

Political Suicide in New York City and Italy: Part II - NYC

Jerry Krase (May 10, 2013)



New York City and Italy have a great deal in common, starting and ending with self-destructive electorates; voters who are intent on putting into office people who, in one way or another, hold them in contempt. In both electoral democracies, We The People are generally too ignorant and self-absorbed to notice that the pain we feel is self-inflicted. How does this happen? Again and again....

There is a lot about current New York City politics that has a distinctly Italian flavor, but there are some stylistic differences; in Italy, when things get really bad people demonstrate in the streets while in New York City we have street fairs and the greatest public outrage here seems to be about bicycles.

In general, the governments of La Belle Italia and la Grande Mela followed the same right-wing economic programs -- reducing revenue while increasing spending in order to create deficits in order to demand, in turn, cutting programs for the many and reducing the power of the government, over



the few. At both the national and local levels, slashing basic public services and earned benefits (rephrased as “entitlements”) has been made more urgent by the fraudulent excesses of large corporations, especially financial institutions, that, with the help of the public officials they own, make Mafia bosses look like benevolent dictators in comparison. In real democracies the government is “of, by, and for the people.” The “People” used to be human beings but thanks to the John G. Roberts’ Supreme Court, mega-business corporations are free to outbid the rest of us. In both Italy and New York City, there are also no real political parties. Political parties are supposed to have manifestos -- ideas about what is best for the citizenry and how to accomplish their goals. Right now, our political parties, citizens groups (many of which are fronts for business groups), and unions, all of which are incorporated in the State of New York, offer no comprehensive platforms or grand visions for our city. Most of the candidates themselves are surrounded not by policy experts and community leaders but by consultants telling them what to wear. The goal is winning whatever the cost, and the costs keep going up.

The current New York City mayoral two-ring circus has two candidates with Italian roots. Even better, or perhaps worse, was the 1950 race with three Italian-born candidates: Vincent R. Impellitteri won on the Experience Party line; Ferdinand Pecora came in 2nd on the Democratic/Liberal lines; and 3rd place loser was Republican Edward Corsi. The first of today’s sons of Italy is my old friend, Calabria-born, several term City Councilman Sal Albanese. Sal came in third in the 1997 Democratic Mayoral primary to Ruth Messenger, and Al Sharpton. Ruth then opened the door for another Italian-American -- Rudy Giuliani, who still haunts City Hall. The second paesano is Public Advocate Bill De Blasio, whose 52nd birthday party fundraiser at Cielo in the now chiche meatpacking district, I went to yesterday evening with some Brooklyn friends. As to more disclosure, although I had voted for him once, I never got invited to any of Bloomberg’s as HE didn’t need my money. Another, more nefarious, Italian connection in the race is Rudy’s protégé Joe Lhota, whose lack of personality demonstrates what happens when you spend too much time with The Rude One, and the MTA. Joe, running for the Republican nomination, told Chris Smith in a [New York Magazine article](#) [2] “I am not a tool of Rudy Giuliani.” However, Smith continued, “...escaping the shadow of America’s mayor may be tougher than he thinks.” Smith’s Machiavellian analysis would translate well for any of Italy’s major newspaper.

“More intriguing is the way the business class has nudged Lhota into the fray. Restless members of the city’s finance and real-estate Establishment have been searching for a more conservative challenger to the field of left-of-center, career-politician Democrats. The most appealing option, Police Commissioner Ray Kelly, resisted the pleading. But the search kept going, fueled as much by the desire to play kingmaker as by dismay at the prospect of a Mayor Quinn, De Blasio, Thompson, or Liu. Among the recruiters have been Ken Langone, the Home Depot co-founder; Dick Grasso, the former New York Stock Exchange president; Mort Zuckerman, the Daily News publisher; and real-estate titans Stephen Ross and Steve Roth.”

It looks to me like when the plutocrats are not running themselves there is a scramble to enter, and then ride, their own horse in the race. With all the arrests, indictments, and investigations of local politicians it’s more difficult then ever. A personal note in regard to Kelly lurking in the wings is also in order here. Before I had read Smith’s article, an Irish American Democratic Party activist/friend who shall remain nameless, had suggested to me that Kelly might become a candidate. To which I responded “Two Irish candidates for mayor?” To which he replied “Who’s the other one?” This lack of ethnic solidarity does not bode well for Christine Quinn.

Only in truly democratic electoral political systems like la Bella Italia and La Grande Mela would a major newspaper like The New York Times complain about “too many” people running for office and making life difficult for the front-runners. In Italy it was the Five Star Movement (Cinque Stelle) and comedian/politician Beppe Grillo that shamelessly crashed the party. Here at home it’s people like my old progressive friend Sal Albanese and, at the other end of the political spectrum, my old non-friend, but fellow Brooklyn Technical High School graduate, John Catsimatidis. I guess, The Times like The Daily News, The New York Post/Wall Street Journal prefer leaving the reins of government in the hands of “regular” yet-to-be-convicted politicians and imperial billionaires like Berlusconi, and Bloomberg who seem not to be content with their current stable of rent-a-pols.

In “[Outsiders in Race for Mayor Are Irritating Their Better-Known Rivals](#) [3]” Michael Grynbaum wrote



“two of the lesser-known aspirants in the contest” are to be reckoned with. “John A. Catsimatidis, the billionaire businessman and Gristedes owner, picked up the endorsement of the obscure but potentially influential Liberal Party, making it more likely that he will win a spot on the general Election ballot that could pose problems for his chief Republican rival, Joseph J. Lhota, a former deputy mayor in the Giuliani administration.”

Here, Grynbaum, missed the irony of this partisan oxymoron, or better “oxycratan,” of ideologically conservative Catsamidis getting the endorsement of the not really “Liberal” Party. Given past history, I wonder how much it cost him. I also wonder what the Independence Party charged (Adolfo Carrion, Jr.), this time around; not to mention the increasingly irrelevant Working Families Party. Where is The Rent is Too Damn High Party when you need it?

“On the Democratic side,” Grynbaum continued “Sal F. Albanese, a former Brooklyn city councilman who is virtually unknown to voters, revealed he had been scrutinizing the payrolls of two of his better-known opponents, and accused two of them of hiring political operatives at taxpayer expense in advance of the mayoral campaign. Both candidates succeeded in getting under the skin of their more established rivals. A spokesman for Public Advocate Bill de Blasio, one of the candidates singled out by Mr. Albanese, called the findings 'plain wrong.' Mr. Lhota suggested that the endorsement of Mr. Catsimatidis was meaningless, issuing a withering statement: 'I have no interest in seeing the resurrection of the deceased Liberal Party in New York.'”

In sum, as in Italy’s last national elections, I predict that September’s mayoral primary elections for both parties, and the certain “less than 40%” runoff in the Democratic Party race, as well as the general election in November will collectively draw the lowest proportion of registered voters in umpteen years. For Italy it was since 1948. For New York City, even less than the last bought and paid for non-election.

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