

## De Blasio and Friends

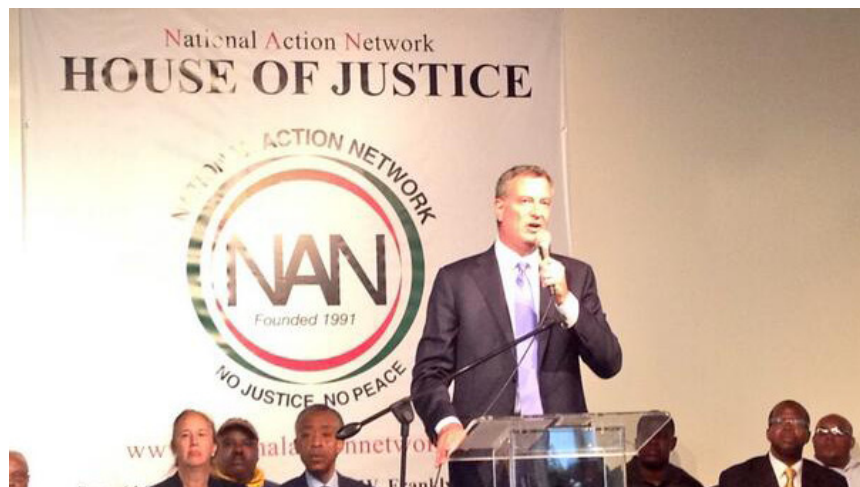
*Unions bring a Far Left government to power in New York City*

**By Alec Torres**

**Summary:** Ever wonder what it would be like if radical unions and their allies gained control of New York City? Wonder no more. With the critical backing of the nation's most powerful union local, SEIU 1199, and with advisors like Patrick Gaspard of SEIU (and the Obama White House) and Bertha Lewis of ACORN, Mayor Bill de Blasio is pursuing policies that threaten the future of the world's most important city.

[**Note:** Many of the individuals and organizations in this story have been subjects of previous reports by the Capital Research Center. See, for example, *Organization Trends* May 2011 (ACORN) and September 2013 (the community organizers' network) and *Labor Watch* December 2009 and January 2010 (SEIU) and November 2013 (Local 1199's role in Obamacare).]

New York City, once prosperous and free, is entering an unnecessary age of darkness brought on by the foolishness of bad governance. The new mayor, Bill de Blasio, is an unapologetic admirer of Soviet-backed thugs, a supporter of the Occupy movement, a foe of school choice, and a crony of the same sort of leftists who destroyed Detroit, once the nation's richest city and now a ruin. With likeminded ideologues in command of other key offices, de Blasio's power within city



De Blasio addresses a meeting of the Rev. Al Sharpton's National Action Network. (Note the threatening slogan on the backdrop: "No Justice, No Peace.")

government is near absolute. His closest backers, Service Employees International Union Local 1199 and its radical allies such as the former ACORN organization, dominate city government at nearly all levels.

It's enough to make one long for the days of Michael Bloomberg.

"We are called to put an end to economic and social inequalities that threaten to unravel the city we love. And so today, we commit to a new progressive direction in New York. And that same progressive impulse has written our city's history. It's in our DNA." De Blasio spoke these words on January 1, 2014, the day he was inaugurated as mayor of New York City.

It was the first time in exactly 20 years that the city had a Democratic

mayor. But de Blasio is not merely a Democrat, nor even a traditional JFK-type liberal, but a self-described and unabashed Progressive. His mayoral campaign revolved around a Tale of Two Cities narrative: there is a rich New York and a poor and exploited New York, and the latter requires more and bigger government to succeed. "Inequality" was the buzzword of de Blasio's campaign, and the casual observer would have been led to believe that

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the greatest threat facing the average New Yorker was the fact that someone else in New York earned more money than he did.

After 20 years of rule under Rudy Giuliani, a Republican, and Michael Bloomberg, a Republican-turned-independent, the leftists in a city known for its leftism burst forth with pent up energy. Now the city's highest offices—elected and unelected—are filled with Progressives, who have little respect for constitutions and other limitations on government power.

