

New York mayor cannot evade fiscal crisis

by Dennis Speed

When the scheme to revoke the charter of New York's government was voted up in November 1989, Mayor David Dinkins entered Gracie Mansion with potentially greater powers than any mayor in the city's history. Yet Dinkins was already under investigation for "various financial improprieties." It is a fact that there is exactly a 100% chance of a U.S. elected black official being investigated by a federal or state agency.

Dinkins's transition team, headed by Nathan Levanthal, head of Lincoln Center, and investment banker Felix Rohatyn, were committed corporatists whose major concern was lowering union wages and cutting city services. Comptroller Elizabeth Holtzman was there to keep the mayor from stepping out of line. In his first 12 days, Dinkins announced the most severe cuts in services that New York had seen in 15 years, since David Rockefeller and friends declared city government bankrupt and Rohatyn put the city under the bankers' dictatorship of "Big MAC" (Municipal Assistance Corp.).

The racial and class tensions provoked by the fiscal crisis bubbled to the surface last August and are now exploding. A focus is the Bensonhurst, Brooklyn trial involving the killing of a black 16-year-old, Yusuf Hawkins, by a gang of 30-40 whites. Two defendants, Joey Fama and Keith Mondello, received verdicts from juries on May 17 and 18. Fama was convicted of murder; Mondello was acquitted of both murder and manslaughter. The contradictory verdicts have further polarized the city.

Other clashes, involving blacks and Koreans, as well as anti-black remarks by Brooklyn grand jury bureau chief Dan Landes (later fired), who spoke of "*schvartze* burglaries and robberies," have fissured the city. Four reporters and photographers were beaten May 17 by supporters of convicted killer Fama; five members of a TV crew were roughed up the next night in the neighborhood of Yusuf Hawkins.

Desperate, Dinkins called a "Rally for Social Harmony" May 22, at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. Eyewitnesses report that the 5,000-6,000 person meeting was a display of allegiance from union workers, city and state employees, and other groups receiving patronage from the Dinkins (city) and Cuomo (state) administrations.

Even in this climate glimmers of reality appeared. Dennis Rivera, president of AFL-CIO Local 1199, said, "We health care workers are committed to doing our part . . . within our practice, to answer the desperation of the growing number of uninsured New Yorkers. Two and a half million New Yorkers ask our support in solving this and other problems.

. . . We have a growing number of mental health patients, but no services to support their needs. . . . We are calling for a universal health care plan for all New Yorkers." The May 19 *Daily News* reported that the state will cut 200 residential beds for the mentally ill in the city, and will wipe out funding for a new emergency psychiatric clinic—to save \$2 million.

Yet the day after the "unity rally," the Dinkins administration announced the elimination of 1,200 jobs at the Board of Education. The same day, Richard Travers, head of the Uniformed Fire Association, indicted the city's plan to shut two fire engine companies, and property owners rallied outside of City Hall to protest a \$180 million property tax hike. In the Bronx, 80 people were arrested in a battle between rival groups demanding construction jobs at the site of a new police station.

New York needs a reconstruction plan

Columnist Pete Hamill pointed out May 22 in the *New York Post*, "Nobody seems to devise a plan for the creation of 300,000 goods-producing jobs. Nobody seems to know how to open factories that will employ people who have never finished high school. Nobody seems capable of creating a system of daycare centers that would allow hundreds of thousands of single mothers to enter the workforce." He was mistaken. In 1981, mayoral candidate Mel Klenetsky had campaigned for the development of New York's port, manufacturing, and transportation facilities, and had been warmly backed by the late Hulan Jack, former borough president of Manhattan—Mayor Dinkins's mentor. Political enmity to Klenetsky, most notably from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), held Klenetsky's vote to 4%.

Today, the ADL is wooing credibility and money through a series of advertisements in the *New York Post*, a paper which has printed a spate of articles and letters to the editor on "black anti-Semitism." In turn, the *Post* has been a target of a boycott by black churches and a group of black professionals called the Committee to Eliminate Media Offensive to African People.

Percy Sutton, a black former Manhattan borough president, now the main owner of radio station WLIB, said that he would close the station if people continued to call into its talk shows and attack his friend the mayor. The station features frequent interviews with the Rev. Al Sharpton, and lawyers Alton Maddox and C. Vernon Mason, who accused the mayor of behaving "like P.W. Botha" in the Bensonhurst affair. Fred Friendly, of Columbia University, contends that there have been "many personal, and often anti-Semitic attacks on whites at WLIB."

WLIB's parent company is Inner City Broadcasting, of which Dinkins was a founding investor. It was "possible fiscal improprieties" in Dinkins's handling of Inner City stock transfers to his son, that prompted a federal investigation that began before he took office.