

Brooklyn Edison Involved In Christian Front Politics

Jervis Review 8/13/42
McLAUGHLIN USED COMPANY'S MAILING LIST
TO FURTHER POLITICAL POWERS IN BROOKLYN

Back in November, 1938, Harold J. McLaughlin was an obscure clerk of the Brooklyn Edison Company. By November, 1939, he had challenged the omnipotent Kelly Democratic machine, edged out the party's regular veteran candidate and was elected municipal court judge. Today, McLaughlin is reaching for one of the biggest plums of Brooklyn politics, running for the Kings County Judgeship. To friends he confides that he plans to go higher and higher; the stratagem which originally catapulted him to the bench may do the trick again.

McLaughlin's political career began in the limbo of early Christian Front politics. As a Brooklyn Edison Company employee he had little to distinguish himself from his thousands of fellow workers, except the fact that he became president of the Brooklyn Industrial Employees Voters Association. Another Edison employee, John Cassidy, head of the Christian Front, was a Director, and Assistant Secretary.

Mystery surrounds the Voters Association. After its formation, seven years ago, it opened offices at 44 Court Street, Brooklyn. Personnel was hired, and a minor Brooklyn Edison official became financial Secretary. Around Christmas, each year, a giant dance was staged in the Hotel St. George, to which thousands of employees came to dance and enjoy refreshments as free guests of the Voters Association. Employees of the company were signed up by the thousand, but no effort was made to collect the nominal dues. Nevertheless, the Voters Association prospered without visible means of support. Employees who didn't join still received regular mail from the Voters Association — it was obvious that

Christian Front Politics

Journal Review 8/3/42

McLAUGHLIN USED COMPANY'S MAILING LIST TO FURTHER POLITICAL POWERS IN BROOKLYN

Back in November, 1938, Harold J. McLaughlin was an obscure clerk of the Brooklyn Edison Company. By November, 1939, he had challenged the omnipotent Kelly Democratic machine, edged out the party's regular veteran candidate and was elected municipal court judge. Today, McLaughlin is reaching for one of the biggest plums of Brooklyn politics, running for the Kings County Judgeship. To friends he confides that he plans to go higher and higher; the stratagem which originally catapulted him to the bench may do the trick again.

McLaughlin's political career began in the limbo of early Christian Front politics. As a Brooklyn Edison Company employee he had little to distinguish himself from his thousands of fellow workers, except the fact that he became president of the Brooklyn Industrial Employees Voters Association. Another Edison employee, John Cassidy, head of the Christian Front, was a Director, and Assistant Secretary.

Mystery surrounds the Voters Association. After its formation, seven years ago, it opened offices at 44 Court Street, Brooklyn. Personnel was hired, and a minor Brooklyn Edison official became financial Secretary. Around Christmas, each year, a giant dance was staged in the Hotel St. George, to which thousands of employees came to dance and enjoy refreshments as free guests of the Voters Association. Employees of the company were signed up by the thousand, but no effort was made to collect the nominal dues. Nevertheless, the Voters Association prospered without visible means of support. Employees who didn't join still received regular mail from the Voters Association — it was obvious that Brooklyn Edison and the Voters Association shared the same mailing list.

The Association's purpose was obscure. Originally it did minor lobbying favorable to the utility company; later, the C.I.O. saw it as a check to their Utility Workers Organizing Committee, and called it a company union. Several Christian Fronters working for Brooklyn Edison liked the Association's offices and were frequent visitors; after the arrest of John Cassidy and John Graf, another Brooklyn Edison Clerk, for sedition, the Christian Fronters were less brash about their contacts with the utility company.

In 1939, when the Christian Front began to realize its political potency, young McLaughlin saw his opportunity. He was the head of an organization with members in every election district in the King's County; he could easily organize the small percentage of voters necessary to control the primary without bothering with the established political clubs. It was a neat short cut.

