

Andrew Cuomo: Tribulations and Perhaps Trials

Jerry Krase (August 28, 2014)



Andy, the least lovable Cuomo is in deeper stuff than usual. The New Times reported recently that he “hobbled” investigations by the Commission he established when it got too close to home. There are two different ways to think about his current troubles. The first is that he is especially corrupt. The second is that Andy is a “normal” politician, making decisions based on how they will affect his more



and (now) less rosy future.

It seems that Andy, the least lovable child of Mario, is in deeper stuff than usual. The New Times reported recently that he “hobbled” (zoppicato) investigations by the powerful Moreland Commission he himself had established to root out corruption, when it got too close to home. According to [Susanne Craig, William K. Rashbaum and Thomas Kaplan](#) [2] “ It was barely two months old when its investigators, hunting for violations of campaign-finance laws, issued a subpoena to a media-buying firm that had placed millions of dollars’ worth of advertisements for the New York State Democratic Party.” Unfortunately they didn’t know that Andy bought campaign airtime from them in 2010. When Cuomo’s most senior aide, Lawrence S. Schwarz found out he called one of the commission’s three co-chairs, William J. Fitzpatrick, the district attorney in Syracuse and directed him to “Pull it back.” Although Andy said “...he had every right to monitor and direct the work of a commission “ “many commissioners and investigators saw the demands as politically motivated interference that hamstrung an undertaking that the governor had publicly vowed would be independent.” Andy nixed the commission after nine of its eighteen-month shelf life. As he gears up for a (hoped for) re-run in November, federal prosecutor Preet Bharara is looking into his role in the shutdown and has taken up the commission’s unfinished business. To add more fuel to the ethics fire, Andy evidently intends to use New York State funds in case he faces criminal charges. Even worse (ancora peggio) than all these troubles, the New York Times [denied him their expected endorsement](#) [3] in the upcoming (September 9th) Democratic Party Primary Election where he will face an, until recently, virtual unknown law professor (Zephyr Teachout).

There are two different ways to think about the current troubles of Governor Cuomo II. The first is that he is an especially corrupt politician. The second is to think that Andy is, unlike his father, a “normal” politician who makes decisions based primarily on how it will affect his future as opposed to his saintly reputation (reputazione di santo). Having spent much of my long life both studying and being at times too involved in politics, my sense is that Andy is not especially ethically challenged. For example, ex-Kings County District Attorney Charles Joseph Hynes who is now under the [ethics microscope](#) [4] for prosecutorial misconduct had such a squeaky clean reputation that he, like Andy’s father, headed several major and very sensitive statewide investigations. The idea that Andy would be unwilling to investigate, and possibly harm, those who helped him get elected is hardly shocking as it is SPOP (standard political operating procedure). The only politicians who go after their friends are those who have never been in office, or are out of the business.

In the interest of journalistic integrity I should note that I did a lot of work in Mario Cuomo’s gubernatorial and Major Owens’ congressional campaigns in 1982. In fact I coordinated some of their local campaign efforts in Brooklyn. After they both won, for my troubles as a volunteer (volontario), I was asked if I wanted a “job.” My reply was “No thanks.” I already had a professor “job” which most nine-to-fivers consider a “no show” one. I did say that I would accept, if offered, a pro bono position in an area of my interests. Soon thereafter I received a letter of my gubernatorial appointment to the New York State Council for the Humanities on which I proudly served until George Pataki became governor at which point I resigned. I also campaigned for recently elected New York City Mayor Bill DeBlasio. Shortly after he was elected I was asked to fill out an on-line form indicating how I might help his administration. Thereupon I also registered my lack of interest in doing anything more than serving pro bono in areas such as civil or human rights (diritti civili o umani). I have yet to hear from Bill, so I guess he has more important things to worry about such as how to eat pizza with only his hands.

Other political folks for whom I have done something for nothing much include then newly elected (1983) Congressman (now U.S. Senator) Chuck Schumer (Military Academy Candidate Review Board) are too numerous to mention. One elected official to whom I will be eternally grateful kept me out of Rikers Island Prison after a false arrest (falso arresto). Finally, in reference to political friends and enemies I must tell the story of a relative-in-law who was angry that he didn’t get a job for which he wasn’t qualified. He asked me to “look into it” for him. When I spoke to the patronage



boss (capo di clientelare) I was told that my relative-in-law didn't have the requirements for the position and that given the scrutiny of an earlier Moreland Commission the organization wanted to make sure that all appointments were solid. In politics the general patronage rule is that if there are two people qualified for the job and one is a friend, guess who gets it? PS: When friends don't get what they think they deserve, they become your enemies.

Andy's troubles might also be the Post-FDR curse (maladetto) placed on all New York State governors who even think of becoming President. Nelson Rockefeller failed three times (1964, 68, 72) Mario went nowhere even after the best speech ever heard at a Democratic Party National Convention (1984). For George Pataki, Elliot Spitzer, and David Patterson the office, for various other, and infinitely better, reasons, was also a dead end. It is also possible that Andy's troubles are partly a consequence of the sins of his father (peccati di suo padre) Mario. All politics is not only local it is also very personal and both Mario and son Andy made lots of enemies along their oft-shared pathways to higher office. The rap against Mario was that he thought he was smarter than everyone else (which he was) and the rap against Andrew is that he thinks he is. Perhaps Andrew learned at least one lesson from his father and is trying not to piss off his friends and thereby make more enemies.

According to unnamed (sensa nome) sources Andy has never been a particularly popular guy. His positive qualities have always been draped around his competence and his no-nonsense, clean-as-a-whistle doggedness, so his current troubles have made him much more vulnerable than anyone expected in his second term election campaign. As noted, Zephyr Teachout has been attracting increasing support in her challenge to him in the Democratic Party Primary. [Andy failed in his attempt to keep her off the ballot](#) [5] and, although she might not even come close to winning the battle, the war on Andrew's governorship and especially his higher office (Presidential?) aspirations is certain to continue.

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- [2] http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/23/nyregion/governor-andrew-cuomo-and-the-short-life-of-the-moreland-commission.html?_r=1
- [3] <http://newyork.cbslocal.com/2014/08/26/new-york-times-refuses-to-endorse-cuomo-in-democratic-primary/>
- [4] <http://www.propublica.org/article/for-brooklyn-prosecutor-a-troubled-last-term-and-a-trail-of-lingering-quest>
- [5] <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/12/nyregion/cuomo-primary-opponent-can-run-judge-rules.html>