

Mounting opposition to Democratic politicians in New York

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A new opinion poll registers the growing dissatisfaction with the bipartisan big business political machine that controls state government in Albany, New York.

According to the Quinnipiac University poll, the performance of Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo, now in the first year of his second term in office, is approved by only 44 percent of respondents, the lowest level since he first became Governor in January 2011. The approval rating for the state legislature, where the Republicans control the State Senate and the Democrats the Assembly, is even lower, at 26 percent.

The growing dissatisfaction follows the indictments on corruption charges earlier this year of both the Democratic Speaker of the State Assembly, Sheldon Silver, and the Republican leader of the State Senate, Dean Skelos. Both Silver and Skelos have since resigned their leadership posts, but remain in office pending their trials.

The Cuomo administration is itself under investigation by the office of the US Attorney for the Southern District of New York, according to a report on the International Business Times web site. Although the office of US Attorney Preet Bharara has not commented publicly, Cuomo's office is involved in the probe of influence peddling in Albany, according to the IBT. The giant real estate firm of Glenwood Management is enmeshed in the charges against Silver and was named in the indictment of Skelos, and its co-owner, Leonard Litwin, gave more than \$1 million in contributions to Cuomo's campaign for governor.

Glenwood is alleged to have benefited from its relationships with both Silver and Skelos, and perhaps with the governor as well. The state housing agency approved a low-interest loan for Glenwood in connection with a luxury housing deal earlier this year.

At a press conference about a month ago, Cuomo defended his ties to Glenwood Management and said he would continue to accept campaign contributions from them. The shameless buying of influence continues unabated. Glenwood has spread its generosity around, to the tune of \$10 million in contributions to state politicians in recent years.

The poll results are only the palest reflection of the social tensions and widespread anger among working people in New York. The polls take almost no account of the greater than 50 percent of eligible voters who don't vote, having long since concluded that none of the establishment politicians represent them. While the poll registers disgust over Albany corruption, workers are also angered by the connection between the dishonesty and self-enrichment of the political representatives of big business, on the one hand, and the actual conditions they face on a daily basis. These include schools in crisis, understaffed hospitals, the near impossibility of obtaining affordable housing, and a market in which the overwhelming majority of jobs available are at or near the minimum wage.

Meanwhile the feuds between the most prominent Democratic politicians in New York continue to flare up. The latest development on this front is the report that Cuomo's legal department has circulated a five-page survey to various state agencies asking for evaluations of the performance of the office of Attorney General Eric Schneiderman. Schneiderman, who is a former State Senator and was elected to the Attorney General post in 2010 and reelected last year, portrays himself as a crusading liberal.

Cuomo's office claimed he had no knowledge of the survey, which was portrayed as a good-faith effort to improve coordination and the tracking of various legal cases. According to former Attorney General Elliott

Spitzer, however, as quoted in the *New York Times*, “this is an unprecedented and unusual mechanism and to do so in this context raises questions in my mind about the motivations of the governor’s office.” The suggestion is that Cuomo, like Spitzer, a former state attorney general, is fishing for negative reviews of Schneiderman, which could be used to undermine his political position or even to take some responsibilities away from his office.

Last week the governor and New York City mayor Bill de Blasio also exchanged some carefully chosen words, as de Blasio asked Cuomo to show “leadership” on various legislative matters stalled in Albany, including the question of mayoral control of the city’s schools and also the extension of rent regulations. Cuomo took the opportunity in reply to make an unaccustomed attack on de Blasio from the “left,” suggesting quite correctly, but with outrageous hypocrisy, that the mayor’s latest housing plan was “a giveaway to developers.”

These exchanges and maneuvers, between politicians amongst whom it is virtually impossible to find serious political or even tactical differences, reflect the deepening political crisis of the Democrats. They trot out left-sounding rhetoric, especially in response to signs of growing popular anger. At the same time they reassure Wall Street that the wealth and power of the super-rich will in no way be threatened or even slightly impinged upon.

De Blasio was elected 18 months ago as the new model of “progressive” Democrat, but workers see no serious improvement in their lives. Cuomo took office for his second term with a few demagogic remarks about inequality, but he remains a vociferous supporter of charter schools and an opponent of even the smallest tax increase on the wealthy. And Schneiderman recently entered the “left” sweepstakes with the following clumsy and dishonest comment: “I think there has been a shift in politics. I think more people are concerned about the problem of the underclass of people falling further behind.”

The insulting reference to “concern” over “the underclass” reveals the growing fear, among the “people” Schneiderman really represents, of looming social and political struggles that will involve broad masses of the population.

It is worth noting that among the recipients of the

largesse of the real estate industry, and of Glenwood Management in particular, were both Attorney General Schneiderman and State Comptroller Tom Di Napoli, the two top state Democrats along with Cuomo. As for de Blasio, the backers of his fraudulent plan for affordable housing include the Real Estate Board of New York, a trade organization that works, according to its web site, to “improve and advance the business of real estate in New York City.”



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