





NEW YORK

# Democratic Dogfight: A Hopeless Welter of Nonissues

By Doug Ireland

"... In a city reeling from a summer of blackouts, muggings, and Son of Sam, the mayoral candidates are afraid of the voters ..."

**T**he electrocution 50 years ago of Sacco and Vanzetti was surely the most misguided homicide in the history of American criminal justice. And even though Mayor Beame has been bleating about capital punishment from every street corner and precinct house in the city for weeks now, his honor saw nothing wrong last week in proposing "Sacco and Vanzetti Day."

Absurd? No kidding. Thank heavens that living amongst us is Sacco's grandson. Invited to parade with the mayor before the television cameras, he balked. Massachusetts's Michael Dukakis declared just last month that the man's shoemaker ancestor was railroaded. So young Sacco pointed out how inappropriate it would be to appear at the P.R. event; it was designed, after all, to con people into voting for a man who says our social problems can be cured by the same "final solution" that precluded this lad from ever knowing his own grandfather.

It's been that kind of an election year. Surely this is the oddest Democratic primary in recent history. Seldom have the voters in our town had such a hopeless welter of nonissues thrown at them in a mayoral campaign:

□ Why is accountant Abe Beame, whose administration is besieged by questions of financial mismanagement, running for executioner when he and any thinking person in the city know full well that capital crimes have little or nothing to do with what really ails this city?

□ Why does Bella Abzug, a civil liberties lawyer for 30 years, take her considerable self to 42nd Street, there to declaim into the microphones the palpably absurd notion—framed in pseudo-feminist rhetoric—that pornography encourages rape, when she and every thinking voter in this city know

that pornography actually *defuses* sexual violence?

□ Why does Percy Sutton, a sophisticated street politician, parade around in an auxiliary-police uniform when he knows that these misfit vigilantes—David Berkowitz was one—only frustrate the real work done by already overburdened police professionals?

□ Why does Mario Cuomo, a savvy trial lawyer and law professor, rant on about tougher judges and harsher sentences when he and any thinking voter in this town know that urban crime is bred by a web of dope, alcohol, and unemployment that our archaic prison system does everything to support?

□ And why does Ed Koch, whose camp includes some of the brightest Jewish intellectuals in this city, solemnly pronounce that "the Judeo-Christian ethic provides a moral basis for the death penalty," when he knows that the thrust of modern talmudic and biblical theology rejects "an eye for an eye" as the primitive, blunt slogan of unschooled, uncivilized ancestors?

Why? Because in a city still reeling from a sweltering summer of blackouts, looting, criminally high unemployment, and Son of Sam, most candidates are as afraid of the voters as the voters are of the muggers in the streets.

**A**be Beame's failure to deal coherently with the issues should come as no surprise. The barren void that is his imagination is reflected in his administration. Though he mounted a virulent attack on John Lindsay's record in 1973, Beame chose as his first deputy mayor Lindsay's deputy budget director, James Cavanagh. And when that poor Irish soul was driven from City Hall by the bank and insurance interests hereabouts, he was replaced with Lindsay's City Planning Commission

chairman, John Zuccotti. Today, with his back against the wall, with polls showing the highest negative rating for a mayor in modern times, to what fresh face does Mayor Beame turn? Why, to that old Lindsay street horse Sid Davidoff, now director of Abe's field operations. But there is more sad irony here. It was Davidoff, along with Barry Gottehrer, who was the architect of the troubleshooting street network that kept the city cool on many dangerously hot and tension-filled nights during the Lindsay years. Now that that network is no more, as the blackout riots illustrated, Sid is reduced to selling executions for Abe.

Beame is hopelessly bereft of substance. Try his other pitch on for size: "He made the tough decisions and made them work." Any "tough decisions" Abe Beame made in the last four years were forced on him by the unelected government installed by the financial community to run the city. As for making them work, the much awaited Securities and Exchange Commission report will soon disabuse any lingering adherents of that point of view. And Beame knows it. That's why he is attacking the SEC for meddling in the mayoralty: If he can convince the Jewish middle class that the SEC really stands for Secular Episcopalian Conspiracy and suddenly position himself as a foe of the bankers rather than as the man who capitulated to them, he might sneak into the runoff by a hair.

But don't bet on it. For most Jewish voters in this town take voting as seriously as the Roman Catholics take the confessional. Voting is a quasi-religious experience, and pulling the lever is an affirmation of faith in this city—but they could hardly find a prophet more blind than Abe Beame, who was present at the creation of almost all of the city's fiscal shenanigans of the last decade. If there's a hidden

*Journalist Doug Ireland contributes frequently to this publication.*



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vote for Beame, it lies among the undecided, confused by the number of people in this Democratic dogfight.

