

New York's Corrupt and Venal Leaders Must Go

by Conrad Black



Writing as someone who was slightly acquainted with the late Mario Cuomo and considered him a substantial political force—not out of place among the many distinguished men who have held the historic office of governor of New York, from General George Clinton and John Jay to the Roosevelts, Al Smith, and Nelson Rockefeller—I have always found both of the present public Cuomos unutterably obnoxious. The only positive thing about the present governor is that he is an improvement on Eliot Spitzer, an apparently megalomaniacal incarnation of

the concept of malicious and reckless prosecution when he was state attorney general.

With that said, the cascade of demands that Andrew Cuomo resign over the allegations of improprieties against him launched by present or former female co-workers is piffle.

There is something particularly nauseating about the cowardly antics of New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio as he attacks Cuomo and demands his resignation. De Blasio is a catastrophic failure in his post, often occupied by accomplished individuals, from DeWitt Clinton to Fiorello LaGuardia, Ed Koch, Rudolph Giuliani, Michael Bloomberg, and, even as a debonair souvenir of the roaring '20s in Manhattan, James J. Walker.

De Blasio is, as former President Trump described him, the most incompetent mayor of New York in the 400-year history of that office. He has presided over a regime of unrelieved incompetence, corruption, and cowardice, culminating with the \$1 billion defunding of the New York City Police Department in response to the racist violence of last summer. For all Cuomo's failings, he deserves better than de Blasio sanctimoniously demanding that he resign because of this cascade of denunciations from women who over many years have worked closely with the governor and now claim that he behaved improperly towards them.

The governor has a perfect right to await the results of the investigation being conducted by the attorney general of New York into his conduct, and there is no reason at all that he should resign now prior to any finding from that source.

In fact, most of the agitation over the allegedly wronged women is years out of date, completely uncorroborated, stops well short of coerced sex, and even if entirely true, is sleazy, tasteless, and wholly inappropriate, but it cannot seriously be portrayed in any case that has been explicitly

described up to now as a physically dangerous or psychologically traumatizing assault. Traditionally, these are matters to be taken into account by voters and the media, given the attention they deserve, along with the denials of them which the governor has repeatedly uttered. The complainants' credibility must take into account, the delay in their complaint and, where appropriate, the continuation of their employment even under the conditions alleged.

The much more serious charge against Cuomo is his apparent complicity in the wrongful death of many thousands of elderly coronavirus sufferers his administration consigned to homes for the elderly with tragic results. No one would suggest that the governor wished the terrible consequences of his administration's mistaken decisions, but the issues of potential negligence, and of deliberate misinformation on a scale that may have violated the commitments of his oath of office, are serious questions of life and death and the criminal law that will require comprehensive and unbiased investigation to determine whether prosecution of the governor or other officials is justified.

The charges involving the women, though very important, are essentially a comparative sideshow, and despite the hysteria that has been generated by militant aggrieved women, long-established rules of evidence are going to have to be resurrected and applied on the civil law standard of balance of probabilities and the criminal law standard of proof beyond reasonable doubt.

There is, moreover, no doubt that many men have been unfairly victimized where charges of male sexual misconduct inflicted on women in subordinate positions have been accepted after insufficient administration of evidence and that some of the accused have been judicially punished or otherwise penalized beyond what objectively even-handed standards of proof would justify.

The whole country saw how close the U.S. Senate came in 2018 to rejecting unjustly the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court because of what cannot reasonably be believed to have been politically convincing allegations of misconduct 36 years prior to his nomination. Senators and other commentators were demanding that the individual making the allegations against Kavanaugh be believed automatically because of her sex. It was to this almost unimaginable depth of vacuous injustice that the confirmation process of America's senior legislative chamber for admission to the bench of its highest court was nearly reduced: a mockery of due process which would make the Red Queen appear a Solomonic source of justice and equity.

Cuomo is almost certainly finished politically and very deservedly so; he is an ineffectual and megalomaniacal blowhard and anyone who would send thousands of COVID sufferers into homes for the elderly while rattling out a book in praise of his crisis management and accepting an Emmy Award for his self-serving daily propaganda sessions about a public health crisis he was chronically mismanaging, is not fit for high office.

He does, however, have an opportunity to perform one service. He could defend the issue of his conduct toward the female plaintiffs who have accused him and help to clarify the level of proof required to validate such claims. Instead of weakly folding like a three-dollar suitcase in the manner of Fighting Al Franken, who floundered out of the Senate after the publication of a photograph in which he made a humorous ghoulish face while gesturing at the covered breasts of a beautiful sleeping woman whom he did not disturb, Cuomo should push the American justice system to restore a reasonable balance between the rights of the accused and the rights of women not to be intimidated by the physical or verbal sexually charged harassments of a man in a position of influence over the course of their careers. Cuomo should see this as an

opportunity to be useful, and, even to some extent, to end his public career on a slightly redemptive note.

As for New York, both New York City and New York state have had contemptibly incompetent and venal leaders before, but not for at least a century, if ever, have they been lumbered with such unworthy occupants of their highest elected offices simultaneously as they are today. The thought, a public rumination, that de Blasio is contemplating running for governor, is an obscenity. He is a personal wrecking ball to good government. The sooner both these unworthies are banished to the merciful obscurity of the memory, the better for the Empire State and the nation's suffering metropolis.

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