

Giuliani prepares US presidential bid—a new phase in 9/11 mythmaking

Bill Van Auken
18 November 2006

With this week's announcement that Rudolph Giuliani has formed an exploratory committee—the first step in making a run for the 2008 Republican presidential nomination—the mythmaking surrounding New York City's former Republican mayor is entering a new phase.

New York's tabloids gave the founding of the "Rudolph Giuliani Presidential Exploratory Committee Inc." banner headline treatment, while a number of political analysts treated the move as a groundbreaking event in the long slog to the 2008 election.

In the wake of the Republican debacle at the polls in this year's midterm contests, Giuliani is being sold to the public as the party's potential savior.

He is being promoted as a "moderate" Republican alternative to the politics of Bush and Co., ideally positioned to appeal to the "centrist" and "independent" voters whose crossover is credited by media pundits for this year's Democratic sweep. Some have opined that the defeat dealt to Bush—as well as to a virtually every candidate for whom Giuliani personally campaigned in the run-up to November 7—has somehow strengthened the political position of New York's ex-mayor.

Like most of what passes for political analysis in the American media, the attempt to cast Giuliani as a "moderate" alternative is both shallow and grossly misleading.

It is based almost exclusively on statements he made while running for mayor of New York in support of abortion and gay rights, the two key "social issues" that Republicans have flogged in order to mobilize their base within the Christian right.

Any close examination of his record demonstrates, however, that on fundamental questions of militarism, democratic rights and social equality, Giuliani is among the most right-wing political figures in America today.

As mayor, Giuliani was despised for his provocative defense of flagrant police killings of innocent victims such as Amadou Diallo and Patrick Dorismond, the byproduct of relentless "quality of life" and "zero tolerance" law enforcement that rode roughshod over the democratic rights of the city's working class and minority residents. In the Dorismond case, he brought public life in the city to an all-time nadir by illegally unsealing and publicizing the victim's juvenile record of a nonviolent offense to "prove" that the 26-year-old got what he deserved when an undercover cop shot him dead on a Manhattan street corner.

Presiding over City Hall during the most explosive Wall Street boom in US history, Giuliani pursued policies that served to transfer wealth from the poorest sections of New York's population to the richest, forcing nearly a quarter of a million people—in their overwhelming majority women and children—off welfare and into even deeper poverty.

During the same period, he expanded the city's corporate welfare initiatives, handing out generous tax breaks and concessions packages to Wall Street firms and major corporations headquartered in New York.

He also sought to whip up religious backwardness and curry favor with the Republican right by staging bizarre and malicious confrontations over

art that he deemed anti-religious or offensive, cutting off funds at one point to the Brooklyn Museum over an exhibition. The episode had more than a whiff of fascism, echoing the kind of campaign waged by the Nazis against "degenerate art."

Moreover, his administration was packed with incompetent flunkies, appointed for their unquestioning loyalty to the mayor or to pay off debts to political patrons. The exposure of multiple Giuliani-era corruption scandals continues to this day, with the city's Department of Investigations continuing to pursue multiple probes into the ex-mayor's closest aides.

By the fall of 2001, he was widely despised and so politically and personally discredited that he was forced to drop his challenge to Hillary Clinton for a US Senate seat.

But for Giuliani, the shopworn phrase "9/11 changed everything" has real meaning. The terrorist attacks five years ago served to wipe the slate clean, turning him into an overnight icon—"America's mayor." In the years that have followed, he has managed to turn this reputation into a marketable commodity that has made him a very rich man.

According to what passes for conventional wisdom within the US media, the terrorist attacks that toppled the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, proved Giuliani an exceptional leader, established him as a prescient warrior against international terrorism and demonstrated his selfless dedication to the people of New York and the nation.

He has since placed this media-driven reputation at the service of the most reactionary causes, explicitly promoting the ill-fated US war of aggression against Iraq as vengeance for the victims who died in the Twin Towers.

Giuliani was lionized by the media for the fact that he was at the scene of the World Trade Center's collapse and spoke coherently to the people of New York in its immediate aftermath—in contrast to Bush who sat in a Florida elementary school classroom as the tragedy unfolded and then fled in Air Force 1 for a circuitous journey to secure military bases in the South and Midwest.

But what is the substance of Giuliani's role on September 11? And how did the decisions he had made in the years leading up to the attacks affect the city's response to the catastrophe?