De Blasio and the government he directs do not draw principal support from Wall Street or from the media, as was the case in recent administrations. Their friends are the likes of the Service Employees International Union Local 1199 (SEIU 1199), New York City's largest and most powerful union, and community organizations reborn from ACORN. De Blasio's mayoral campaign, as well as his rise to every public office he's held, were heavily backed by unions and left-wing groups with ideologies and ends so similar to his as to be indistinguishable.

### **Bill de Blasio in LeftWorld**

Bill de Blasio was a leftist from his youth. In college, at New York

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University, he was an activist who started small, protesting tuition hikes and staging a sit-in to demand that the Bobst Library stay open later. Shortly after completing his graduate degree in International and Public Affairs at Columbia, de Blasio visited Nicaragua, where he saw a vision of unrestrained leftism provided by the Sandinistas, an anti-American communist group in Latin America that received weapons from the Soviet Union and funds from Soviet-backed Cuba. When de Blasio returned to New York, he raised money for the Sandinistas, subscribed to the party newspaper, and volunteered at the (pro-Sandinista) Nicaragua Solidarity Network of Greater New York.

During his time as an activist, de Blasio volunteered for the campaign of David Dinkins, who defeated Giuliani for mayor in 1989. He spent four years working as a junior aide in community affairs for the Dinkins administration, which oversaw four years of high crime and high taxes in the tumultuous early '90s. During the Dinkins era, visitors to New York City were more likely to need a list of places to avoid than sights to see.

In the Dinkins administration, de Blasio became close friends with Patrick Gaspard, then the Special Assistant in the office of Mayor Dinkins. In the late '90s, both men would be part of the trust that created the Working Families Party (WFP), New York's most powerful third party. WFP supported de Blasio in the 2013 mayor's race as well as many of the other top elected leaders who came to power in the 2013 citywide election.

Gaspard would later spend nine years, from 1999 to 2007, as the executive vice president of SEIU 1199, America's largest union local with 200,000 members based in New York. In the Obama administration, Gaspard was director of

the Office of Political Affairs (Karl Rove's old job), and he served as executive director of the Democratic National Committee. He was appointed U.S. ambassador to South Africa in 2013.

Gaspard, it is widely reported, considers de Blasio his best friend and is one of the people de Blasio calls first for advice and in times of crisis. When de Blasio was choosing personnel for his administration, and during the recent, contentious race for speaker of the city council, he was on the phone frequently with Gaspard. De Blasio's daughter, Chiara, was even the flower girl at Gaspard's wedding and de Blasio coached both of their sons on a Little League team.

After de Blasio's years with Dinkins, he served as Hillary Clinton's campaign manager in her successful bid for U.S. Senate in 2000. While he ran for New York City Council in 2001, he (along with his wife, Chirlane) began work as a paid consultant for SEIU 1199, the same time Gaspard was acting as the union's executive vice president. De Blasio served in the city council until 2009, when he successfully ran for the citywide watchdog position of public advocate, a job he held until ascending to the mayor's office.

### **De Blasio's support network: unions**

Firmly ensconced in the world of the Left—with a close, personal relationship with SEIU 1199, involvement in New York's strongest third party, and ties to the Clinton network—de Blasio owes his rise to many groups. But it is his SEIU 1199 connection to which de Blasio can attribute his victory in the mayor's race. With Bloomberg set to leave office at the end of his third term, and after five terms with non-Democrats in Gracie Mansion, it was almost certain a Democrat

would win the mayor's race. The general election was largely a formality. What mattered most was the Democratic primary, and de Blasio was far from a shoo-in.

In May 2013, de Blasio wallowed in fourth place in the Democratic primary, behind Bill Thompson, former NYC comptroller; Christine Quinn, then-speaker of the city council; and Anthony Weiner, famous for sending sexual photos of himself to a college student while he was in Congress. De Blasio's name recognition was low and his prospects bleak.

