

New York's Working Families Party once again backs Democrat Cuomo

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After hours of behind-the-scenes negotiations and bitter debate last Saturday night, incumbent Governor Andrew Cuomo won renomination on the ballot line of the “independent” Working Families Party (WFP).

The vote to endorse Cuomo came after days of increasingly frenzied maneuvers and with some vital last-minute assistance from New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, the current darling of left-liberal elements within the Democratic Party. De Blasio made a trip up to the WFP convention near Albany to gently twist some arms on behalf of the governor.

Cuomo, whose right-wing record in his first term of office has included wage freezes for state workers, full-throated support for charter schools and a refusal to entertain even the tiniest tax increase on the state's billionaires and multi-millionaires, faces little opposition in his campaign for re-election. With an eye, however, on a possible future run for the presidency, he was intent on securing the WFP ballot line, on which he won more than 150,000 votes in 2010, in order to boost his victory margin.

The Working Families Party was formed in 1998, and its purpose has not changed since then. Backed by some of the local and state unions, its main aim is to help the Democrats project a more liberal image so as to prevent the necessary political break by the working class with this party of Wall Street. While it has on rare occasions run its own candidates and even supported some Republicans, the WFP is primarily concerned with lobbying the Democrats, and especially obtaining what the union executives usually refer to as “a seat at the table” when it comes to negotiating budget cuts and the continuing assault on government employees and other sections of workers.

Press reports gave some of the details of deliberations at the WFP convention this past weekend. Cuomo was

booed and mocked when he made an appearance via video hookup. The governor, planning for a record margin in the fall election against a little-known Republican opponent, did not take a chance on appearing in person.

Convention delegates brought signs depicting the governor as Napoleon or, in another instance, as “Cuomoccio,” with a Pinocchio-like nose, in a reference to the governor's broken promises. They threatened to nominate their own candidate, Zephyr Teachout, a Fordham University professor and former operative in Howard Dean's abortive 2004 run for the Democratic presidential nomination, to run against Cuomo. Ms. Teachout was nominated by Bertha Lewis, the former leader of the ACORN community organization. Teachout told the delegates, as reported in the *Daily News*, “My goal is to launch a new argument about what kind of New York, what kind of America we want to live in.”

As these platitudes indicate, there are absolutely no differences of principle between Cuomo and the WFP “activists.” The main reason for the somewhat chaotic recriminations over the past week is that elements of the WFP feel the ground has been cut from under them as they seek to carry out their task of bolstering support for the Democrats.

In order to smooth over the problems, a series of promises on the part of Cuomo were negotiated in the days leading up to the convention vote. This is where de Blasio and his aides played the role of mediator, claiming that the new pledges would mean more than the old ones had. In the end Cuomo secured about 58 percent of the vote.

There was another major factor in the Working Families decision to re-endorse the incumbent. The main financing behind this allegedly independent

organization is provided by unions like Local 1199 of the Service Employees International Union and the hotel workers union UNITE HERE. Officials of these unions were among those who twisted arms and no doubt threatened, even if obliquely, that their financial assistance to the WFP would be cut back if the endorsement was not delivered. The party will lose its automatic ballot position if its total vote drops below 50,000 statewide.

The sops offered to the WFP fakers included the pledge by Cuomo that he would not stand in the way of efforts to secure a majority for the Democrats in the New York State Senate.

At present the State Senate remains under the control of the Republicans, with the aid of a breakaway group of five Senate Democrats. Cuomo has made use of this typically corrupt arrangement to avoid having to take full responsibility for his actions and to ignore those voters who were told that after voting for him they would see some improvement in jobs and living standards.

The very fact that support by a Democratic governor of control of the state legislature by his own party is portrayed as major news is another indication of the filthy nature of capitalist politics and the enormous shift to the right within both major big business parties in recent decades.

In this context it is worth noting the similarity between Cuomo's frenetic efforts to increase his victory margin so that he can market himself as an electoral powerhouse, and last year's maneuvers by Republican Governor Chris Christie in neighboring New Jersey with the same end in mind. Christie's efforts badly backfired after some of his top aides apparently orchestrated petty political revenge on Democrats who did not endorse him. Cuomo has not yet faced that kind of scandal, but of course the year is still young.

The promises made by Cuomo to the Working Families Party are being depicted in the mainstream media as a humiliating climbdown for the governor. There is very little basis for this, since the promises mean essentially nothing. At the same time, the corporate and financial establishment, while quite satisfied with Cuomo's performance thus far, is acutely sensitive to the prospect of any softening of the onslaught on the working class, and is using the media

coverage to make it clear that the governor will continue to do its bidding.

The elaborate negotiations in preparation for the coming state elections in New York reflect some political shifts. The nervousness among the capitalist politicians is a very pale and distorted manifestation of deeper currents within the voting public and even deeper currents within the working class as a whole. The gulf between the political representatives of big business and the masses of working people will inevitably give way to a social explosion. The role of the Working Families Party is another demonstration of the reactionary role of the unions and all those forces which remain tied to the Democrats and to capitalist politics.



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