He approached Joseph Witty, Democratic leader of the populous 2nd Assembly District. He handed Witty a four-page memorandum which broke down the vote into "Christian" and "Jewish," and which declared that the 8th Municipal Court District had a "Christian majority — 2623." McLaughlin said this proved the district was "entitled" to a Christian candidate, instead of Albert D. Shanzer, the party regular, who was a Jew. McLaughlin explained he would be the candidate. Witty is reported to have been outraged at this ultimatum from an upstart, he showed McLaughlin the door.

The Voters Association went to work. Housewives began receiving campaign literature from the meter readers. Light-bill collectors tarried to deliver the latest Christian Front line, and more than one employee of the Edison Company found a packet of "McLaughlin for Judge" leaflets inside of his meter book when he reported for work. In the primary the unknown McLaughlin rolled up startling pluralities to capture the nomination. The racial ex-

against possible enemy attacks.
Brooklyn Zionist Region
Approve Britain's Move
for Palestinian Army

a minor Brooklyn Edison official became Secretary. Around Christmas, each year, a giant dance was staged in the Hotel St. George, to which thousands of employees came to dance and enjoy refreshments as free guests of the Voters Association. Employees of the company were signed up by the thousand, but no effort was made to collect the nominal dues. Nevertheless, the Voters Association prospered without visible means of support. Employees who didn't join still received regular mail from the Voters Association — it was obvious that Brooklyn Edison and the Voters Association shared the same mailing list.

The Association's purpose was obscure. Originally it did minor lobbying favorable to the utility company; later, the C.I.O. saw it as a check to their Utility Workers Organizing Committee, and called it a company union. Several Christian Fronters working for Brooklyn Edison liked the Association's offices and were frequent visitors; after the arrest of John Cassidy and John Graf, another Brooklyn Edison Clerk, for sedition, the Christian Fronters were less brash about their contacts with the utility company.

In 1939, when the Christian Front began to realize its political potency, young McLaughlin saw his opportunity. He was the head of an organization with members in every election district in the King's County; he could easily organize the small percentage of voters necessary to control the primary without bothering with the established political clubs. It was a neat short cut.

He approached Joseph Witty, Democratic leader of the populous 2nd Assembly District. He handed Witty a four-page memorandum which broke down the vote into "Christian" and "Jewish," and which declared that the 8th Municipal Court District had a "Christian majority — 2623." McLaughlin said this proved the district was "entitled" to a Christian candidate, instead of Albert D. Shanzer, the party regular, who was a Jew. McLaughlin explained he would be the candidate. Witty is reported to have been outraged at this ultimatum from an upstart, he showed McLaughlin the door.

The Voters Association went to work. Housewives began receiving campaign literature from the meter readers. Light-bill collectors tarried to deliver the latest Christian Front line, and more than one employee of the Edison Company found a packet of "McLaughlin for Judge" leaflets inside of his meter book when he reported for work. In the primary the unknown McLaughlin rolled up startling pluralities to capture the nomination. The racial argument which worked wonders in the primary, was used again for the final contest. Irish voters received letters stating that McLaughlin "has been attacked by groups in an organized fashion solely on the basis of his Christian Faith . . . We know that neither Lester D. Folk nor Benjamin Brenner are personally responsible for that situation because they are both Jewish gentlemen of the highest integrity . . ." Thus did candidate McLaughlin inform the voters that he was the sole "Christian" candidate. He won.

McLaughlin is not the only candidate who enjoyed the backing of the Voters Association. Others have drawn on this support, although McLaughlin is the most meteoric example. The successes of the Voters Association, and the power of the Christian Front in Brooklyn, have given season politicians endless headaches. Typically, the attitude is one of appeasement towards the diligent, smoothly running organization which can outflank the club house and the patronage train. Leaders are genuinely afraid of the persistent unknown men and women who are organized under a dozen different names, who out-whisper, out-rumor, out-work the average political hack. If one wants to win, one doesn't forget the Christian Front's precinct organization, and the McLaughlin case. Numerically small, the organization is solid and it generally gets to the control points first in Brooklyn politics.