Then came the fateful endorsement from the executive council of SEIU 1199. Not only did SEIU 1199 donate hundreds of thousands of dollars to the de Blasio campaign, it spent \$2 million in mailers to get its 200,000 members to the polls. Although the United Federation of Teachers, 32BJ/SEIU (a union of property service workers), and the Hotel Trades Council endorsed others, de Blasio had the support of New York City's largest and most powerful union, and that support propelled him to victory in the primary.

Reacting to the endorsement, de Blasio's campaign manager Bill Hyers said, "Game-changing is a cliché in politics, but not when it comes to the mayor endorsement of 1199 SEIU." For SEIU 1199 president George Gresham, the endorsement was a long shot that paid off. De Blasio remained down in the polls into June, but Gresham put the full weight of the union behind the union's longtime ally. Gresham was later rewarded by de Blasio with front row, VIP seats to the inauguration in January, along with, more importantly, a spot on de Blasio's transition team, which in turn assembled de Blasio's executive team. Unsurprisingly, his administration would be filled with

high-profile union members, many from SEIU 1199.

Another union played a critical role in his victory. De Blasio was also boosted by an early endorsement in May by the Communications Workers of America 1180 (CWA 1180), a union that was key in helping de Blasio overcome his main opponent in the Democratic primary, Christine Quinn. According to Capital New York, CWA gave \$507,200 to its local New York City group, CWA 1180, on May 8, and on May 9, CWA 1180 donated \$507,000 to "New York City is Not For Sale," the group behind the "Anybody but Quinn" ad campaign that smeared Quinn repeatedly in television commercials. The anti-Quinn ad campaign suggested that she was partly to blame for the closing of St. Vincent's hospital in the West Village and that, while city council speaker, she was a lackey to then-Mayor Bloomberg.

This cash transfer may have been legally dubious, but the ad campaign worked. It came when Quinn was leading in the polls, but she didn't hold that lead for much longer. By May 22, CWA 1180 formally endorsed de Blasio, adding further weight to SEIU 1199's endorsement announced only a few days earlier.

Bob Master, the CWA's district 1 legislative and political director, is a longtime ally of de Blasio. He said the choice to support de Blasio, even when he was fourth in the polls, "was not a difficult decision. We have always enjoyed a long and deep relationship with Bill."

### **De Blasio's support network: local political groups**

Major unions like SEIU 1199 and CWA 1180 were not content to support de Blasio through ad campaigns, endorsements, and donations alone. Unions were heavy supporters of the Working Families

Party, which has been closely tied to the de Blasio network since its founding 15 years ago.

The WFP supports Progressive candidates and pushes Progressive causes, most notably the institution of a "living" minimum wage, the construction of less expensive housing units, and the furtherance of rent control, as well as retroactive pay hikes for public-sector employees, an adversarial policy toward charter schools, and higher taxes on upper-income earners. The party is currently co-chaired by Bob Master of CWA 1180 and was founded in the late '90s by activists from the United Federation of Teachers, CWA 1180, and the United Auto Workers union, along with de Blasio, Gaspard, CWA political director Master, now-deceased ACORN community organizer Jon Kest, and Bertha Lewis, the chief organizer of ACORN.

In many ways the WFP is an offshoot of ACORN (the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now). It was founded in large part by ACORN members and co-chaired in its early days by ACORN official Bertha Lewis. It initially occupied the same address as ACORN's national office.

Funded with major donations from CWA 1180 and UFT (and allegedly George Soros), the Working Families Party holds more political sway in New York City than its 20,000-person membership would suggest. As *National Review's* John Fund has noted, the WFP propelled all three citywide officials in New York City—the mayor, the speaker of the city council, and the public advocate—to office. Because New York allows third parties to cross-endorse candidates from major parties, they've added an extra constituency to Democrats across the state. (Unlike in most states, candidates in New York can add



together their totals from different parties, so that, for example, a candidate can run on both Republican and Conservative ballot lines.) The WFP has now spread up to Connecticut and hopes to change the laws in other states, including Oregon, Delaware, and South Carolina, to allow cross-endorsements.

During the time they helped found the WFP, Kest and Lewis were working for ACORN. Lewis's relationship with de Blasio grew from Kest's own friendship with de Blasio back when de Blasio worked in the Dinkins administration.

