

New York Governor Cuomo wins reelection in record low turnout

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New York Governor Andrew Cuomo won reelection this past Tuesday, but with a total of only 54 percent of the vote, far less than his backers were hoping for. The shift from the incumbent Democrat, while never seriously jeopardizing his chances for a second term, was part of the nationwide pattern that saw the Democrats lose heavily in races for the US Senate, the House of Representatives and governorships. Four years ago, Cuomo won 62 percent of the vote against his Republican opponent.

In his first four years in office, Cuomo established a record far to the right of any New York Democratic governor in modern history, and rivaling that of his most recent Republican predecessor, George Pataki.

Cuomo bragged about his ties to Wall Street with an arrogance that surprised some observers. He contemptuously rejected the proposal of New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio for a tiny increase in state taxes on the wealthiest one percent of the population in order to fund pre-kindergarten in the city. At the same time, the governor insisted on wage freezes for state workers, and made his support for charter schools one of the centerpieces of his platform.

The incumbent received about \$1.2 million in campaign contributions from bankers, hedge fund managers and other wealthy charter school supporters, according to a recent report in the *Huffington Post*. Last February, Cuomo helped organize the charter school rally in Albany led by Eva Moskowitz, the former Democratic City Councilmember in New York who has become notorious for her vicious attacks on the city's public schools. Only days before Election Day, Cuomo reiterated his assault on teachers, calling the public schools a "public monopoly" that he plans to "break."

With this record, it is not surprising that the Democrats had a hard time getting working class voters

to the polls. Nor was there any enthusiasm for the right wing Republican candidate, Rob Astorino. Most voters simply stayed home.

So desperate were the state Democrats that, in addition to the usual barrage of robocalls, they sent implicitly threatening letters to voters. A form letter said, in part: "Who you vote for is your secret. But whether or not you vote is public record. ...We will be reviewing the [County] official voting records after the upcoming election to determine whether you joined your neighbors who voted in 2014. If you do not vote this year, we will be interested to hear why not."

Despite these efforts, the total state vote was 3.7 million, barely one-third of the 10.8 million eligible voters and the first time in recent memory that it had dropped below 4 million. In New York City it was worse, with the city's vote total adding up to 27 percent of the total state vote, although it contains about 42 percent of the state population.

So brazen have Cuomo's attacks become that they have alarmed some liberal circles. These sections of the political establishment feel the necessity of making at least a few noises about widening inequality, lest the Democratic Party's credibility fall even further and trigger a long-suppressed but inevitable social explosion.

There are those who compare Cuomo with his father Mario, a three-term governor of New York between 1983 and 1994, who became nationally prominent for the liberal rhetoric of his 1984 keynote speech at the Democratic National Convention. Some weeks ago, the younger Cuomo gave another illustration of the rightward trajectory of the Democratic Party when he damned with faint praise his father's devotion to "principle," while explaining that his job was to carry out definite policies.

The Working Families Party (WFP) briefly threatened to run its own candidate against Cuomo earlier this year. This organization, which has used its “independent” ballot line for the past decade to endorse New York Democrats while lobbying for more “left” policies and on behalf of a section of the trade unions who give it financial backing, quickly backed down in exchange for some worthless pledges by Cuomo, including a promise that he would campaign for a Democratic majority in the State Senate.

The next few months saw one of the more putrid displays of the unprincipled nature of capitalist politics. As the Capital New York website explained it this past week: “After the governor talked his way onto [the WFP] ballot line in late May... he set about destroying it. ... Cuomo created a competing Women’s Equality Party (WEP) and put massive time and resources behind urging New Yorkers to vote for him on it, while mocking WFP as a ‘fringe’ group. ...”

Cuomo’s cynical appeal to the votes of a section of the affluent middle class on the basis of “women’s issues” was of the same character as that pursued with so little success by Democratic Senate candidates in Colorado, Iowa and elsewhere. In New York, where the Democrats were not in serious danger of losing the governor’s post, the motive was slightly different. Cuomo was seeking revenge against Working Families. If outpolled by either the Women’s Equality line or by the Green candidate, it would lose its favored spot as Row C, the third line on the ballot, after the Democrats and Republicans.

The final results demonstrated, among other things, how little appeal Cuomo’s posture as the defender of women held. Working Families did outpoll Cuomo’s artificial creation, but the 120,000 votes for Cuomo on its “independent” line fell below the 170,000 attracted by Green candidate Howie Hawkins. The Greens, who have long positioned themselves as a liberal-environmentalist pressure group within the two-party system, have generally won about 1 percent of the state vote. This time Hawkins, benefiting from the anger toward Cuomo, secured 4.9 percent.

The liberal opposition to Cuomo had earlier found expression in the large vote for Fordham University law professor Zephyr Teachout in the Democratic primary two months ago. Teachout focused much of her campaign on the governor’s abrupt shutdown of the

Moreland Commission investigation into state government corruption, which Cuomo had established only a year earlier.

Teachout got one-third of the primary vote, but Cuomo did not appear worried. In his calculations, the opposition among liberals and sections of the union apparatus is not a serious concern, since these layers, tied by their class position to the Democratic Party, inevitably fall back into line after being allowed to vent their minor differences.

The bankruptcy of the liberal opposition was reflected in its endorsements. Teachout herself said she regarded either a vote for Cuomo on the Working Families ticket or a vote for Hawkins on the Green Party ticket as equally effective. “Both are expressions of populist power, a show of strength for traditional Democratic values,” Ms. Teachout declared, once again illustrating the bankruptcy of her “challenge.”

Meanwhile, the *Nation* magazine, the leading voice of erstwhile left-liberalism, endorsed Cuomo on the Working Families line, but its Executive Editor publicly dissented and urged a vote for the Greens.

Far more important than the various intrigues among the Democrats and those like the Greens and various pseudo-left tendencies who revolve around them, is the growing disgust among workers with the bipartisan policies of austerity and attacks on education and all public services. The 2014 results in New York underscore the necessity to turn this disgust into a conscious break with the Democratic mouthpieces of capitalism.



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