The recent book by investigative reporters Wayne Barrett of the *Village Voice* and Dan Collins of CBS News, *Grand Illusion*, provides valuable insights into these questions, serving to prick the media-created bubble that has encased Giuliani for the past five years. (*Grand Illusion: The Untold Story of Rudy Giuliani and 9/11*, HarperCollins, 400 pp, \$25.95)

Basing themselves on interviews with former city officials and survivors of the trade center collapse, testimony and documents that emerged from the 9/11 Commission in 2004 and the reporting of many others journalists who covered the city, Barrett and Collins establish that political decisions made by Giuliani over the course of his eight years in office left the city ill-prepared to confront the disaster that unfolded on September 11. They

likewise make it clear that the actions taken by the ex-mayor on the day itself, when he wandered around lower Manhattan giving a series of “walking press conferences,” only contributed to the disorganization and confusion that ultimately cost lives.

The book makes clear that Giuliani, first elected in 1993, completely ignored the lessons of the first attack on the World Trade Center, which occurred that year, and failed to implement multiple recommendations from the city’s emergency services professionals that could have saved lives eight years later.

Among the most egregious manifestations of this failure to draw any lessons from the 1993 attack was the fact that firefighters were using the same 1960s-era “handie-talkie” radios on September 11, 2001, as they had used eight years earlier. On 9/11, just as in the 1993 incident, these devices failed to function within the high-rise towers.

As a result, entire fire companies failed to hear an order to evacuate before the towers fell, and the Fire Department as a whole was unable to communicate with the New York City Police Department, whose helicopter pilots had warned 25 minutes in advance that the North Tower was going to collapse. Similarly, the police received a warning that floors appeared to be collapsing in the South Tower 20 minutes before that building fell. As a result, the NYPD ordered its personnel out and suffered one-fifteenth of the casualties inflicted upon the FDNY.

Giuliani gave a self-serving and perverse explanation for the failure of the firefighters to evacuate the towers before they fell, attributing it not to a fatal failure of communications, but to a supposedly suicidal *esprit de corps*. “They weren’t going to abandon the ship,” he told the *New York Times* in 2002. “You have to understand the nature of a firefighter. It’s like the nature of a Navy captain.”

In point of fact, the bulk of the 343 firefighters who died were more akin to Navy sailors. Their captains—the senior leadership of the FDNY, much of which was also wiped out that day—were trying to tell them to flee the buildings, but were unable to make contact.

In another statement cited in the book, Giuliani celebrated the deaths of 343 firefighters as a deliberate and politically necessary sacrifice. “Rather than giving us a story of uniformed men fleeing, while civilians were left behind, which would have been devastating, to the morale of the country, they gave us an example of very, very brave men and women in uniform who stand their ground to protect civilians.”

The book effectively debunks this morbid claim that firefighters chose to die. Citing survivors who did escape the buildings, it makes clear that many caught in the collapse were not “standing their ground” but resting on floors, exhausted from the multi-story climb up the trade center’s stairs in full gear and oblivious to the fact that the building was about to fall.

A 2005 report issued by the National Institute of Standards and Technology following a \$23 million study of the response to the 9/11 attacks was unequivocal: “A preponderance of the evidence indicates that emergency responder lives were likely lost at the WTC resulting from the lack of timely information-sharing and inadequate communications capabilities.” It found that only half of the emergency responders “heard radio messages calling for the immediate evacuation of the building.”

When Giuliani testified before the 9/11 Commission in May 2004, he was nearly drowned out by a chorus of relatives of firefighters and others killed at the trade center, who booed and shouted, “What about the radios. Talk about the radios.”

While the commission, as its Republican chairman Thomas Kean later admitted, gave Giuliani a politically motivated pass, those in the audience knew that firefighters lacked adequate radios that day and died because of the politically corrupt methods of the Giuliani administration.

Several months before the September 11 disaster, the city struck a suspect no-bid \$33 million deal with Motorola Corp. for new digital radios that were untested and grossly ill-suited for use in firefighting. After they were introduced, firefighters found that they could not hear

transmissions from those working only a few feet away from them. In one case, a downed firefighter’s “mayday” call went unheard, nearly leading to his death. As a result, the radios—designed initially for encrypted use by the National Security Agency—were withdrawn and the antiquated models reintroduced.

In his testimony before the 9/11 panel, Giuliani claimed that the inability of the police and fire departments to communicate with each other was a matter of “technology”—that interoperable radios that could switch both departments to the same channel “do not exist today.” As the book points out, a study by the US Conference of Mayors had found that, on the contrary, 77 percent of the largest 192 American cities have precisely such radios in operation.

Grand Illusion cites the moving testimony of family members of firefighters killed on September 11 who attempted to sue the city over the radios but were blocked because of a clause in the victims compensation law that precluded any such legal actions.