It was during Lewis's tenure as chief organizer that ACORN faced a scandal brought to light by journalists James O'Keefe and Hannah Giles, who shot undercover video showing ACORN employees giving advice on how to hide underage prostitution activities and avoid taxes. According to Matthew Vadam of the Capital Research Center, editor of our sister publications *Foundation Watch* and *Organization Trends* and author of a book on ACORN (*Subversion, Inc.*), Lewis attempted to cover up this scandal, "claiming over and over again that ACORN employees shown in the videos were rogue actors." ACORN had also been consistently accused of voter-registration fraud—including during the years when Lewis ran the organization.

Eventually, in 2009, Congress eliminated federal ACORN's funding. The organization filed for bankruptcy in fall 2010. Today, the old ACORN organization operates under a variety of different names.

Lewis is open in admitting that she and de Blasio "go back a *long* time," as she puts it, and she started meeting with de Blasio regularly a couple of years ago. "I would meet with Bill on a regular basis to talk about issues. . . . Definitely his role as public advocate and also his role

when he was in the city council on the General Welfare Committee," she said. "I might meet with him maybe four, five, six times a year."

When he decided to run for mayor, these meetings became more frequent. Lewis and de Blasio met every month to talk about "issues and strategy, and the structure of the campaign, and outreach, and constituents, and get-out-the-vote," she said. Lewis's personal relationship with de Blasio was so deep that she was even invited to the small inauguration party in de Blasio's private residence in Park Slope on the night of December 31, 2013.

Despite being officially defunct, ACORN lives on. Judicial Watch, a watchdog group, released a report in August 2011 detailing the creation of one international, four national, and 18 statewide ACORN-affiliated organizations after ACORN fell. One direct offspring of ACORN is New York Communities for Change (NYCC), a group that endorsed de Blasio for mayor early in the primary. NYCC has received millions of dollars in union support over the years.

NYCC advocates almost exactly the same policies as the WFP: increased "affordable" housing, increases in the minimum wage, and an adversarial approach to charter schools. Shortly after his election and before his inauguration, Bill de Blasio hosted a fundraiser for NYCC and thanked them for their support over the course of the election. Over the course of three years, the United Federation of Teachers gave NYCC \$1.3 million dollars and, in turn, NYCC has pushed for policies that favor the teachers' union and harm charter schools.

### **The Left's team**

With advice from his transition team, including Gresham of SEIU 1199, Gaspard of SEIU 1199 and the WFP, and Bertha Lewis of ACORN

and the WFP, de Blasio packed his executive team with union members and Progressive leaders. De Blasio's chief of staff, Laura Santucci, was part of Gresham's political arm at SEIU 1199. Santucci also served in the Obama White House and worked closely with Gaspard while he was at the Democratic National Committee before he became ambassador to South Africa. They also worked together at SEIU 1199, when Gaspard was executive vice president of the union. Santucci is now acting executive director of the DNC.

Anthony Shorris, another SEIU 1199 alumnus, now works as de Blasio's deputy mayor. Shorris was a part-time consultant for SEIU 1199's National Benefit Fund and now has Dominic Williams as his chief of staff, who was formerly a pension strategist for SEIU 1199 and also worked on Obama's 2012 campaign.

But one of the most important leaders in de Blasio's administration is Emma Wolfe, once a field organizer for both SEIU 1199 and the Working Families Party and now de Blasio's intergovernmental affairs director. Wolfe started her career as an organizer for ACORN and eventually became de Blasio's chief of staff in his public advocate's office before becoming his deputy campaign manager in the mayoral race. In the WFP, Wolfe was an organizing director and election campaign director, helping elect Progressive politicians and pass Progressive legislation. The *New York Times* listed her as one of the three members of de Blasio's inner circle along with Patrick Gaspard and de Blasio's wife, Chirlane McCray, a former lesbian activist and David Dinkins speechwriter.

