

Politics/Kenny Lerer
**THE FIGHT TO
 SUCCEED ED KOCH**

SHEILA HARKAVY



Allard Lowenstein: "Let's talk about the planet a little. . . ."

A Cosmic Candidate

This Sunday, right about the time most of us will tune in to Super Bowl XII, another kind of battle will be shaping up near Gramercy Park. In the drab auditorium of Washington Irving High School at 40 Irving Place, 980 Democrats will gather to anoint a successor to former Congressman Ed Koch, who is now in another line of work.

This collection of would-be political bosses are New York County Democratic committeemen. Normally, these committeemen do little but preach to the already converted and drive old voters to the polls on Election Day. But Sunday will be different—the closest most of these 980 people have ever come to wielding real political power. By law, they are charged with selecting the Democratic candidate—which really means the next congressman—and you can bet they're taking it seriously, as are the nine candidates currently falling over each other to represent the country's most prestigious congressional district, the East Side's fabled 18th, the "perfumed stockade," the home of "silk stockings."

The early form has Bella Abzug way out in front. Of course, the last two times the odds-makers bet the rent on Bella, they lost—in 1976, when she tried for the U.S. Senate, and last fall, when everyone was saying she'd be where Koch is today.

Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that the outcome will be different this time around. It's called the "guilt theory"—people feel guilty that Bella isn't back in Congress, where she was "so effective" before. So power brokers like Big MAC Chairman Felix Rohatyn, former Deputy Mayor John Zuccotti, and union leaders like Vic Gotbaum and Barry Feinstein, who have never supported her when it really mattered in the past, are pushing her now.

Bella's playing it cool, trying hard to adhere to her campaign strategy of being nice: no bad-mouthing other candidates and no yelling, except a little. Maybe, she figures, if she's nice, she can pick up the delegates of the other candidates as they drop out. Of course, being nice doesn't mean that Bella can't brag, something at which she is probably the world's champion. "If I'm back in Washington," she told one reporter recently, "[House Speaker] Tip O'Neill will make me Democratic whip." (Tip's office says he's not getting involved, but that hasn't stopped Bella from using some old O'Neill endorsements.)

There is, almost inevitably, a flip side to the be-nice strategy, one we're a bit more familiar with in politics. Bella, you see, is making deals. Like the one with the new Manhattan borough president, Andy Stein. In exchange for her support of Andy in the closing weeks of his race against Bobby Wagner in

November, Andy is trying to deliver some 100 delegates to Bella on Super Sunday.

If there is a flaw in Bella's plan as she marches back to Congress, it can be found in an old democratic tradition, the secret ballot. The 980 mystery guests will most probably do their choosing privately, and recent electoral history has proved that Bella's name and a voting booth aren't exactly a winning combination like, say, Roger Staubach and Golden Richards of the Dallas Cowboys.

So it is possible that Bella will lose, which brings us to the most interesting, if not the most serious, challenger to Bella: the perennial candidate, Allard Lowenstein, 49, currently working—but on a leave without pay—for Andy Young at the United Nations as U.S. ambassador for special political affairs.

Lowenstein offers a very different choice from Bella, one which deserves to be considered seriously. Bella believes in confrontation—she long ago rejected the notion that to get along you should go along, and her six years in Congress prove that screaming can work, if only sometimes. Lowenstein, on the other hand, prefers compromise and mediation, the very modes of operation raised to high art by the man he was instrumental in removing from the presidency, Lyndon Johnson.

Still, Lowenstein's candidacy is almost pathetic, and the candidate himself something of a flake.

Listen as Lowenstein speaks to 30 county committee members in the living room of an East Side penthouse. He begins with a joke:

"A woman came over to my seven-year-old daughter and asked her what her name was," he says. "My daughter answered, 'Kate.' 'No, I mean your full name,' responded the woman. 'My name is Katharine Eleanor Roosevelt Lowenstein for Congress,' shot back my daughter. Maybe that tells me something." Everyone laughs. Lowenstein, disheveled as always, scratches his thinning hair. He seems out of place—could he really mean it when he says, "I feel most at home with poor blacks in Brooklyn"? He pauses, then launches into his speech.

"I want to go to Congress at this particular juncture. . . . We've been through many fights together. . . . We

got out of Vietnam because people cared, but we are now worse off than before, things are more difficult now in the city and the planet. . . . We have gained specifics but lost in the general direction we want to go in. . . . Let's talk about the planet a little. . . . At this rate the ocean will be dead in the year 2000."

