

Valedictory

What would Katharine Roberts say? That's the way I sometimes frame for myself a set of questions that often nettled me throughout my five or six years of active service with CRDC: What is it that reform clubs should be doing? Where are they failing? And why?

As most of our long-term members know, Ms. Roberts (who died last summer) served as a conscience both for our club and for the reform movement in general. And while I did not always agree with her specific complaints (Gloria Sukenick likened her famous disputatiousness to "... the irritation that might produce a pearl") Katharine was dead-on when she said that CRDC was losing clout in the community. And that reform itself was becoming an if-y proposition.

Actually, some of Katharine's frustrations spoke to the current state of New York City Democratic clubs in general, whether they are reform or so-called "regular." Two recent campaigns pointed to the increasing irrelevance of clubs in this town: Obama for president and Thompson for mayor. In the first instance, the campaign, brilliantly managed, simply did not need club apparatus in order to win. In the second, the shambling Thompson organization was snubbed by clubs citywide; it lost but did so with a surprisingly thin margin. Had clubs bucked up that campaign, our party might be in charge of City Hall today.

So before I re-join the rank-and-file of CRDC, I want to briefly explore the three questions I posed, offer some suggestions for raising our profile in, and

By Judy Richheimer, Acting President

connectiveness to, the community. (And along the way, perhaps channel some of Katharine's spirit.)

1. What reform clubs should be doing:

The short answer is all of the good things regular clubs do — with none of the bad stuff — plus raising consciousness on issues — which implies tolerance for debate — taking stands, and then supporting politicians who promote our views. Regular (also known as machine) clubs work to elect politicians and take care of neighborhood needs, such as finding jobs and apartments. Unfortunately, these clubs are also known to act in lockstep with county bosses and sometimes are tainted with corruption. Reform, on the other hand, is supposed to remain independent of party rule — the political equivalent of Caesar's wife.

2. Where they (we) are failing:

As I said, we were hors de combat in two recent crucial races. On the other hand, we've been all too quick to endorse candidates with agendas that are far from our own. Here I'm thinking particularly of the '04 presidential primary, when we threw our support behind John Kerry despite his strong initial support for the Iraqi war and his many other political shortfalls as measured by the CRDC agenda. I recall club discussion from that time, with words like "we need to appear relevant in the community" carrying the day for a Kerry endorsement.

continued on page 2

GENERAL MEETING

**Thursday February 18, 2010
7:00PM**

Hudson Guild, 441 West 26th St.
(btwn. 9th and 10th Avenues)

ON THE AGENDA:

Report From Albany

**Senator Liz Krueger and
Assemblymember Richard Gottfried**

ALSO ON THE AGENDA

**Election of Club Officers
and Members-At-Large**

The following people have been nominated:

President: Steven Skyles-Mulligan

1st Vice President: David Caraway

2nd Vice President: Lydia Hummel

3rd Vice President (only vote for one)

Andrew Berman OR Maarten de Kadt

Treasurer: Paul Groncki

Corres. Secretary: Linda Longstreet

Recording Secretary: John R. Johnson

Members-at-Large (only vote for 9)

Muriel Beach • Jesse Campoamor

Paul A. Goetz • Sandy Marsh

Jon Nalley • Donathan Salkaln

Lee Sinovoi • John (Jay) Stockman

Gloria Sukenick • David Warren

Please Note:

Further nomination will be taken from the floor for uncontested offices.

Remember in order to vote your 2010 dues must be Paid. You may pay the night of the election.

Valedictory

continued from page 1

For at least as long as I've been an active member, the club has been virtually MIA in terms of one-to-one outreach in the community — except when it comes to petition drives. Talk will occasionally arise about setting up a walk-in housing clinic but to my knowledge, there has never been follow-through on this idea.

We have accomplished some coalition building, especially in dealing with zoning issues. And we had a presence in the fight to save mom-and-pop stores in Chelsea — for a while.