Everyone expected de Blasio, with his deep connections to SEIU 1199, the WFP, and the like, would fill his team with people cast from the same

mold, but the unity of leadership extends far beyond the executive branch in New York City to the only other two citywide elected officials: Melissa Mark-Viverito and Letitia “Tish” James.

Mark-Viverito, now the speaker of the city council, was strong-armed into her position by de Blasio in one of the mayor’s first initiatives after winning election. In her role as speaker, Mark-Viverito may be the second most powerful official in the city. Proposed legislation will pass through her office, and she will set the agenda of the city council.

Council speakers traditionally represent the independent voice of the legislature, and they can, when necessary, act as a check on the mayor’s power. But Mark-Viverito is almost an ideological clone of the new mayor. A *New York Times* article in December said that, in Mark-Viverito, de Blasio has found “a legislative partner whose outspokenness against inequality matches, if it does not sometimes exceed, his own.”

Mark-Viverito—who, as a council member, serves the city’s eighth district, covering northeastern Manhattan and some of the South Bronx—has been described by some colleagues as too liberal and too abrasive. She helped found and now co-chairs the Progressive Caucus of the city council—the farthest-left group in the city’s legislature—and, with the Progressive Caucus, has advocated for the expansion of prevailing-wage requirements (requiring the payment of union-level wages on government projects), the raising of the minimum wage, and higher taxes on people with higher incomes.

She was also an active participant in the Occupy Wall Street movement, which she said “inspired” her. “We are the 99 percent,” she said at an Occupy rally in November 2011.

“We represent the 99 percent. We are representing people that have been impacted by the corporate greed, by the 1 percent.” Mark-Viverito’s strong ties with Occupy extended beyond speaking at its rallies; she was once arrested for blocking a street during an Occupy protest against income inequality. “I was more than happy to participate in this action,” she said. “Government needs to respond to the immediate crisis that we have, which is an economic crisis and inequality crisis in terms of how government is structured.”

The new speaker boasts support from labor unions, the NYCC, and the WFP (she ran as a cross-endorsed candidate on the Democratic and WFP lines). SEIU 1199 was a major force behind Mark-Viverito’s election to the speakership. SEIU 1199 officials emphasized that they supported Mark-Viverito by their own free will, not only because she was de Blasio’s favorite—a thoroughly believable claim, considering Mark-Viverito’s previous employment as strategic organizer for SEIU 1199 before running for city council. Much of Mark-Viverito’s election war chest was provided by UFT, SEIU 1199, and CWA 1180.

Succeeding de Blasio in the office of the city’s public advocate, Letitia James has nearly an identical résumé to Mark-Viverito. She ran as a Democrat but was cross-endorsed by the WFP and received the full support of labor unions. (In her second run for city council in 2003, she was notably the only councilman ever elected solely on the Working Family Party line.) In her race for public advocate, James first won the support of 32BJ/SEIU in mid-March 2013 and later received endorsements from UFT and CWA 1180.

On the city council, James was a member of Mark-Viverito’s Pro-

gressive Caucus. Like Mark-Viverito, she supported Occupy Wall Street. James and Mark-Viverito joined two other lawmakers in suing the city over the New York Police Department’s alleged violation of Occupy protesters’ Free Speech rights. James also took part in New York’s iteration of the “fast-food protests” that advocated for a \$15 minimum wage. In New York City, the lines at the fast-food protests were filled more with SEIU 1199 representatives, members of UFT, and former Occupy activists than with actual fast-food workers.

Public advocate is not a particularly important position in itself, but considering de Blasio’s path, it is now considered a stepping stone to the mayor’s office. Tasked with serving as a direct link between the electorate and city government, the public advocate is supposed to provide oversight for city agencies and assist citizens having trouble with city services. While the public advocate can co-sponsor and introduce legislation in the city council, she cannot vote.

Upon assuming office, James said that she would act independently of the mayor. As of this writing, the only time James has disagreed with Mayor de Blasio was when he attempted to force the closure of three charter schools by kicking them out of empty space in public schools. This was in violation of a deal negotiated by Mayor Bloomberg. James was actually more radical than de Blasio; she said that de Blasio should have kicked out *more* charter schools.