He continues for twenty minutes, speaking extemporaneously — mostly about the cosmic condition. Finally, a young committeeman asks: "Mr. Lowenstein, if I could get you out of the sky for a moment, what do you think of President Carter's energy program?" Before too long, after an unsatisfactory response, he is back in the clouds.

Lowenstein is taken with his own ramblings. "I cannot win the county committee by who went to the most Christmas parties and what people think about block associations. One must discuss the direction of the planet. Not to do so is tawdry."

Running for Congress is not a novel experience for Lowenstein. He is something of a professional candidate, having run seven times in sixteen years, and that doesn't include three abortive attempts for the U.S. Senate. He won once, in 1968, in a congressional district on Long Island. He served one term and was defeated. This year's model of a Lowenstein candidacy is no different from the others—hectic and disorganized.

He waited until the last minute to make the race. He has no campaign manager. No campaign office. No strategy to speak of. As in the past, he is frequently accompanied by two or three former students who drive his car, fetch pizza for his children, and do just about anything else that's asked of them.

Once again Lowenstein isn't taking care of business; he is his own worst enemy. "There isn't a practical bone in his entire body," says a former campaign manager. "He drives you nuts."

So why is he doing it—again? Andy Young spews out the expected rhetoric but then gets to the point. "Al wants to get back to Congress because he was extremely effective there. He could be a bridge between the younger members—many in the past have worked in Al's campaigns—and the leadership. He has an obsession with Congress, and he should get it out of his system. I was there for four years and that was enough for me."

Another friend and former campaign aide echoes Young: "Al has to win one more time so he'll be vindicated."

The Koch Watch BOARD STIFF

In the tenth hour of 1978, Ed Koch fulfilled his first campaign promise—he took a bus to work. And paying the 25-cent (half) fare, he demonstrated a symbolic commitment to fiscal frugality.

Shades of Jimmy Carter again. Koch first began resembling the president when he decided against having a first deputy mayor, just as Carter has let the White House function without a chief of staff.

But the most potentially dangerous similarity between the two is Koch's seeming inability to comprehend how important the Board of Estimate is to a successful mayoralty—just as Carter has yet to deal effectively with Congress for the same reason.

Men like Howie Golden, the Brooklyn borough president, are unimpressed with the mayor's "common man" stunts. "Lindsay took the bus to work for the first week too," says Golden, conveniently forgetting that because of the infamous transit strike of 1965, there was no public transportation at all until the twelfth day of Lindsay's term. "I hope that Koch doesn't keep on riding the bus. Hell, if there's a major problem in Bushwick like a riot or fire, I want him to come in the limo 'cause if he takes the bus, the way they run, Bushwick might not be there when he arrives."

Golden's real beef with Koch runs a lot deeper than the price of a token compared with that of a tank of gas. It involves the mayor's fulfillment of another campaign promise—to dismiss politically connected hacks. Some of those fired last week are Golden's closest political allies. "Look," says Golden, "I honestly think this Koch wants to be a good mayor. But laying off people will be a factor when it comes time for him to ask me to vote with him on the Board of Estimate. And the board is where you get things done. I expect the first few weeks of the administration to go smoothly, but pretty soon you are going to see a major flare-up and I'm willing to bet that it comes in the board."

So are a lot of other people. Manhattan Beep Andy Stein hasn't forgiven the mayor for his lukewarm support of his candidacy—it was clear to everyone that Koch pre-

ferred Bobby Wagner and only supported Stein out of a sense of party loyalty.

Like Golden, Queens Borough President Donald Manes is steaming because he lost a political crony to Koch's ax, and over on Staten Island, Beep Tony Gaeta has a wholly different set of priorities than the mayor. While Koch worries about Westway and fiscal solvency, Gaeta's predominantly conservative constituents are interested in issues like sewer systems, school busing, and liquified-natural-gas tanks.

Clearly, Koch is up against some feisty pros who've never believed in long political honeymoons. Says one borough president unwilling to identify himself: "I intend to work as well as I can with Koch for about the first six months to show the federal government that we're all pitching in to save the city. But if Koch isn't going to have a first deputy mayor then there's no way he's going to consult with the borough presidents on major decisions. And because of that I expect to have a major blowout with Koch around June or July. And it will be such a battle royal that it'll drag across every front page in town for days."

Each of the borough presidents has two votes on the Board of Estimate, and the comptroller and City Council president have four each, just like the mayor. Most of these politicians are just that—people with their own constituencies, ambitions, and game plans.