Testifying in court, Eileen Tallon, mother of Sean Patrick Tallon, a 26-year-old probationary firefighter, expressed outrage over the actions of Giuliani and his administration. She told the court, “In April 2001, my son came home and he said to myself and my husband and my daughter one evening: Something is going on with the radios. Something very bad is going on with the radios. He said I’m very worried. Even special chiefs and people were getting transferred farther away when they were complaining about the radios. So I said to him: Well you better stay quiet. You need your job. I said I’m sure the people at the top are taking care of the radios. And I have found out, Judge, that so much wrong has been done about the radios. And that’s why I’m here. I’m looking so that people that did wrong with these radios that we could, you know, show future generations that wrong can’t be covered up.”

Sally Regenhard, whose 28-year-old firefighter son was also killed on 9/11, testified, “The people who are guilty promulgated these stories that, oh, the firefighters could have left, but they didn’t. They heard the orders, but they refused. I’m here to uphold the character and dignity of my son. He was a marine. If he would’ve heard an order to evacuate, he would have evacuated. Not only that, he loved life. He never, never would have done anything to commit suicide.”

Nor was this the only fatal communications failure. FDNY officials present at the World Trade Center disaster were unable to communicate with 911 operators responding to the frantic calls from people inside the buildings. Thus, while fire department commanders had determined that everyone should evacuate the buildings, the operators, working off an established and outmoded protocol, were telling people to stay put and wait for emergency personnel to reach them. It will never be known how many of those who died might have found a way out if they had been told to flee.

Why was there no system in place to allow those at the scene of a disaster to communicate to operators fielding calls from people needing assistance? “During the Giuliani years, the city collected more than \$250 million in telephone surcharges to upgrade 9-1-1 but diverted the majority of the funding for other budgetary purposes, even in years of huge surpluses,” Barrett and Collins report. “Unifying 9-1-1, Emergency Medical Services, and fire dispatch, as done in other major cities, was never considered. Instead Giuliani just let it drift.”

Asked at the 9/11 Commission hearing what he would tell leaders in other cities about how to prepare for a similar disaster, Giuliani replied, “The most important recommendation that I would make, put on the top of the list, is that cities should have Offices of Emergency Management. The Office of Emergency Management that we established in ’95, ’96 was invaluable to us.”

This self-congratulation by Giuliani is belied by the facts. As the staff report prepared for the commission pointed out: “Any attempt to establish a unified command on 9/11 would have been frustrated by the lack of

communication and coordination among responding agencies. The Office of Emergency Management headquarters, which would have served as a focal point for information-sharing, was evacuated. Even prior to its evacuation, moreover, it did not play an integral role in ensuring that information was shared among agencies on 9/11.”

The evacuated OEM headquarters—popularly known as “Rudy’s bunker”—had been established in 1999 on the 23rd floor of 7 World Trade Center, a building adjacent to the Twin Towers. While a number of ranking police officials had argued strongly against the site—pointing out that the trade center remained the most likely target for a terrorist attack—Giuliani shrugged off the warnings and proceeded with a multimillion-dollar contract for the space with developer Larry Silverstein, a prominent contributor to the mayor’s reelection campaign.

The city then proceeded to install—in flagrant violation of building codes—a 6,000-gallon emergency fuel tank above ground level and a 275-gallon tank on the seventh floor. Subsequent investigations have suggested that the ignition of these tanks was the principal cause of 7 World Trade Center’s collapse several hours after the fall of the Twin Towers.

Giuliani and other city officials were unable to enter their high-rise bunker on September 11, and its state-of-the-art equipment went unused. As for the OEM’s leading personnel, they played virtually no role on the day of the disaster. The agency’s director was Richard Sheirer, whose career as a fire alarm dispatcher took a meteoric rise as a result of his persuading his small municipal union to endorse Giuliani in his 1993 race for mayor.

The book cites the devastating testimony of John Farmer, the former New Jersey attorney general who headed the 9/11 Commission unit that reviewed the city’s response. “We tried to get a sense of what Sheirer was really doing,” he said. “We tried to figure it out from the videos. We couldn’t tell. Everybody from OEM was with him, virtually the whole chain of command. Some of them should have been at the command center.”

Sheirer was by no means atypical. Similar figures headed both the fire and police departments. The FDNY’s commissioner, Tom Von Essen—who had twice flunked a promotional exam to become a fire Lieutenant—also owed his position to having convinced the firefighters’ union to endorse Giuliani in 1993. Before the end of his term, he became widely hated as a turncoat by his union’s rank and file.