### **The de Blasio Administration’s early days**

With Gaspard, Wolfe, Santucci, Shorris, and Williams filling in de Blasio’s executive team and Mark-Viverito and James occupying New York’s two other citywide offices,



politicians funded, supported, and endorsed by unions are now entirely in charge of the city government. A massive, well-coordinated leftist machine has taken control of New York City, and it has already started its work.

Early on, the de Blasio administration has faced a number of practical difficulties, separate from its ideological initiatives, which contributed to a rocky start. A series of snowstorms left New York at a near standstill because the mayor failed to coordinate proper plowing. De Blasio faced particular criticism for failing to close schools after a heavy snow and for leaving Manhattan's Upper East Side unplowed for nearly a day. (The Upper East Side was the only Manhattan neighborhood to vote for de Blasio's Republican challenger for mayor, Joe Lhota.)

Next, the new mayor acted with glaring hypocrisy when his driver, with the mayor inside the car, was caught on tape breaking multiple traffic laws in quick succession only days after de Blasio announced a five mile per hour speed reduction to make the streets safer. Many New Yorkers took note of the seeming favoritism and hypocrisy, becoming critical of the mayor during what should have been his golden early days.

Of course, de Blasio and his team did not attain power merely to plow New York unequally or cut the city's speed limit or violate that limit in the mayoral limo. The city's new leadership has a mission—to impose their vision of Progressivism on the city. They began with three main projects that have had varying degrees of success.

► First, a teachers' contract. The mayor's office has been in negotiations with the United Federation of Teachers to form a new contract with the union. The de Blasio

proposal would date an uncharacteristically long nine-year contract *back* four years, to when the unions rejected the renewal of their former contract. The contract would then spread \$3.4 billion in retroactive pay over the next four-and-a-half years, saving de Blasio from a massive deficit in the city's budget this year and pushing the following round of negotiations to 2017, after the next mayoral election.

UFT has been clamoring for retroactive pay dating back to November 1, 2009. As *National Review's* Jillian Melchior wrote in February, UFT pressed for an early expiration of the contract with the hopes that, by 2009, then-mayor Michael Bloomberg would be heading out of office, replaced by someone who would negotiate a better deal for UFT.

When Bloomberg won a third term, the teachers' union was left without a contract. But despite not winning more money in 2009 from a government facing a deep recession, teachers still enjoyed a cumulative increase of \$2.1 billion in compensation between 2009 and 2013 due to pension contributions, bonuses, and pay raises for teachers who had not yet risen to the top of the pay scale.

UFT represents 116,000 people—almost 40% of New York City's government employees. If the de Blasio administration agrees to a retroactive pay increase for such a large swath of government employees, other municipal unions may demand the retroactive raises they have also been demanding. If all of the over 150 unions seeking new contracts with the city receive their requested back pay, it will cost New York City taxpayers more than \$8 billion, not counting future raises.

► Second, de Blasio won a mixed victory in his attempt to implement his signature program: universal pre-kindergarten. In de Blasio's vi-

sion, all New Yorkers earning more than \$500,000 a year would face a tax increase that would ostensibly fund public pre-K education for all eligible children. However, city tax increases must be approved by the state government in Albany. Gov. Cuomo refused to go along with the tax hike; he is attempting to brand himself as a moderate, pro-business Democrat in preparation for a possible 2016 presidential run. The Governor has also made repeated promises to lower taxes this year.

Cuomo offered a counterproposal to fund a pre-K program throughout New York State while simultaneously keeping tax rates at current levels. In this deal, De Blasio won \$300 million a year to fund expanded pre-K, less money than he sought, and dropped his demand to raise taxes on higher-income New Yorkers, a demand that was a key part of his Tale of Two Cities/inequality narrative.

► Finally, de Blasio failed to make good on his promise to “focus on” traditional public schools, a euphemistic way of saying that he wants to reverse the Bloomberg-era school choice policies. Those policies led to a flowering of charter schools in a city brimming with failing public schools. Like most Progressives, those in the de Blasio administration believe the failure of public schools is caused by inadequate funding and an unmet need for increased governmental (taxpayer) support, even though the city leads the nation in per-pupil spending (over \$19,000 annually, roughly double the national average). Left unexplained: how does it drain funding from conventional public schools when a student switches to a charter school that receives one-third less in funding for that student?

