Alter in the Democrat primary (who will continue on the Republican and Liberal ballots in the general election), Stein faces another Brooklyn Jewish candidate, State Senator Donald M. Halperin, and a serious black candidate, Harlem's State Senator David A. Paterson, son of the important black leader and friend of Dinkins, Basil A. Paterson. In addition, Stein faces a formidable Puerto Rican, Bronx State Assemblyman Roberto Ramirez. Finally, perhaps Stein's most formidable obstacle to re-election is the high-profile and abrasive leftist Manhattan Jew, Mark Green. Green, former U.S. Senate candidate against Al D'Amato, and Dinkins's former Commissioner for Consumer Affairs, was a Naderite lawyer who has appeared often as the leftist on *Crossfire*. Green was reportedly vetoed by Pat Buchanan as his *Crossfire* counterpart after Tom Braden was kicked out by CNN.

The Stein-Green race is expected to be close, and predicting becomes very difficult with so many in the field. Although Stein has already raised and spent over \$4 million in his mayoralty campaign, he is expected to raise plenty more in his race for re-election. Green, on the other hand, has the high-profile image. An interesting cross-current:

Paterson will by no means collar "the black vote." On the contrary, as a Harlem leader, he faces a tremendous conflict between the blacks of Harlem and of Brooklyn and Queens. This conflict transcends ideologies, as witness the fact that the leftist Congressman Major R. Owens of Brooklyn has endorsed Stein over his black "brother" Paterson.

Amidst this murk, Dinkins decided the better part of valor is to endorse no one, and to smile benignly on all. Hence, there will be no "ticket" on the Democratic side.

In the meanwhile, there is also a hot fight for comptroller. The incumbent, running for re-election, is former Congresswoman Liz Holtzman, the tough, mannish woman from Brooklyn whose pit bull attack on the ethics of Geraldine Ferraro, trying for a comeback in the primary for U.S. Senate last year, managed to dump Ferraro and to nominate Bob Abrams. Running against Holtzman in the primary are Herman Badillo and Queens Assemblyman Alan Hevesi. Openly rooting against Holtzman is La Ferraro, thirsting for revenge.

Andy Stein's and Badillo's withdrawal leaves Dinkins himself without significant primary opposition, but there remains the fascinating phenomenon of Roy Innis, head of the Congress of Racial Equality. Innis has long since become a conservative, and his role is not so much of a "spoiler" as an aid to Giuliani, since Innis is allowed to "play the racial card," which Giuliani cannot openly do. Innis, in short, can and has denounced Dinkins for black racism against white, a charge all the more effective because Innis's own skin color is far "blacker" than the beige-skinned Dinkins. Innis can thereby play to the hidden tensions within the "black community," which itself has always been rife with jealousies and "prejudices" among varying degrees of skin color. Darker-skinned women, for example, are anxious to marry "upward" with lighter-skinned males. It is no accident, therefore, that such black conservatives as Tom Sowell and Alan Keyes are very dark-skinned, and that their rhetoric against the black leftist elite is often shot through with attacks against these leaders' generally light-skinned mulatto color. Sometimes they accuse the leftist leaders of not being "authentically" black.

Thus, Innis will definitely not win the mayoral Democrat primary, but he will be useful to Giuliani by openly raising racial issues.

Meanwhile, since substantive issues are scarce, the big battle between Dinkins and Rudi during June has been over semantics. Our age is all too often a battle over the politics of language, and its Political Correctness, and the big issue now is what term to use in referring to the Crown Heights riot of blacks against Jews in the late summer of 1992. Jews call it a "pogrom," and then raise the question why Mayor Dinkins stood idly by while a pogrom raged in Brooklyn.

Giuliani has now taken up the cry, and denounces the "pogrom" at every opportunity, especially when addressing Jewish groups. Dinkins, on the contrary, denies it was a "pogrom," a term, he says, that only refers to assaults against Jews organized by the government (as in Czarist Russia). Dinkins therefore maintains it was only a "riot." From a strictly linguistic viewpoint, Dinkins is probably right, but of course his position opens him up to the well-known charge of "insensitivity" to Jewish concerns, and, of course, always peeping just beneath the surface, to Hitler and the Holocaust. One Jewish reply on the linguistic front is that Crown Heights riot was a "*de facto-pogrom*," whatever that may be.

Talk of politics as the triumph of symbolism over substance!