

The Mayor's Big Stick

by Dan Jacoby

Mayor Michael Bloomberg is a soft-spoken guy. Listening to him give a speech or hold a press conference, you get the impression that he's never shouted in his life, and that he couldn't raise his voice if you paid him.

Not that offering to pay him would help; Michael Bloomberg is a billionaire. In fact, one of the chief tenets of his first campaign for mayor four years ago was based on his wealth. In most election campaigns, candidates garner support – and donations – by promising to do certain things for their chief donors if they are elected. By spending his own money, Michael Bloomberg was able to walk into Gracie Mansion (symbolically, at least) without owing favors to anyone.

And that, at least, has proved true. Nobody has accused Mayor Bloomberg of being in anyone's pocket.

But now that the next election season is rolling around, a different method for buying votes is emerging. Michael Bloomberg's philanthropy has always been tremendous. Over the past few years, however, it seems to have taken an ominous turn. Many organizations whose leaders might have campaigned against the mayor have become new recipients of his largesse.

Indeed, according to a recent New York Times article ("With More Private Giving, Bloomberg Forges Ties," May 23), Michael Bloomberg even has an enforcer on the city payroll.

It's a novel tactic for an old strategy. Instead of buying support by promising future deeds, the mayor is giving money away and then quietly assuming he's bought that support. Then he sends out his staffers to make sure that support stays bought. He might as well stand outside the polls on election day and hand out hundred dollar bills.

At a time when teachers are leaving the city in droves, developers are running roughshod over neighborhoods, businesses are being closed down by rezoning plans that will never come to fruition, and the voices of the people are being studiously ignored, can we afford to allow a mayor to buy his reelection?

It's time for a change.

It's time to find someone who is not beholden to special interests, whether they be friends of the rich and powerful, or the "old guard" of the political elite. It's time to find someone who doesn't make back-room deals, or spend tens of millions of dollars, to gain power.

It's time for an insurgent.

New York City has always been about shouting from open windows. It has always been about small neighborhoods and small businesses, as well as the concrete-steel-and-glass glamour. It has always been about being first. That is the best of New York City.

We need a mayor who exemplifies the best of our city, not one whose "big stick" consists of buying votes.