Bella Abzug has a better chance for the Jewish vote than Abe, and though the polls show Bella's lead slipping, no one who has seen this redoubtable campaigner work a street corner should ever underestimate her strong appeal. It cuts across all lines—race and class, black and white, male and female. (I ought to know her charms: I was manager of her triumphant first race for Congress. I also ran her Senate campaign last year—I lost that one.) Her reputation as a gutsy fighter helps her weave a magic spell in the streets that galvanizes the town's current discontent. But Bella, not unlike Abe Beame, is running *against* her popular image. She is purposefully toning down her style to strike what she conceives to be a mayoral demeanor. And some of her most consistent and emotional supporters down through the years are concerned that she may be paying too high a price for her face-lift: Coming off a grueling nine-month Senate primary, she hardly had the time to steep herself in the maze of city issues. Straight-talking used to be what Bella was all about; her answers to questions were fact-filled, informed, and definite. Yet in this race, while the spirit is still there, too often she has sounded false and vague, with rambling rhetoric substituting for solid analysis (like her porno putsch noted above).

Frank Sinatra supposedly once said that Vic Damone had the greatest pipes in the world—but, sniped Frankie, Vic had some difficulty feeling the words. Well, Bella feels the words still—no matter how badly she has chosen them during this race.

Mario Cuomo, the Sinatra-backed mayoral candidate, is a different matter. He is probably the best orator on the hustings this fall, yet it is difficult at this late date to pin down his sense of the city. He wraps himself in the ethereal principle, but his attempt to deal cohesively with real issues in this campaign has too often been tortured, embarrassing to watch. He may be a philosopher king, but even Plato learned to walk erect among the poor. Cuomo recently took to television to say, "I hate to admit we're at a point now in society where you have to be as primitive as talking about how we lock up the animals who threaten us, but that's the fact of it now." When a former law prof postures like a street

tough, mingling academese with up-from-the-streets rhetoric, watch out. And don't think for a minute that blacks and Puerto Ricans in New York are fooled by Mario's coded speech. One of the city's most sophisticated black leaders who knows the man well told me "it doesn't matter that Mario isn't a bigot and is a liberal at heart. If he is elected, it will be a signal to the blacks and Puerto Ricans to stay back, lie down, and keep quiet."

"Great conciliator" Cuomo's reputation comes from his handling of the Forest Hills controversy. Yet another black leader from Queens maintains that "no compromise was possible in Forest Hills without backing away from principle, from the notion that poor people and black people have the right to live side by side with the white middle class. You know how they finally kept blacks out of that project? They segregated the applications by zip codes."

Cuomo's closeness to Governor Carey hasn't helped him either. The gov's arm-twisting did corral Mario the Liberal-party nomination and launched the Cuomo juggernaut. ("There's a switch," laughed a Jewish street politician who is not for Cuomo. "The Irishman is the organ-grinder and the Italian is on the end of the string.") But Carey has simply been far too visible in marshaling both money and support. The governor's visits to Wall Street on Cuomo's behalf have been too well publicized.

Worse, Cuomo has roused the ire of Meade Esposito, crafty, salty-tongued godfather of the regular organization and a Beame supporter. At a recent Italian-American gathering, Esposito quipped, "Cassius Carey has a lean and hungry look, but Brutus Cuomo is an honorable man." Why? Because Cuomo likes to say that he received the Democratic State Committee's nod for lieutenant governor in 1974 by running against the bosses. Thomas More, whose portrait hangs in Cuomo's office, would turn in his grave—in fact, Mario could not have received the state committee's nod without seeking and finally getting organization votes, especially those controlled by Esposito, who supported Mario in 1974.

Queens, not Esposito's Brooklyn, is Cuomo's real base, however, and the daily papers, anxious last spring to curry favor with Long Island readers, made Mario their darling. That romance over, the savior of the neighborhoods

has had to settle for the less than useful endorsement of the *Village Voice*—a scalp delivered by a longtime devotee, *Voice* senior editor Jack Newfield.

**T**he man who most threatens Cuomo now, both in Queens and in the rest of the city, is Ed Koch, a capital-punishment liberal. Koch shrewdly kept his campaign staff small, husbanding every dollar for a steady media blitz, and placed himself in the hands of David Garth, who was John Lindsay's media man. Garth created for Koch the slogan "After eight years of charisma, and four years of the clubhouse, why not try competence."