In the Bloomberg administration, charter schools were allowed to

co-locate with other public schools. This meant unused and under-used space in conventional public schools was granted to charter schools rent-free, allowing them to focus their limited resources on providing higher quality education for their students. De Blasio attacked co-location as a threat to traditional public schools. (An investigation by the Manhattan Institute strongly supports the view that co-location harms neither of the schools involved.). The United Federation of Teachers is particularly invested in the failure of the so-far-successful charter school experiment, because charter school teachers are free from the forced unionization that teachers face in traditional public schools.

In de Blasio's first review of charter schools' applications for co-location, the mayor denied three applications, putting at risk the academic future of 194 students, mostly low-income and classified as minorities. The charter schools faced possible closure due to New York City's astronomical rents. De Blasio's move, placating his UFT allies at the expense of poor children, did not go unnoticed. A pro-charter school group, Families for Excellent Schools, began a highly publicized ad campaign along with Success Academies, the charter school consortium overseeing the three schools facing closure. The ads highlighted the cruel personal impact of de Blasio's policies on some of New York's most vulnerable citizens; public reaction forced de Blasio to soften his adversarial stance. Of late, he has had to explain repeatedly that he does not want to "destroy" charter schools.

In the mayor's pre-K deal with Gov. Cuomo, Cuomo wrestled control over charter schools from the mayor, gaining a political victory for charter school supporters and

halting the negative effect of de Blasio's policies. Cuomo and the state legislature barred de Blasio from charging the charter schools rent, as the mayor had planned, and the pre-K deal came with an order for New York City to fund improved charter facilities.

### De Blasio's drop

With a quick series of unpopular decisions and heavily criticized actions, de Blasio faced waning popularity only three months into his administration. A *Wall Street Journal*/NBC poll found the mayor has a remarkably low 39% approval rating. New Yorkers don't share de Blasio's vision for the city, according to a Quinnipiac poll conducted shortly after de Blasio's inauguration, with only 2% of voters saying that inequality should be the mayor's top priority. On March 31, baseball's opening day, de Blasio was booed while throwing the first pitch at Citi Field in Queens.

Anti-charter school policies were never a ticket to popularity because New Yorkers don't see education as a zero-sum game the way UFT and de Blasio do, where charter schools win at the expense of traditional public schools. In October 2013, when de Blasio, as the Democratic nominee, was the presumed next mayor, there was a 17,000-person march in which New York City residents, most of whom professed support for de Blasio, nevertheless came out in opposition to his education policies. And for all de Blasio's cheerleading of universal pre-K "for New Yorkers funded by New Yorkers," polls indicate people prefer Gov. Cuomo's plan, which provides a lower level of funding than de Blasio's plan.

Still, de Blasio's limitations and initial failings do not diminish the fact that the unions and the Left

are in power. Indeed, they operate with many more functionaries than the mayor. SEIU 1199, CWA 1180, UFT, NYCC, and the WFP boast hundreds of thousands of members, millions in the bank, and a network that stretches from New York's poor and wage laborers, through the city legislature, and all the way into the core of the mayor's office.

Realities may get in the way of their plans. The state capitol in Albany inevitably acts as a check on the city's taxing power; budgetary limitations, however disregarded, cannot be ignored forever, even if unions demand four years of back pay; and New Yorkers, despite their strong left-wing proclivities, have on occasion shown a more reasonable streak. (Remember Giuliani?)

Citizens of New York City may agree with de Blasio in theory, but most people are not part of the shadowy world of union politics and community organizers from which de Blasio sprang. Like the charter school parents who voted for de Blasio yet quickly turned on him when they were harmed by his policies, others may turn away when New York's "new Progressive direction" favors left-wingers rather than the average New Yorker.

