

# New York's m

By Salim Muwakkil

NEW YORK

**T**HE POSSIBILITY THAT NEW YORKERS WILL elect the first black mayor in the city's history seems a bit less likely now than it did two months ago. Manhattan Borough President David Dinkins, the black candidate for the Democratic nomination, still leads incumbent Ed Koch in the latest polls, but the margin is shrinking and the mayor clearly has the momentum as the September 12 primary election nears.

The two other Democratic candidates—Harrison "Jay" Goldin and Richard Ravitch—have failed to garner much public support and consequently languish low in the polls. Goldin, 53, has been the city comptroller for 16 years. The 56-year-old Ravitch is a real estate developer and former chairman of both the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and the City Charter Revision Commission.

All four of the candidates are moderate-to-liberal Democrats, with Dinkins stating positions furthest on the political left. Interestingly, Dinkins prefers to be characterized as "progressive" while his opponents readily embrace the liberal label. Although drugs and crime have pushed the "conservative" issue of law and order high on the list of voter concerns, New York City is still much more liberal than the rest of the country. Jesse Jackson won the 1988 Democratic presidential primary here, and Michael Dukakis took the general election.

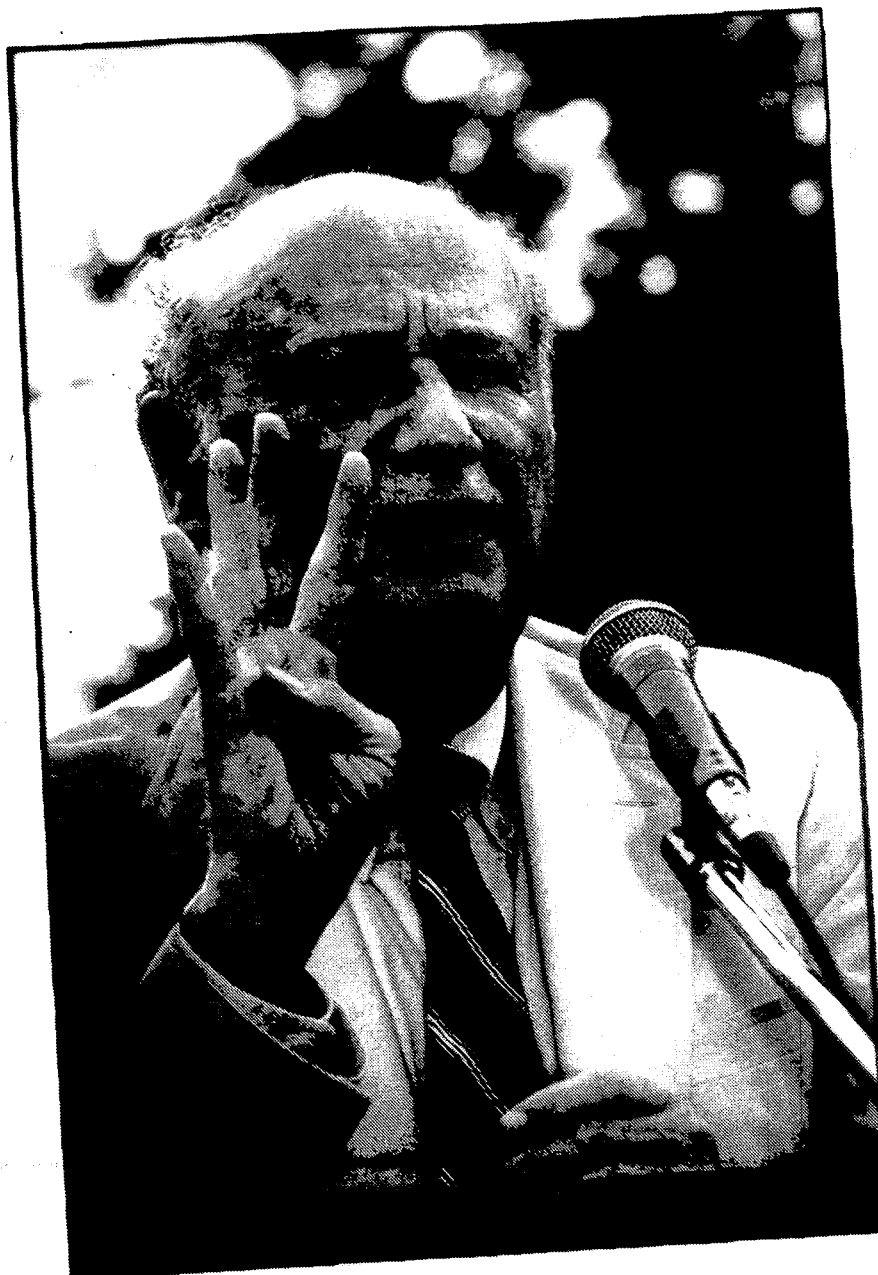
If none of the candidates wins more than 40 percent of the primary, the top two vote-getters will face each other in a September 26 runoff election. In this overwhelmingly Democratic city the general election is usually nothing more than a pro forma exercise to ratify the Democratic primary results. This year, though, things will be different.

With Republican Rudolph Giuliani—a former U.S. attorney with a national reputation as an effective prosecutor—expected to win the GOP nomination, the November 7 general election promises to be a hard-fought battle. Giuliani's primary opponent is Ronald Lauder, the "richest man to ever run for mayor of New York," with a net worth of more than \$250 million.

Lauder, the 45-year-old son of cosmetics queen Estée Lauder and a former ambassador to Austria, is sinking \$10 million of his own money into the campaign. He has the support of New York's most powerful Republican, Sen. Alfonse D'Amato, but little additional backing. The wealthy cosmetics heir insists he's the only true Republican in the race, and his name will appear on the Conservative Party ballot as well in the November election. Most pundits give him no chance of toppling the popular former prosecutor in the GOP primary.

**Dinkins' dilemma:** Dinkins' quest to become the city's first black mayor has failed to fire up the city's African-American community. Thus, despite a campaign featuring a wide range of interracial support, the Dinkins' candidacy is generating scant enthusiasm among the grass roots of his core constituency. Many black analysts blame this on his conciliatory political style. Others claim his team just hasn't done the necessary legwork.

Because of a series of incidents involving black New Yorkers who died while in police hands, and the general tenor of the times, racial tensions are high. Koch has done no-



Ed Koch



David

thing but inflame those tensions with his harsh rhetoric and manifest insensitivity to the needs of the African-American community.

"For 12 years Koch has blatantly insulted and ignored the black community," explains Wilbur Tatum, publisher of the black-owned *Amsterdam News*. "It's way past time that we get rid of this corrupt and anti-black regime." For Tatum and many others, Dinkins' popularity is fueled by a widespread dislike of the brash incumbent. In fact, it was a Koch statement during the 1988 presidential primary—"Jews and other New Yorkers concerned about Israel would be crazy to vote for Jesse Jackson"—that is credited with convincing Dinkins to run.

As the primary winds down, the Dinkins camp is sharpening its message and attacking Koch more aggressively in an attempt to spark some excitement in the black community. Although he has lined up an impressive array of endorsements, most analysts agree that Dinkins must energize his core to win the election.

Former mayors John Lindsay, the last Republican to lead the city, and Abraham Beame, the Democrat who ousted Lindsay and preceded Koch, are on the list of prominent Dinkins supporters. Among the dozens of endorsements received by the Manhattan borough boss are those of the National Organization for Women; Victor Gotbaum, former leader of New York's Municipal Union; and Howard Squadron, a former head of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations.

"David's campaign is the most hopeful of them all," says Bill Muchow, a veteran organizer who heads Council 16 of the Teamsters union and who is coordinating much of Dinkins' labor support. "He's the only candidate who can bring this city together, and a lot of people realize that. There is a tremendous amount of racism in this city, and David's election would do much to get us on the road to dealing with it."

**Hispanic support:** The Democratic front-runners are aggressively seeking support from the city's huge Hispanic community. Elected Hispanic officials are split almost evenly in their support for Koch and Dinkins. However, the city's highest-ranking Hispanic elected official, Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer, recently endorsed Dinkins.

The relationship between Dinkins and Hispanic New Yorkers is of great import for its larger political implications. Together blacks and Hispanics make up about 45 percent of the vote in the city, and various community activists have long urged a working coalition between what they consider natural allies.

That potential alliance was seriously damaged in 1985 when a group of African-American leaders—including Dinkins—aborted the incipient mayoral campaign of Herman Badillo, a former Bronx borough president and congressman. Instead Dinkins and the others backed Denny Farrell, a nothing candidate who just happened to be black and who suffered an embarrassing loss at the ballot box. Hispanics were angered by the action of the black politicians, and Koch pulled about 65 percent of their vote in the 1985 primary.

Still nursing that wound, Badillo has said he will endorse anyone but Dinkins. "When they ask me why I'm not supporting Dinkins," Badillo says, "I quote Jesse Jackson: 'Reciprocity is the essence of politics.'" But Badillo, who also was Koch's deputy mayor before a parting of the ways over policy, has not endorsed the incumbent, either. In fact,

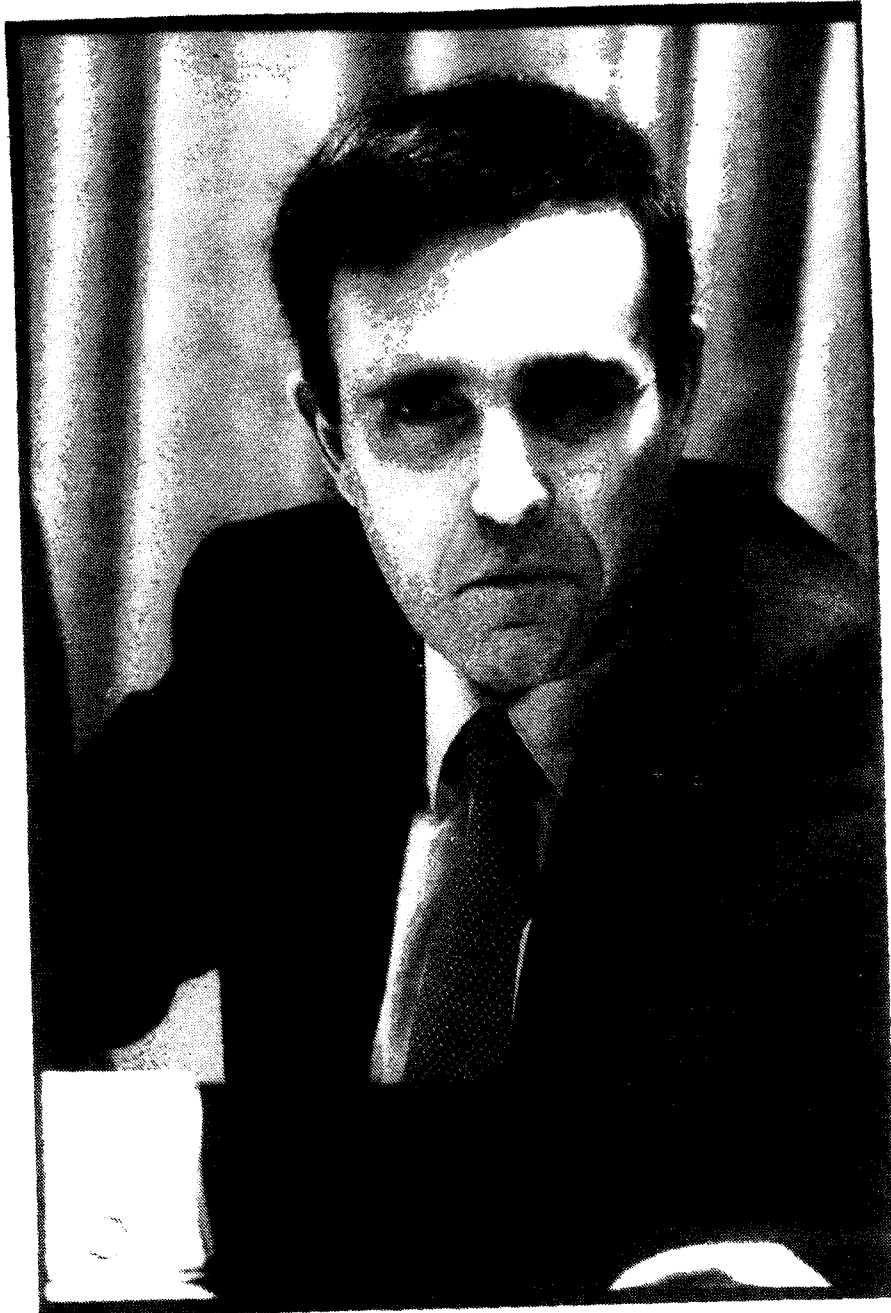
**Six colorless candidates play the racial game**



# Mayoral race



1989 Rex Heberford Impact Visuals



1989 Rex Heberford Impact Visuals

Rudolph Giuliani

Koch's relationship with the Hispanic community in general is a source of great concern to his operatives.

In early 1988 Hispanic New Yorkers gave Koch a 56 percent approval rating, but the latest figure is 25 percent. "Latinos are also fed up with the mayor's confrontational tactics and his insensitivity to our concerns," says Dennis Rivera, president of Local 1199 of the Drug, Hospital and Health Care Employees Union. Rivera supports Dinkins.

Republican Giuliani is also viewed favorably by a majority of the city's Hispanics. His image as a tough-guy reformer is an attractive one to a community bedeviled by the urban ills of crime, crack and AIDS. To many Hispanics Giuliani's conservative stance and prosecutorial credibility on those problems and his liberalism on social issues seem just what the doctor ordered for these troubled times. Moreover, in another peculiarity of politics in this city, Giuliani has also managed to get his name listed as a candidate on the Liberal Party ticket.

**Giuliani's tumble:** But Giuliani's star is beginning to fall. After bursting on the scene with all the bravura of a hero riding in on a white horse to save the city, his campaign has run smack into the cold facts of New York City politics.

First there were the revelations about the links between his law firm and Panamanian strongman Manuel Noriega. Then the political ramifications of the Supreme Court's *Webster* decision caught him off guard. Already on record as being opposed to abortion and favoring the overturning of *Roe vs.*

*Wade*, Giuliani "clarified" his position following the Supreme Court ruling, when a variety of polls revealed that most Americans favored continued abortion rights. Although the Republican-Liberal Giuliani says he still personally opposes abortion, he now believes that the procedure should remain legal and says he now favors funding of abortions for poor women.

That flip-flop tarnished the golden boy's glow and chilled his reception among the more liberal of his supporters. He compounded the damage by coming out against bereavement leave for homosexuals employed by the city who suffer the death of a partner. Since then there have been other unflattering revelations: Daniel Lazare's piece in the *Village Voice* detailing Giuliani's role in imprisoning Haitian boat people, disclosures of his Vietnam draft exemption and charges of media grandstanding in various Wall Street probes while he was a U.S. attorney.

After one investigation initiated by the Giuliani-led U.S. attorneys office recently ended with no charges being filed, Mayor Koch sneered that Giuliani "calls himself a big prosecutor, then handcuffs people, drags them out of their offices in chains, causes great pain to their families and then he doesn't come up with an indictment."

On top of that, and perhaps more damaging, is a *Daily News* photo showing Giuliani holding his son in his arms as a gust of wind blows back his carefully arranged hairpiece revealing a bald pate for all New York to see. The photo gaffe has become a metaphor, of

sorts, for the Giuliani campaign: who is this guy, really?

The candidate has hired Republican hit man Roger Ailes, of Willie Horton fame, to help reconstruct his damaged campaign. But according to Jimmy Breslin, a columnist for *New York Newsday* and one of the city's most respected pundits, Giuliani will never become mayor of New York City with Ailes—an operative alien to the New York mentality—calling the shots.

**Koch's burden:** After serving as mayor for 12 years, Koch has an excess of negative baggage. The African-American community seems to be the most unhappy with his tenure, but the contentious Koch has alienated many other groups with his bully-boy tactics and shoot-from-the-hip persona.

One recent example of his rhetorical recklessness is an outburst during a speech he made outside the Iranian mission to the United Nations. All six candidates showed up at the demonstration, called by the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York to help defuse U.S. anger at an Israeli action that endangered the lives of American hostages.

While the five other candidates denounced terrorism and pledged to support any U.S. action taken, Koch urged the president to tell Iran, "If every single hostage isn't freed by Monday" the U.S. would carpet-bomb the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon—a 75-mile-long stretch of Lebanon that is home to thousands of Lebanese non-combatants. The very next day Koch visited the Arab section of Brooklyn to assure them that he

would offer protection from the anti-Arab violence that had been threatened during this period. According to reporters on the scene, he seemed unable to understand why the Arab community refused to take seriously a promise of protection from a man who had just advocated the indiscriminate bombing of their relatives.

**Talent bank:** Aside from the mayor's various verbal affronts, he is having problems in other areas. The latest involves his former special assistant, Joseph DeVincenzo, who was recently indicted on 11 counts of perjury for lying to a state commission about the activities of the Mayor's Talent Bank, an organization set up to bring more blacks, Hispanics and women into city government. Investigations later revealed that the Talent Bank was simply a patronage mill that parceled out jobs mostly to white males with political connections.

This charge is particularly damaging to Koch who, as noted earlier, is least well-liked in the African-American community. What's more, it adds to the aura of corruption that has surrounded the Koch administration. In the first debate for the Democratic primary race, Goldin called out the names of some of Koch's people who left office because of various corruption scandals and added, "They haul them off in manacles; they throw them in jail. You had to dismiss them in disgrace," he said, looking at Koch. "And that's a record you can't laugh away, a record of the worst corruption in a municipal administration in this city in history."

**Hit the streets:** Lillian Smith was a volunteer for Harold Washington's juggernaut Chicago mayoral campaign in 1983. She said the experience politicized her forever and she still marvels at the tremendous civic energy generated on the grass-roots level. A producer for the *Donahue Show*, Smith is now a Manhattan resident and a volunteer for the Dinkins campaign.

"The difference between the two cities is astounding," she explained. "The Dinkins people are not as eager to get down into the community as were the workers for Washington. And there are a lot of turf rivalries in this city that either weren't there or were submerged in Chicago." Although she remains confident that Dinkins will pull off a victory, Smith is impatient with his campaign strategy.

Compounding Dinkins' problems is the contentious relationship between the city's Jewish population and the more militant segments of the black activist community. The candidate needs the energy and street-level know-how of those organizers to help promote his campaign among those types of people who Smith noted were so essential in Washington's Chicago victory. But Dinkins' overtures to the city's powerful Jewish electorate has disenchanted many of those activists.

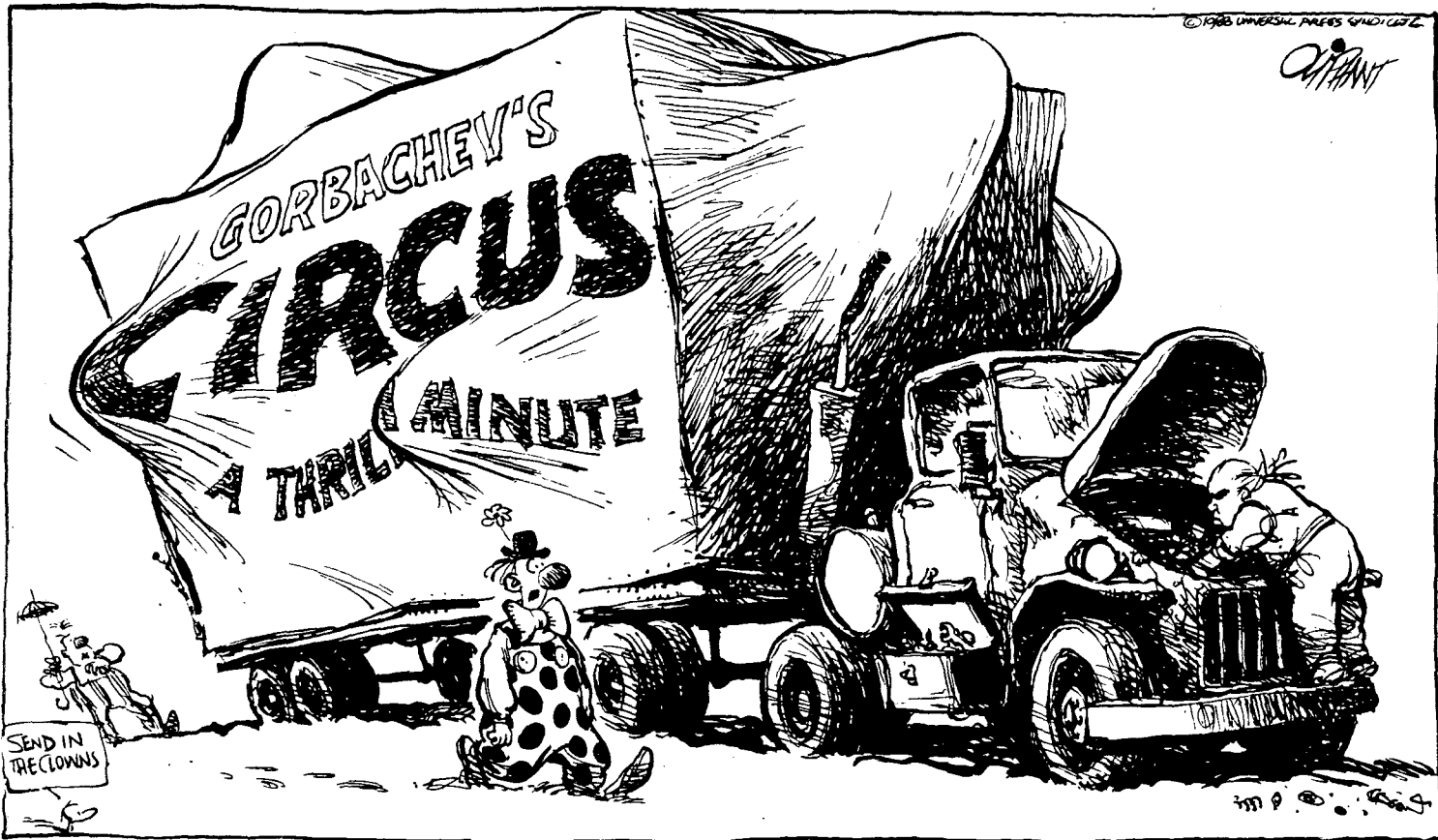
The publisher of a militant African-American-owned weekly said, "Dinkins is so concerned about showing how reasonable he is and how anti-Semitic he's not, the man has almost completely forgotten where his bread is buttered. Why is he bragging about denouncing Farrakhan, when his core constituency looks to Farrakhan as a hero? Who is he trying to please?" The publisher, who wished to remain anonymous, said, "Somebody should tell Dinkins that he's the only candidate in the Democratic primary who is not of the Jewish faith." □



# EDITORIAL

IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"



'SIR, THE BEAR IS LOOSE...'

## Communism's crisis, socialism's opportunity

Socialism, everyone agrees, is in crisis. No one seems to know what the concept means anymore. As a political movement, both in the East and in the West, disorientation reigns. The central and most obvious reason for this has been the glaring failure of Communism—what the Soviets call “real existing socialism”—in the information age.