The blitz appears to be working. Before the blackout, Koch seemed permanently stalled in fourth place—so much so that Garth, who always likes to hedge his bets, was secretly meeting with Cuomo to plan a media campaign in the event that Koch didn't make the runoff. But the Silk Stocking liberal who represents both the posh East Side and part of the Village has been surging steadily forward as the first primary approaches. He's been draining off votes from both Cuomo and Beame, against whom he has been fighting for the center constituency.

The biggest break for Koch is his endorsement by the *New York Post*. This move is likely a cagey power play by the *Post*'s publisher, Rupert Murdoch, who had been expected by most journalists in this town to endorse Cuomo. Mario enjoyed a big play in the *Post* early in the campaign, and it will be interesting to see if Koch will now match Cuomo's generous line count in that paper.

Koch and Murdoch make for an interesting couple: Both are a complex mixture of liberal and conservative instincts. Koch is a civil libertarian who has taken some courageous stands—for example, his support of gay rights, a particularly gutsy act for any unmarried politician, given the state of public opinion. Like Bella, as a member of Congress he has fought to divert more federal aid from the southern pork barrels.

But this year, as in his incomplete mayoral candidacy four years ago, Koch has run shamelessly way to the right on the law-and-order issues, harping on Cuomo's refusal to be sucked into support of capital punishment. This right-left fan dance, which has now secured him the endorsement of the



# Just Answer the Question—Yes or No?

That sly rogue Machiavelli once said, "A Prince is further esteemed when he is a true friend or a true enemy, when, that is, he declares himself without reserve . . . this policy is always more useful than remaining neutral." Our nine candidates for mayor seem to have overlooked that ancient counsel. When journalist Ken Lerer first approached them with the questions below, many refused at first to "declare" themselves with a straight yes or no. In fact, State Senator Roy Goodman said flatly, "Yes and no answers are too simplistic to the complicated problems presented by the questions." Well, while Roy kept mum, most of the other candidates finally put themselves on the line . . . most of the time.

These answers are distilled from interviews with candidates and press secretaries, or published remarks. They give you at least a glance at the differences between the candidates. If we do nothing more than prompt some phone calls to campaign headquarters for amplification, then we will be happy. Trying to "type" these nimble politicians by questionnaire has proven as difficult as color-coding a jar of wriggling chameleons—but then watching them squirm is half the fun.

	ABZUG	BADILLO	BEAME	CUOMO	HARNETT	KOCH	SUTTON	FARBER
Do you call for free tuition at the City University no matter what?	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Are you in favor of abortion for the poor at the expense of public funds?	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Would you segregate all pornographic uses into one "combat zone" in Manhattan?	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Are you in favor of phasing out New York City's income tax?	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	N.A.	YES
Do you favor busing schoolchildren across county lines?	N.A.	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	N.A.	NO
Are you in favor of maintaining a rent-control ceiling for the "maximum base rent"?	YES	YES	YES	YES	N.A.	YES	YES	YES
Are you in favor of one-officer patrol cars in areas other than high-crime areas?	N.A.	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Do you favor the construction of a convention center in New York?	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
Would you reject Westway even if federal funds were not transferable to mass transit?	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES
Should the State Power Authority take over Con Edison if that proved more efficient?	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO
Are you in favor of legalizing casino gambling in New York?	N.A.	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Are you in favor of bringing the Olympics to New York City in 1984?	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Would you push for passage of the gay-rights amendment in the City Council?	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO
Would you have called out the National Guard the night of the blackout?	N.A.	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
Are you in favor of the death penalty under some circumstances?	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES
Are you in favor of submitting municipal labor agreements to a vote of the people?	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
Do you favor the Concorde landing at Kennedy Airport?	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO

FRED W. McDARRAH UPI BLACK STAR ALLEN ARPADI



# "...Corruption turns promising leaders in the steaming, teeming ghetto into hopeless poverty pimps and government junkies..."

*Daily News*, makes "Fast Eddie" the most formidable opponent for Bella; besides, she despises Koch, who can be counted on to try to goad her into losing her temper should they wind up one-on-one in a runoff. But like Cuomo, Koch must do well in Queens to get there.

Surprisingly, the first member of the primary law-and-order fraternity was Percy Sutton, who with that act may have cut off his political nose to spite his race. By all political standards, Percy is qualified to be mayor of New York. An able legislator when he was in the Assembly, he has survived eleven years as borough president: He knows the machinations and inner workings of the bureaucratic maze. Despite that, even the bigots in this business wryly smile and admit that he's been frozen out of media coverage.

