NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

NEW YORK POST, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2001

If Green Fails ...

. . . the victory belongs to the race-baiters



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IT'S delicious to contemplate the meaning of a Mark Green defeat in today's mayoral election. The repudiation it would represent of every aspect of his career is a little like a dream come true for sensible New Yorkers who have watched his career with alternating suspicion and disgust.

Green cut his political teeth managing the 1976 senatorial campaign of Ramsey Clark, the most awful serious candidate for major political office in my lifetime. (Clark actually sided with Iran in the taking of the American hostages in 1979.) Green's kneejerk hostility to capitalism expressed itself in years of self-described "consumer advocacy" in Washington — which was simply another way of advocating untrammeled socialism.

Take this record of pronounced leftism, add to it a Clintonite hunger for attention, mix in an addiction to press conferences so out-of-control that a 12-step program would be the only solution — and there you have Mark Green.

"Cassius hath a lean and hungry look," says one mistrustful conspirator of another in Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar," the greatest of all political plays. The sleek and polished Mark Green, who loves the camera so much he literally licks his lips whenever he comes into focus, is the Cassius of New York.

It's nice to see him struggle and sweat.

If he wins today, it will be by the skin of his teeth. A Green victory will be due almost entirely to the natural advantages any Democrat possesses in New York City (mainly a 5-to-1 superiority over the GOP among registered voters) and with Green's own betrayal of his leftist past by the way he unashamedly stood on the shoulders of crime-buster Bill Bratton.

And yet — alas, alas that I even find myself writing these words — Mark Green would be a better mayor for New York City than Michael Bloomberg.

That's in part for substantive reasons: Green's views on rebuilding the city after Sept. 11 are far more thorough, honest and realistic than Bloomberg's confused pseudo-plan. It's in part due to the simple fact that Green has worked in government, and at a time of crisis it would be useful to have a mayor who knows how city agencies work.

That's especially true given the nightmarish chaos that will be caused by the wholesale replacement of dozens of elected officials due to New York's horribly ill-conceived term-limits law.

Some of those who have moved into Bloomberg's camp have come to believe that his victory will be a third term for Rudy Giuliani. Bloomberg has said he would try to keep on many of Rudy's lieutenants, and there's hope that the mayor would be appointed to run the new authority overseeing the rebuilding of lower Manhattan.

But Bloomberg will not have spent $50 million to become mayor so that he can be bossed around by Giuliani — nor will Giuliani be content to work for Michael Bloomberg. The way these things go, we'll be lucky if the two of them are talking by next Christmas.

Here's the most sobering thing to think about: A Green defeat will be seen as a victory for Al Sharpton, Freddy Ferrer and the politics of racial division in New York City.

The pundits and political scientists will say that Green lost because he had angered black and Latino voters who chose to stay home on election day.

For a week after the mid-October runoff, the leaders of the so-called "Black-Latino" coalition that came close to winning the Democratic nomination for Freddy Ferrer demonized Green for phone calls his campaign didn't make and fliers his campaign didn't hand out.

The anger against Green has been stirred up and manufactured by rabble-rousers — Sharpton and Bronx Democratic boss Roberto Ramirez particularly — who clearly would prefer to see Green lose because it will make them look more powerful. That explains the endorsement of Bloomberg by the New York Amsterdam News, which used blatantly anti-Semitic language to denounce Green and his "Jewish mafia from Borough Park."



Will Green's years of diligent leftism come to nothing?

The Amsterdam News endorsement points up the most bizarre aspect of this most bizarre race. Bloomberg knows full well that the Sharpton-Ramirez flirtation with him in October caused the Green juggernaut to be brought to a full stop. He may imagine that he can work with them.

By contrast, Green now has every reason to view Sharpton and Co. with the kind of loathing that they deserve — and that any New York mayor must have if he is to succeed. Maybe he'll show us he deserved that Bratton endorsement after all, and that Bratton wasn't just acting out of spite toward Rudy when he went with Green.

Of course, Green has to win first. Personally, I'd enjoy his loss tonight far more than his victory. But I don't think that would be best for New York City.

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