But as much as I'd like to see CRDC militate for progressive positions, I also want serious debate within our ranks to determine exactly what we should be supporting. I mentioned zoning: the club opposed variances for the General Theological Seminary and supported landmarking Saint Vincent's Hospital — correctly in my view — but these were issues where reasonable people could disagree. Debate was not encouraged on these questions; debate is rarely encouraged in our club.

3. *Why have the club, and reform, lost steam?*

The two most obvious answers are: many of our most active members have either grown old or died. As for Chelsea newcomers, income often determines political consciousness; Chelsea has grown affluent (going back to its roots) and therefore less Democratic, or at least less "activistly" so.

However, to the extent that progressive ideals still hold sway, internet organizing and labor unions have stolen a lot of thunder from the reform movement.

Ironically, in one respect, the destruction of reform was built almost into its very idealism. Political scientist Ken Sherrill sums it up: "The rise of good government and the decline of corruption have removed a link that enabled some local political clubs to mobilize a large number of campaign workers and voters." But Sherrill does acknowledge that as late as the early 90's, reform galvanized many New Yorkers, especially around housing issues: warehousing, illegal evictions, and so on.

And that brings me to my last point. After decades of seeing New York, particularly Manhattan, become increasingly a property owners' town and therefore I would argue, a more conservative place, suddenly the

renter has returned. And this development could be our best organizing wedge. Even market rate renters are beginning to see that there is no glamour in being exploited by the housing crunch. And here is an arena that Twitter would find difficult to enter and labor could not thoroughly address.

But whatever issue(s) we take on, the club must re-discover its former *modus vivendi* and *modus operandi*. Fortunately, there are new people coming into the club and onto the board who just might be the reinvigorating force we need.

Comments on Economics— Charter Schools

Maarten de Kadt, CRDC Member

A neighbor of mine who is a teacher told me she was forced to take a lower paying job in her school. "Where's the union?" I asked. "What union?" she responded. "I work for a charter school." She took the pay cut because she needed the work.

In the New York City, there are 99 Charter Schools, with an enrollment of about 30,000 students. They are public schools that operate independently of the public school system. As a result they operate outside of the Department of Education's red tape, which is not at all a bad idea as Department bureaucracy often inhibits the creativity of individual teachers. There are numerous other schools in the New York City school system that might flourish with a reduction of bureaucracy.

Charter Schools operate mostly in the lower grades and in areas with large populations of disadvantaged students. If they fail to meet New York State's Regents criteria they are subject to having their charters revoked or not renewed. Data to make that determination is difficult to obtain and where available difficult to interpret. Fourth grade test results in charter schools may not be directly comparable to those coming from the rest of the city as charter schools are able to select their students more carefully than are the other schools. Furthermore, charter school students, difficult because of their emotional or behavioral problems, are easier to remove from the schools than they would be for most other public schools. As charter schools are relatively new in New York State (the charter school act was passed in 1998) few charters have been revoked.

Charter School funding by-and-large comes from public school funds. But that is not the only source. Many have wealthy sponsors who donate millions of dollars. This additional funding enables them to have even smaller classes (a key criteria to good student teacher interaction and good teaching). But the funding doesn't entirely go to teacher salaries. As Juan Gonzalez reports in the *Daily News* (February 27, 2009) a promoter of Charter Schools through not-for-profit organizations, Eva Moskowitz, former New York City Councilperson, is receiving more in salaries than the public schools' Chancellor, Joel Klein. In 2007-2008 Moskowitz pulled in \$371,000 to Klein's 'meager' \$250,000. Some Charter Schools are operated by for-profit corporations. Keeping teacher salaries low outside of union control enables charter schools to divert money from education to administration and profit.

Even so, the smaller size of charter schools have led to the myth that they produce better education for young people. Based on this the mayor and the governor have promoted the expansion of charter schools. But there is evidence that the schools have not worked as well as expected and cannot be relied upon to do consistently better than other small schools. As *The New York Times* recently stated (January 11, 2010) in an editorial, "a large number of charter schools are failing to deliver on their promises."