And at the helm of the Police Department was Bernard Kerik, who before being catapulted into the commissioner’s office had held only the rank of third-grade detective, the lowest after beat cop. His only known qualification was having served as Giuliani’s chauffeur and bodyguard during the 1993 campaign. Earlier this year, Kerik pleaded guilty to corruption charges involving kick-backs and mob ties. The case was only part of the geyser of scandal and corruption that erupted after President Bush’s abortive nomination of the ex-police commissioner as the head of the Department of Homeland Security.

As the book makes clear, on 9/11, these three, the nominal leadership of the city’s main emergency response agencies, were trudging aimlessly together with Giuliani through lower Manhattan, providing photo-ops, but no direction to the efforts of firefighters, cops and others at the scene.

Giuliani’s presence at the scene only served to exacerbate lack of communication and coordination that led ultimately to a greater loss of lives, as both his and others’ accounts of that day make clear.

Arriving at the Fire Department’s command post on West Street, Giuliani spoke briefly to the Chief of Department Peter Ganci, First Deputy Commissioner Bill Feehan and rescue chief Ray Downey, the senior leaders of the FDNY, all of whom were subsequently killed. As debris from the building began falling near the site, Kerik and others urged the mayor to leave. As Giuliani wrote in his own book, *Leadership*, “I turned north and headed to the Police Department command post.”

The action effectively separated the senior leadership of the Police Department from that of the Fire Department and flew in the face of the city’s own stated policy, which called for the Fire Department to be in overall charge of any fire incident and for the establishment of a joint command post. If they had done so, the inability of the two departments to communicate with each other over their incompatible radios could have been largely mitigated.

The National Institute of Standards and Technology study concluded that “functional unified operations were diminished as a result of the two departments’ command posts being separated.” The former head of OEM, Jerry Hauer, a qualified professional who was driven out of the post, agreed: “Had there been a senior police liaison at the command post, information about what the police were observing in the air could have been relayed to the ground.”

As the authors spell out, “Rudy Giuliani had the opportunity to make that kind of unified direction happen and, by his own description, the obligation to make it happen, but he didn’t.” Instead, he marched away from the FDNY command post with the entire senior leadership of the Police Department, which functioned largely as his personal entourage and bodyguard.

As *Grand Illusion* makes clear, Giuliani has parlayed the fabricated tale of his supposed heroism and decisive leadership on 9/11 into a personal fortune. After a failed attempt to upend the democratic process by having the 2001 mayoral election called off and his own term extended on the grounds that only he could lead post-9/11 New York, Giuliani established his consulting firm, Giuliani Partners.

Giuliani’s services amounted to renting out his name and the 9/11 aura to companies in trouble and lobbying for favors within the Republican political establishment. In many cases, those who put money into the enterprise were the same banks and corporations that he had showered with tax cuts and concessions when he was mayor. One of his biggest clients was the big pharmaceuticals’ association, which he assisted by lobbying against allowing the re-importation of cheaper prescription drugs from Canada. Kerik, who was a member of Giuliani Partners until scandal forced his ouster, was sent out to testify that the cheaper drugs could be used as a cover for shipping biological weapons across the border.

While Giuliani Partners is a private company that closely guards information on its earnings, divorce lawyers for Giuliani’s estranged wife Donna Hanover estimated the ex-mayor’s personal income at \$20 million in 2002, over half of it coming from speaking fees—normally \$100,000 for an appearance—and book advances.

The speaking engagements are numerous. Giuliani has become the headliner in a traveling lecture/seminar tour known as “Get Motivated,” which the authors describe as a “daylong infomercial that moves from city to city around the Lower 48 selling God, country and ways to make a killing in the stock and real estate markets.”

Giuliani, who takes the stage flanked by bodyguards, serves up his stump speech on the principles of leadership—“develop strong beliefs, be an optimist, have courage...”—and offers patriotic 9/11 anecdotes. He shares the bill with speakers who invoke their personal relationship with Jesus Christ and pitch the crowd get-rich-quick schemes that can be learned by buying their DVDs or paying \$1,000 for a two-day investment seminar.

The authors point out that the appearances not only serve to fatten Giuliani’s bank account, but also give him “direct contact with the base,” a conservative lower-middle-class layer that has been courted by the Republican Party and the Christian right.

That such a figure—contemptuous of democratic rights, steeped in corruption and a paid shill for corporate and financial interests—could be seen as a “moderate” and a savior of the Republican Party is a measure of the desperate political crisis confronting the US two-party system as a whole.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact