



Oliver

By Dick Oliver

The Light Is On Leichter

The political wiseguys joke that when Franz Leichter enters a room the light bulbs go dim. But in the Koch corruption scandal, this West Side State Senator is emerging as the brightest light among the would-be political reformers.

No wild-eyed ideological crazy, this Leichter is thoughtful and soft-spoken, unheard-of attributes for a New York politician. What's worse is that he repeatedly commits the dangerous error of forcing people to think.

Unlike most pols who dazzle with blue smoke and mirrors, Leichter often causes his listeners' brain waves to generate. He's the last guy you'd expect to see on a stage with a top hat and a cane, or hamming it up in front of the TV cameras for a laugh like you-know-who.

Yes, he's no fun but he's probably the only local politician who has given serious thought to what's wrong with the way we choose the people to run our government, how our government is structured, and how to keep it free of corruption.

One by one, from Cuomo and Koch on down, a long list of politicians are lining up on the side of reforms that Leichter has been calling for, virtually alone, for years. But don't count on any stampede to reform.

Last week's City Hall press conference by Leichter, Council member Ruth Messinger of Manhattan, and several other politicians was an indication of the fat-cats' ambivalence towards reform. Leichter and Messinger want a \$1,000 limit on political contributions, instead of the \$50,000 cap now in effect.

Leichter and Messinger distributed a list of prominent politicians in support of the \$1,000 limit, including former mayors Abe Beame and John Lindsay, and three former deputy mayors, Herman Badillo, Basil Patterson and John Zuccotti. None of them attended, and neither did any of big power brokers on the list, such as Howard Rubenstein, the publicist and lobbyist.

After the press conference, I button-holed Leichter and asked him what steps he believes should be taken to clean up the municipal mess.

Aside from putting a limit on campaign contributions, he replied, the Board of Estimate should be restructured.

This powerful body, comprised of the



State Senator Franz Leichter

mayor, city council president, controller and the five borough presidents, now passes on every contract, lease, franchise. Leichter would limit the board to land use matters. He explained:

"I think that given the history of New York, and five boroughs having pulled together, that there's merit in retaining the Board of Estimate. I know some people say get rid of it and build up the City Council. I don't know if you're ever going to be able to do that. I think there's something to be said in having the boroughs represented at the seat of government. So I would limit their power to the major land use questions, but I would not give them all of the power that they now have."

A third reform would be a "real, independent Department of Investigation," he said. Other points:

- We need a city controller who will be a "check and balance on the mayor, instead of one who looks the other way to grab some headlines." He was referring to the incumbent, Harrison J. Goldin.

- "We need a better, clearer code of ethics, and better disclosure by public officials. Our disclosure laws are ridiculous. You never know what their present situation is, they're always one year out of date."

Is New York City manageable? Does it need a city manager system? Leichter replied: "I would rather take my risks with some of the political corruption that's going to occur where all your key officials are elected, than to take the chance that somebody is really going to be accountable. I think it's good to have an elected mayor, and to have somebody who can say, 'Hey, the buck stops here!'"

Leichter paused to laugh at the double meaning of the expression in connection with our present mayor.

But, if Leichter had to select one major reform to help straighten out the system it would be limiting campaign contributions.

"Absolutely. This (situation) is what's really giving the impression that the city is up for sale. There is no doubt in my mind that major decisions affecting the face of the city of New York, the future of the city of New York, are being made on the basis of campaign contributions."

In a strange twist of fate, Leichter owes his current position as the city's leading reformer to campaign contributions or, more accurately, the lack of enough campaign contributions. Last year at this time he was forced to drop out of the race against Controller Jay Goldin.

Goldin had more than \$1 million in his campaign war chest. Leichter was unable to raise more than \$100,000. So he quit.

It was a low point in his political life. And now, just one year later, Leichter is at a high point, clearly a leading contender for citywide office in the fast-approaching post-Koch period.

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4/21/86

Village Dems Fete Boro Prez and One of

BY CHRIS ARCHER

It was a night for dropping names. A lot of names.

There were introductions and gratitude apportioned to State Assemblymen Jerrold Nadler and William Passannante, State Senators Franz Leichter and Manfred Ohrenstein; Congressman Ted Weiss and New York County Democratic Leader Herman "Denny" Farrell, downtown Democratic District Leaders Kathryn Freed and Jim Stratton and Village Democratic District Leaders Tony Hoffman and Sherri Donovan. The litany ran on and on.

All received the complimentary amount of applause. Others, like City Councilmembers Miriam Friedlander, Ruth Messinger and Stanley Michels, drew more thunderous hosannas. It was like hearing a cannon of some of the City's and the State's more prominent political celebrities. The constellation was indeed impressive.

There was almost a religious intensity to the unfolding at the Village Independent Democrats' 29th Anniversary Dinner April 18, heightened perhaps by the posh and glitter of Windows On The World at the World Trade Center and a commanding view of Lower Manhattan. But the fervor on this particular night was directed to two other prominent political leaders: guests of honor Catherine Abate, former Democratic District Leader in the Village's 61st Assembly District and now Executive Deputy Commissioner of the State Division of Human Rights; and newly installed Manhattan Borough President David Dinkins, who has just marked his own first 100 days in office.

Some people just know how to put on a show, but the question is always how much substance there is behind the performance. As Dinkins would say in his speech later on "We politicians are ones to huff and puff." From all appearances though, this was more than just a lot of hot air. Instead it was more like a collective flexing of political muscle eager to reach its full potential.

"They say you can't beat City Hall, but this is the club that beat City Hall," said Dan Roskoff, talking of the club's past victories and implying more triumphs to come. The past victories included, of course, those achieved in the days when a certain Edward Koch rose through the club's ranks as district leader, City Councilmember and Congressman before assuming the mayoralty.

Much water had passed under the bridge since then, what with a schism that sent supporters of Koch and Councilmember Carol Greizer out of the club and produced the Village Reform Democratic Club. But the VID had always retained both parts of the district's leadership, a majority of the seats of the local Democratic County Committee for the Assembly District part and alliances with numerous local, State and Federal elected officials.



At the VID event, Village District leader Sherri Donovan, Boro Prez David Dinkins, Village District Leader Tony Hoffman, Ronni Terr, Bruce Feffer, Catherine Abate and Fred Koster. (Villager/Archer Photo)



"VID, as always, is in a terrific state," reported club president Rick Braun at the start of the evening. He termed the dinner the "most successful fundraiser VID has ever had," citing the attendance of 230 people. He confidently called the political activism and independent leadership espoused by the club as "alive and well and living in this city."

The roll call kept going throughout the evening, with names like: Comptroller Harrison J. Goldin; State Committeeman nominee David Rothenberg; Margaret Chin, president of Asian Americans for Equality; former State Committeeman Jerry Goldfeder and Douglas White, Commissioner of the New York State Division on Human Rights. There were candidates for school board elections in Community School District Two, in-

cluding Cindy Fine, Lindy Linder and Shirley Yan. "We left the very special people for after," said Hoffman, who was reading one of several lists with Donovan.

One of those was Dinkins himself.

"I had a rule in my campaign, no one's supposed to look better than the candidate," he said, kidding Hoffman and Braun for being "decked out" in tuxedos, and Abate for having "a new dress for the evening." The candidate who had received VID's support in last year's primaries sought to reaffirm the club's belief that, yes, he was one in heart and soul with the club's agenda of progressive politics.

"VID's commitment to political activism never wavered," he said, citing struggles against Westway and apartheid in South