Charter Schools are not the only small schools in the City serving needy students. While the small size of a school as well as smaller classes are important, the structure of the school is by itself not sufficient to produce good education. Needed as well, is a supportive administration interacting with caring staff functioning together to promote a culture of education for and with the students in their charge. Careful selection of teachers is needed to assure their fit into a staff promoting the goals of the school. There is an active small schools movement of which at least 28 schools evaluate student performance based on their work product rather than on high-stakes tests. These are called performance-based-assessment schools and have been highly successful.

With a dedicated staff, the small school idea works well. It is put in danger as schools are forced to take more students and as budgets are cut. What is needed in education are good relationships between teachers and their students and encouragement of school administrators as well as of the union to foster those relationships. Funding is needed to maintain small class

size in all public schools. Profits and high administrative salaries of Charter Schools are better used supporting small classes and good teaching in all public schools.

The Invisible New Yorker

Donathan Salkaln, CRDC member

The recent news in the bankruptcy of the Peter Cooper Village and Stuyvesant Town apartment complex coupled with our city's announcement of a spectacular roller coaster rides going up in Coney Island is a testament to this city's misguided agenda.

There were two giant land deals. The first deal was 80 acres and 11,000 units of affordable housing purchased at such a high price that the success of the deal was contingent upon replacing rent-regulated residents with tenants willing to pay higher market-rate rents. When the residents screamed for help, trying to purchase the property themselves, Mayor Bloomberg and this city turned its back on them.

The second deal, 7.5 acres of sand in Coney Island for which the city paid \$95 million is part of the Mayor's agenda — that of reshaping New York City into a Disney type destination. A new amusement park is just another glitzy piece added to the promenades in the middle of avenues, flags hanging everywhere, clean streets, city workers with nice uniforms, no strikes, and new and well-maintained parks. He makes sure that the museums, theaters and most cultural avenues are thriving. Let's not forget the stadiums we built in the Bronx and Queens, and the one we're currently cramming into downtown Brooklyn. With this, New York City attracted over 45 million tourists in 2009, replacing Orlando as the No. 1 destination in the country. The Mayor is shooting for 50 million by 2012. With countless foreigners taking advantage of the cheap dollar and gobbling up all the high end condos, his goal might be achieved.

Lost in the Mayor's plan are we, the New Yorkers. People, like the thousands in Stuyvesant, who live and work here and are expected to be courteous, give that helping hand and directions to all the tourists. He even wants us to look good, prodding us to lose weight, not to smoke and, if we're homeless, even disappear. Meanwhile, we're drowning in high rents, taxes, fees and fines. Our favorite stores and relatives priced out of town.

continued on page 4

PO Box 1120
Old Chelsea Station
New York City, NY 10113-1120

Chelsea, Madison Sq., Flatiron, Rosehill



Invisible New Yorker *continued from page 3*

And let's not let the City Council off the hook. Many of our club members took part in the Chelsea demonstrations to fight unfair commercial rent increases and yet our council let its proposed law, for fair negotiations of small business lease renewals, disappear without even a vote. It's not part of the big plan. To the Mayor, commercial rent arbitration means 'Same Old, Same Old' — not 'New, New, New.'

Some of us even like 'Old, Old, Old.' But we're invisible.

In This Issue...

Valedictory

By Judy Richheimer, Acting President

Comments on Economics—

Charter Schools

Maarten de Kadt, CRDC Member

The Invisible New Yorker

Donathan Salkaln, CRDC Member

Join CRDC Today!

Time to pay your 2010 dues to remain a member of CRDC, New York City's most progressive Democratic Club! Please fill out the coupon below and mail to our postal box, or you may renew by going to our website, www.crdcnyc.org.

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone (Day): _____

(Evening): _____

Email: _____

Send monthly newsletter by: Email or Postal delivery

\$25 Individual \$40 H'Hold \$50 Patrons

\$10 Ltd. Income \$15 H'Hold Limited Income

Make checks payable to CRDC and mail to:

PO Box 1120, Old Chelsea Station

New York City, NY 10113-1120

Questions? Call 212-924-5433, email us at info@crdcnyc.org, or visit our website at www.crdcnyc.org