As a substitute, he's had to rely heavily on the network of black churches to get out his vote. And his campaign has been plagued by other problems. Lack of money is one. Lack of consistent leadership is another: Sutton switched campaign managers in midstream.

A sly businessman who is no intellectual slouch, Sutton has a brain trust headed by Basil Paterson (the 1970 Democratic candidate for lieutenant governor who outpulled running mate Arthur Goldberg in every single county in the state). Basil is one of the sharpest grass-roots politicians this town has ever seen. Representative Charles Rangel is another key adviser. To balance off his lack of white political support, Sutton has also linked arms with David Dinkins, the Manhattan borough president candidate.

But much of Sutton's problem is that his own community base is dominated by a Manhattan-oriented black-power combine with its origins in the days of J. Raymond Jones, the Tammany Hall leader known as "the Fox," and Adam Clayton Powell. That, plus Sutton's meddling over in Brooklyn's black politics, may have cost him the support of that borough's feisty congresswoman, Shirley Chisholm, who is rumored to be seriously considering support for Beame.

Fairness forces one to mention Joel Harnett, the former City Club chairman who defended the high-handed oppressions of Maurice Nadjari. Aside from being the prosecutor's guardian, Harnett flirts with bigotry in his studied misunderstanding of civil-liberties issues that involve defendants, trade

unionists, or gays. He also has a penchant for showing up in public wearing a graceless campaign T-shirt under his business suit. He is virtually alone in his enthusiasm for his candidacy.

**T**hose candidates who have been appealing to people's basest fears in this mindless campaign should have taken a closer look at the mayoral race of 1969. There was John Lindsay, losing the Republican line on which he was elected, staggering from a series of major social cataclysms which had shredded the city's unity: the Civilian Review Board controversy of 1966; the school strike and the riotous rebellion that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, both events in

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1968; and the race-based low-income-housing controversy in Corona in 1969. What did Lindsay's strategists have him do? He admitted his mistakes, in a brilliant commercial which began playing, not coincidentally, during the week of Yom Kippur, the day of atonement. With only the endorsement of the tiny Liberal party and an independent line not easily found on our crowded and complex voting machines, Lindsay put it together against the quintessential law-and-order candidate, Mario Procaccino. How? By playing the politics of hope on every occasion, even showing up at that magic moment when Tom Seaver led the Mets to victory in the race for the pennant and lifting the city's spirit.

The city was so high on hope after the Democratic National Convention and Op Sail last year that—had the

election been held then—even Abe Beame could have been reelected.

But the mood today is darkly different. Lindsay, the golden goy, is discredited. Instead we have that ancient *verbissene*, Abe Beame, racing down to police headquarters to drink to the capture of Son of Sam, foaming at the mouth with the rancid rhetoric of capital punishment. The images could not be more different: one, a celebration of life; the other, a tawdry toying with death and dementia.

**H**ard-nosed realists will undoubtedly pick from among the front-runners. This eliminates slow starter Herman Badillo. Though he carries himself with a prideful arrogance, he is deeply steeped in the governance of our city. A lawyer and CPA, a former housing-relocation commissioner and borough president as well as a congressman, he has a vision of this town that is the most farsighted, the most worked through.

He was the first major political figure in this city to suggest that it could do worse than to declare bankruptcy at the beginning of the fiscal crisis. Perhaps he was right: Only the banks and Wall Street profited from the errors of our mismanagement; to rescue us from those errors they have constructed a solution from which they are now reaping greater profits still.

And Badillo is the only one in this campaign who pleads the cause of the poor. Because he came from poverty, he understands that we must bring the poor into the mainstream of the city's economy or face chronic summer rioting. Capital punishment is terrorism of the poor—Badillo knows it and says it. Truly, here is a man unashamed of who he is and what he is.

What is perhaps most remarkable to me is this man's resistance to the corruption that has scarred his home turf, turning many promising leaders from the steaming, teeming ghettos into hopeless poverty pimps and government junkies. He is one of the few office seekers this season who know the streets and are recognized there; and he fearlessly took his level head to those streets in the depths of the blackout. His vision is clear: This town can only work through a coalition of blacks, Puerto Ricans, and middle-class whites—the people who live here, after all. Other candidates may share this conviction, but in this campaign it is a truth that only Badillo dares speak. ■