As these people make their moves, conflict with the mayor is almost inevitable. This year alone, it is certain that Bronx Beep Bobby Abrams will again seek the state-attorney generalship and highly possible that Comptroller Harrison Goldin will seek to move up to the state spot occupied by Arthur Levitt, assuming the crusty comptroller decides to pack it in.

Even Carol Bellamy, whom Koch embraced during the campaign, demonstrated in the state senate that she's nobody's flunky.

Government doesn't work by fiat, either in Washington or in New York. Our new mayor is being put on notice by the most important group he'll be dealing with for the next four years: "Be careful, Ed, we've got the clout too."
—Denis Hamill

Lowenstein himself rejects the obvious—that he is a campaign junkie. “You have to look at each race independently. I ran because I thought the races were important. I ran,” he says, in a most unconciliatory way, “against the three worst congressmen in the country: Norman Lent in 1970, John Rooney from Brooklyn in 1972, and John Wydler in 1974 and 1976. They were important races to make. Perhaps if I sat down before I did things I would not always do the things I do. But that’s not the way I work. I once got up to announce for the U.S. Senate in 1970 and before my speech was over I announced for the House.” Now he sounds hokey: “Whether you win or lose is not the important thing. It’s the race. The means justify the end.”

Al Lowenstein has spent his entire adult life dashing from one cause to another. In South Africa he spoke out against “inhumane treatment”; in Spain he helped to organize against Franco; in Mississippi he marched with Martin Luther King; and across America he led the dump-Johnson movement and was one of the key strategists in Eugene McCarthy’s 1968 campaign for president.

Today, Lowenstein is frustrated. His office, two doors down from Andy Young’s, is decorated with photographs of his heroes—Bobby Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Senator Frank Graham of North Carolina (Lowenstein started his political career as a legislative assistant to Graham), and a bust of Eleanor Roosevelt. Four weeks of old *New York Times* are stacked in a corner. He is wearing a T-shirt and sneakers and his short-cropped hair, scattered everywhere, seems to defy gravity. He sits Indian style on an old, battered chair.

His job is part of the reason he is running for Congress. A critic of United States foreign policy for the past twenty years, how could he possibly be content acting as an apologist for President Carter’s inconsistent human-rights policy? Lowenstein wants “out” of the United Nations almost as much as he wants “in” the House. But he won’t admit it. Says one of his aides: “The State Department misunderstands what Al is trying to do.”

Lowenstein prefaces his own rationalizations about his position this way: “I’m here because of Andy Young. He’s the best thing about my job,” and “I wouldn’t trade in the last year for anything. It has been a valued year.” Then he rambles again: “We must make initiatives in foreign affairs; everybody has become obscured with

rigid rules. Creativity is needed. Many people are too nervous.”

Finally he opens up—if only slightly. “Everything is cables,” he says. “Look, I don’t want to attack all career diplomats. There are some very competent ones. The division in the State Department isn’t between the career and diplomatic types but between those who want to reach for a common humanity around the world and those who play an endless game of chess where people move back and forth only.”

On more than one occasion Lowenstein has tried to bring different factions together. He was rebuffed. Last spring, for example, he met with the two Nobel-peace-prize winners from Ireland, Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams. Lowenstein arranged a meeting between them and leaders of the Irish National Caucus, Fred O’Brien and Father McManus. The meeting was held in private and never publicized. A second meeting was scheduled. The situation was so sensitive that O’Brien didn’t even tell his own supporters what was going on. But somehow, both the Irish and British governments found out. They sent an official protest to the State Department and two days later Lowenstein received a cable from Washington which said, bluntly: Do not meet with the Irish. He canceled the second meeting.

Recently, Lowenstein was invited to speak at a meeting of Friendship, the organization sending reconstruction supplies to Vietnam. Even before he had time to reply to the invitation, he received another State Department communication which said: Do not attend.

He’s holding it in, but it seems quite clear that win or lose this congressional race, Al Lowenstein will likely be gone from the United Nations before too long, without bothering to look back.

“What life is all about is how you spend your day. Each day becomes a total involvement,” said Lowenstein in a 1969 magazine interview. “So you build as you go along. . . . But it all has a common denominator that gives some sense, some direction—the sense that your total activity is going to make a better situation for people to live in.”

Al Lowenstein hasn’t changed much. He’ll arouse great curiosity at Washington Irving High School this Sunday, a kind of candidate collector’s item. But who knows. After all, in Denver, a quarterback everyone labeled a “has been” has come back against all odds to take the Cinderella Denver Broncos all the way to the Super Bowl in New Orleans.

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