A command economy and one-party rule got Soviet Communists through the years of forced industrialization and World War II in seemingly good condition. But in the postindustrial age of computerization and universal communication, the stifling conformity of centralized decision-making that had sufficed to maintain basic production caused a deadening stagnation that left the Communist world further and further behind the West. Or as Karl Marx would say, Soviet relations of production, no longer compatible with the already-developed forces of production, have become all-too-obvious fetters. And so, in the words of the *Communist Manifesto*, “They had to burst asunder.”

**The development drive:** The ideal of socialism in the days before the Russian Revolution was far different than under “real existing socialism.” This was not simply because all earlier socialists had understood political and economic democracy to be essential elements of a socialist society, but more fundamentally because the function of socialism changed when the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917. For Lenin, and then Stalin, socialism was a means to the rapid, ruthless development of Soviet productive forces, and not, as Marx wrote in *Capital*, the means to a “higher form of society,” based on a highly developed industrial system, “in which the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling principle.” In short, “real existing socialism” has served much the same purpose that real existing laissez-faire capitalism served in the 19th century—the driven development of an industrial base—the difference being that the struggle for democracy proceeded apace with the development of industrial capitalism in the 19th century, but has only recently emerged in the Communist world.

But in the past five years the need for a more open and democratic society has become apparent to some Communist leaders, and the popular struggle for democracy has emerged with a vengeance almost everywhere in the Communist bloc. Disaffection with the Communist Party in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe had, of course, long been pandemic. Until recently, however, the general mood, reflecting a sense of hopelessness, was passive. With the most obvious exception of Solidarity in Poland, it generally took the form of foot-dragging and morbid jokes.

But once the possibility of change was opened up by Mikhail Gorbachov's espousal of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, rejection of Communist leadership and policies took a multitude of forms. These ranged from rejection of Communist candidates in Soviet elections to demands of various ethnic minorities, most notably the Baltic republics, for true autonomy, and from the fledgling democracy movement in China to the formation of the first non-Communist government in Eastern Europe since the early days of the Cold War.

In the West, and especially in the United States, all of this has been seen not only as a failure of socialism, but also as a vindication and victory of corporate capitalism. But while the crisis of world Communism might be seen as a victory for the West, it is less a vindication of corporate capitalism than an unprecedented opening of possibility for democratic socialism.

The reasons for this are twofold. First, because society's responsibility for the health, education, housing and employment of the population is an accepted—indeed demanded—principle throughout the Communist bloc. Second, because the centralized bureaucracies that characterize advanced corporate capitalism, as well as Communism, are the primary targets of popular disdain among those in the East who wish to escape the stifling conformity imposed from above.

Then, too, corporate capitalism as we know it is a failing system. It has had the good luck to exist alongside “real existing socialism.” But once deprived of that comparison—looked at in its own light and not simply as an alternative to a system obviously in crisis—a less attractive picture emerges.

**Our reality:** We are, after all, a country in which the gap between rich and poor is growing apace, with billionaires at one end and an increasing percentage of Americans living in poverty. A recent Gallup Poll found that a quarter of all adults, and a third of non-whites, had a “close relative” who is “living in poverty now.” Our public education system is in shambles. Affordable housing, not just for the poor but for all working Americans, is becoming scarcer. Adequate health care is available to fewer and fewer Americans, and the threat of financial ruin as a result of major illness faces even those relatively well off. And, of course, our environment is constantly being ravaged by corporate greed. Meanwhile, our public resources are directed primarily toward the military, with some \$200 billion a year allegedly going for our defense, but in fact helping only to continue the degradation of our society.

This is a picture not of a healthy social system, but of one with a false set of priorities imposed by those who place corporate profitability above social welfare as their operative principle. It is a system based on private greed rather than social need. And although it has done better in providing for its people than any other we have yet known, the resources we have created could and should now be put to better use.

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