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What Workers Talk About When They Talk About War

BY JOANN WYPLJEWSKI

"You know what they say: a conservative is a liberal who was mugged. I was under those towers, and it changed me". Dan Walker, a firefighter with Engine 212 in Brooklyn, had noticed my red, white and blue peace sign button, and somehow the conversation turned to the subject of war. They call 212 The People's Firehouse because back in the 1970s, when arson was New York City's de facto redevelopment policy and firehouses in poor and working-class neighborhoods were being shut down like runaway factories, the people of Williamsburg successfully fought to save it. Walker told me he'd never been much of a drum-beater for war, but something as arbitrary as time—the fifty-four seconds between when he, his engine-mates and some workers at the World Trade Center escaped from Tower One and saw it collapse—"that changed me, and it hurts my heart to say that, it really hurts my heart, but it did".

I met Walker at a bar called Teddy's, where some of the same people who'd fought for the firehouse were holding a fundraiser for HERE Local 100, whose members used to have jobs at Windows on the World. More than a month had passed since the towers fell, but restaurant workers who'd lost seventy-five colleagues, union and nonunion, were crying as if it had been only days. In most of the city the memory is not quite so raw. There are services to provide, an economy on the skids and, for some, a war to think about. Earlier that evening at a meeting of the New York Central Labor Council, Brenda Stokely, president of AFSCME Local 215/DC1707 representing city workers in the

nonprofit sector, read out a statement issued by an ad hoc group called New York City Labor Against the War:

"September 11 has brought indescribable suffering to New York City's working people. We have lost friends, family members and coworkers of all color, nationalities and religions—a thousand of them union members. An estimated one hundred thousand New Yorkers will lose their jobs. We condemn this crime against humanity and mourn those who perished. We are proud of the rescuers and the outpouring of labor support for victims' families. We want justice for the dead and safety for the living. And we believe that George Bush's war is not the answer..."

When she finished, adding that the statement had been endorsed by her local, by twelve principal officers of city unions, by 260-plus New York unionists and 100-plus labor people from around the country, there was polite applause and some unspoken anger. Between the silence and the tears lies a space for all the conversations within labor that haven't happened, or have happened half-way, the conversations about war and foreign policy that some people are too afraid even to consider, and that others believe must begin, and soon. The question is, How?

Working-class people have typically not been the first ones to show up at a peace rally. Individual workers and unions opposed the war in Vietnam, but it wasn't until 1971 that unions acting in concert broke with the AFL-CIO to form Labor Against the War. In the 1980s labor components emerged in the nuclear freeze, antiapartheid, and Central America solidarity movements, but it's not as if every

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OUR LITTLE SECRETS

WHY GREEN LOST

Dave Marsh sends us this report. Aside from being a longtime CounterPuncher, Dave coedits the terrific Rock 'n Rap Confidential.

In the November 2001 elections, the Northeast was swept by Democrats. For the first time in decades, Democrats in New Jersey seized the governorship and both houses of the legislature. In Connecticut, Democrats took over almost the entire city government of Norwalk, the mayor's post in Waterbury, and even the city government of Greenwich, the Bush family seat. But in New York City, where Democratic registrations outnumber Republican by 4-1, the guy who got elected mayor is not only a Republican political novice who trailed by double digits coming out of the primary, he's a Red Sox fan. Mark Green never mentioned it.

Michael Bloomberg is also a billionaire with a business deeply entangled in city affairs, and he's made no effort to remove himself from it while spitting in the eye of city campaign finance regulations by spending \$60 million to get the job, which you'd think his opponent would

have hammered as a signal of how he'll handle those conflicts. If the conflict issue arose during the mayoral campaign, it wasn't Mark Green's doing.

The last week of the campaign, Bloomberg fell into an embrace with Rudy Giuliani who, even since 9/11, remains feared and hated by black and Latino voters. In fact, Giuliani was vulnerable to exposure of the autocratic, thuggish, deceitful way he actually ran affairs downtown during the post-WTC attack crisis. Mark Green had the same information about Giuliani being Giuliani that CounterPunch ran several weeks ago. (I know, because I gave it to his staff.) It came from notes taken by a city council member with comments from other officials from the affected area. Green never used it, even though he was tarred and feathered for saying he could have done as well or better than Giuliani in managing the crisis.

But that doesn't explain why Green lost the election. Nor was it the fact that such big name Democrats as Ed Koch and Hugh Carey turned on Green out of personal dislike or because of Green's pathetic last-minute attack ads slamming Bloomberg for sexual harassment. It wasn't even because Green was the only idiot in the Democratic primary willing to say that, because Rudy was so swell at handling things after the attack that the Mussolini of the Hudson should be given the extra months in offices for which he'd been whining.

Mark Green isn't mayor of New York today because black voters finally said "enough" to white liberal racism and spited him by voting for his opponent. They had good reason for doing so. Green spent a year trying to have it both ways. He had solid credentials as the only big-name pol in town who had consistently attacked Giuliani for his bullying and bigotry. But his first move in the campaign was to bring forth Bill Bratton, the police commissioner Giuliani deposed for being better liked than the mayor. The message Green thought he was sending may have been about sticking it to Rudy. But Bratton is mainly a cop, and not just a cop but a cop who pioneered the police profiling and stop-and-search techniques that created the

conditions for the murders of Amadou Diallo and Patrick Dorismund, among too many others. White voters may not have paid attention to this-but black voters did.

Green's attacks on Fernando Ferrer, his Hispanic opponent in the run-off-New York primaries, weren't based on Ferrer being a political hack, which he is, but were laced with implications that Ferrer was unqualified because he came from the wrong part of town. When a Bloomberg staffer got caught with racist literature, the staffer lost his job. But when it was revealed that Green's aides held a meeting in Brooklyn to figure out how to exploit Ferrer's ties to Al Sharpton in order to win more votes from Jews there, Green did nothing. As a result, Ferrer refused to campaign for Green; Sharpton threatened a black boycott of the election; and all the major black-owned media supported Bloomberg.

Green got less than half the Latino vote in a city where Democrats always do much better. Bloomberg got almost 30 per cent of the black vote, which cost Green at least ten to 15 points. Sounding like a Naderite talking about Al Gore, Muhammad said that Green winning "would have been a great tragedy". What happened here in New York was predictable, not because Mark Green is a fool but because this is the way the Democrats now run their affairs.

Green has been trying to become a high elected official since he ran for the Senate against Al D'Amato in 1986. That year, he asked me, through a contributor, for help gaining access to performers to help in his campaign. When told that the price was helping to register minority voters in Harlem, Green responded (I was told), "I can't do that, I'm Jewish". Imagine a black candidate saying such a thing. Green, who could not have won the election without a huge black turnout, was trounced, visiting six more years of D'Amato sleaze upon the nation.

In 1992, learning nothing from this, the Democrats ran Robert Abrams against D'Amato. This was the same Robert Abrams who had just written the report assailing Sharpton and company for their behavior in the Tawana Brawley affair. To say that this was tone-deaf to race is redundant. Abrams also got trounced. When Giuliani signalled his political intentions by participating in a racist anti-David Dinkins police riot on the steps of City Hall, prominent Democrats did nothing to

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