*Alec Torres, a William F. Buckley Jr. Fellow in Journalism at the National Review Institute, has worked as a manual laborer in a small, private company in the southern California construction trade.*

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# LaborNotes

In November 2012, we reported on politicians trying to unionize home healthcare workers in **Illinois**, including people who receive a subsidy for taking care of their own disabled family members. In January, the **U.S. Supreme Court** heard arguments in *Harris v. Quinn*, involving **Pam Harris**, a woman with a disabled son who requires constant care. She found out that she was “supposed” to be a member of the **Service Employees International Union** one Sunday morning when union reps showed up unannounced at her home. She spent her own money to warn other people about the attempt to force them into the union, and her cause was taken up by the **Illinois Policy Institute** and its affiliated legal organization, **Liberty Justice Center**, together with the **National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation**.

The left-wing magazine *The Nation* said this case “threatens the existence of the ‘agency shop,’ a bedrock institution in American labor relations—one relied on in the most successful recent union organizing, and that is decisive to the health of public sector unions.”

Otherwise, how bad are things in Illinois? The state has the nation’s second-highest unemployment rate, the second-highest property taxes, and the fourth-highest corporate tax rate. Some 31,000 workers left the state’s labor force last year. Between 2012 and 2013, personal income rose by a tiny 2.1%—and a third of that was due to increases in “transfer payments” such as welfare and food stamps.

Yet legislative leaders are pushing for big tax hike. Why? According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the real reason is “the state’s exploding government-employee pension costs.” This year the state will spend \$7.5 billion on pensions (compared to \$7 billion in state funds for primary and secondary education), with teacher pensions having “gobbled up” 70% of new education spending. “The next tax increase would be, like the last one, more or less a straight income transfer to government worker pensions. **Democrats** in [the state capital] are also teeing up a bailout for **Chicago**’s pension funds, which are \$30 billion in arrears.” (For more on the mess in Illinois, see our July 2013 issue.)

**John Kasich** of **Ohio** is on the **AFL-CIO**’s list of six top targets among **Republican** governors seeking re-election this year. In 2011, he angered unions by backing restrictions on state employees’ unions, restrictions later overturned in a referendum. But union opposition to Kasich, a prospective presidential candidate, isn’t unanimous. The political action committee of the state’s building-trades unions (which includes carpenters, electricians, and iron workers) has given the maximum contribution to his campaign. The construction unions are said to be upset with some of their usual allies over such issues as the failure to approve the **Key-stone XL** pipeline, the failure of Democrats to pass **Card Check**, and the failure of **Obamacare**.

“Among practitioners of labor violence, **International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) Local 17**, based near **Buffalo, N.Y.**, has to rank as among the most obnoxious,” reports *Union Corruption Update*. Federal prosecutors alleged that union members conducted repeated acts of vandalism of nonunion construction sites and terror against nonunion contractors and workers, including tire slashing, a threatening letter to a project manager’s wife, the pouring of sand into machinery, and a stabbing. In March, a federal jury convicted former local president and business manager **Mark Kirsch** of attempted extortion and conspiracy to commit racketeering and extortion. Five other members pleaded guilty in the case, while four others were acquitted.

Another issue we’ve covered (see February 2013) is “official time” (aka “release time”) in which government employees do union work while being paid full salaries and benefits at the taxpayers’ expense. The **Goldwater Institute** in **Arizona** is among those taking the lead in fighting this corrupt practice. As the institute’s **Lucy Caldwell** noted, “A 2011 institute investigative report uncovered ‘release time’ provisions in city contracts throughout the country . . . In one **Phoenix**, Arizona contract with a local police union, it was discovered that several ‘release time’ officers had not been on the beat in years, instead collecting guaranteed overtime and full salary and fringe benefits to lobby, electioneer, and even solicit grievances against the city’s police chief!”

The Institute’s challenge to “release time” won at the trial court level and is now on appeal. The great significance of the Arizona case is that the practice is being challenged as illegal under the “gift clause” of the state constitution, which prohibits subsidies to private entities without public benefit. Such provisions exist in the constitutions of more than 40 states, so a victory in Arizona could have far-reaching consequences.