



A Day, or so, in the Life of Jerry Krase, De Blasio Campaign Volunteer

Jerry Krase (November 28, 2013)



Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn began Ivan's bitterly cold and dark day as a forced laborer in a Gulag camp, mine began a bit more leisurely on a brilliantly warm and sunny Tuesday morning in Super-gentrified Park Slope, and there the similarity almost ends. Spending even a little time to help my fellow half-Italian Park Slope neighbor become at least the fourth Mayor with Brooklyn roots was well worth the



effort. This is the third in what will be a continuing series of more and less critical observations of how promised progressive policies will or will not remake The Big Apple.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn began Ivan's bitterly cold and dark day as a forced laborer in a Gulag camp, mine began a bit more leisurely on a brilliantly warm and sunny Tuesday morning in Super-gentrified Park Slope, and there the similarity almost ends. [The day before the election](#) [2], The New York Post used its front page to super-impose Bill De Blasio's smiling face on the brilliant red flag of the USSR, as it shamelessly continued its Red-Baiting anti-De Blasio as [not-so-closeted Communist](#) [3] campaign.

Bill had attracted quite a number of otherwise rabid "fans" such as Pamela Geller who had earlier, and amazingly, legally vented her spleen by posting her Islamophobic messages on New York City's subway stations. Now she was threatening to "Stop Red Bill" with ads that featured women in hijab holding a ["Muslims for De Blasio"](#) [4] sign and claiming that he will end NYPD counterterrorism surveillance. It had never been easy being Multicultural Bill and his Tale of Two New York Cities. After winning the primary, he was advised to calm the 1%ers, who own all the papers, by finding good things to say about Bloomberg and rich people in general. This has been made even more difficult after Patrick McGeehan wrote in [The New York Times](#) [5]: "Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg said in an interview published on Saturday that Bill de Blasio, one of the leading candidates to succeed him, had run a "racist" campaign. By promoting his mixed race family...."As might be expected the [New York Post](#) [6] joined the chorus of nattering nabobs of negativism.

The, compared-to-Bill, really far-left French daily newspaper [Liberation](#) [7] (founded by Jean-Paul Sartre) didn't help matters with "New York: un favori très à gauche pour la mairie. Élection." Le démocrate De Blasio, qui veut taxer les riches, pourrait remporter le scrutin, le 5 novembre (A far-left favorite for Mayor. The Democrat De Blasio, who will tax the rich could win the vote). Even though none of the New York dailies endorsed him in the primary election because he was too radical for their tastes, all but one (guess which?) more or less endorsed him in the general election with the hope that he was only kidding about being progressive. When according to the polls he was about to become Mayor by a landslide, they starting publishing articles about how he wasn't really so bad after all. I believe it is the Mayor's Office that controls who gets press credentials. A half-hearted endorsement was also published in the [Staten Island Advance](#) [8] which serves Gotham's "Tea Party Country.":

"Do we pretend to agree with all of Mr. de Blasio's policies? No. We think stop-and-frisk on some level can be good policing and has made our city safer. Mr. de Blasio would be wise to seriously evaluate the effectiveness of the program before throwing it out completely. We also disagree with his plan to install an independent inspector general to oversee the Police Department. If Mr. de Blasio cannot trust his police commissioner, he has hired the wrong police commissioner." As we might have expected, this last counted for little, especially among Italian American voters.

It was easy getting out the vote in De Blasio Country. About a third of the registered voters in Park Slope had already indicated support for Bill, and those who were still at home Election Day morning, and hadn't yet gone to polls, reassured me that he "had nothing to worry about." Only one person slammed the door on me and uttered an obscenity. As per my rigorous training, I apologized and wished her well. It was one of the few houses that didn't have working intercoms and she had come down from the third floor to answer the door. I don't blame her. I knew enough not to mention Bill De Blasio's name as soon as I saw her snarly face. I must admit that a few of my less-than-progressive Park Slope friends to whom I sent my I-Italy ["Bill De Blasio: A Progressive Mayor for All New Yorkers](#) [9]" were not impressed with his scant "accomplishments" while serving as Public Advocate. I countered that the only function of the Public Advocates is to prepare oneself to run for higher office, but they still thought I was only doing this to get a no-show job.

It was much worse a few days earlier making phone calls for Bill to Staten Island seniors. Staten Island never was, and never will be, "De Blasio Country." I got three kinds of responses to the name "De Blasio" during the phone calls. Silence and a click was the most frequent. Many of the women who answered after I identified myself said things like "I don't have to tell you anything. It's my right." Most women are kind enough not to tell you what they know you don't want to hear. But the men are different: "Hello, may I speak with Anthony Italian-Sounding-Name?" "Who wants to know?"



"I'm calling for De Blasio ..." "I wouldn't vote for him in a million years." "How about a thousand Anthony?" One woman whispered that she would vote for him but didn't want her friends, whom I could hear in the background, to know. A day later, Andrea Bernstein on WNYC radio interviewed an alleged "election expert" who predicted that the Island (La Isola) would, for the first time in ages, go for a Democratic Party Mayor. Staten Island money was flowing into his campaign coffers from donors there because of the commanding (75%-25%) lead he had in the citywide polls.

Both Bill and Joe had marched in the Columbus Day Parade with hardly a concern about the Native American New Yorker voting bloc. The [Daily News](#) [10] reported that as to his "humble origins," Lhota described his maternal grandfather, Joseph Tinnaro, as "very Italian," who grew up in Brooklyn and drove a Checker cab. Tinnaro lived across the street from St. Barnabas Hospital in the Bronx, where Lhota's grandmother, Edith Steinberg, worked as a nurse's aide. De Blasio better fits my own bill for future political candidates of Italian descent and the Italian American Democratic Leadership Council agreed by endorsing him early on: "Bill is very proud of his Italian heritage-- his family is from east of Naples. Bill's maternal grandmothers and her sisters emigrated to the U.S. from Italy in the early 1900's and started a dress shop in midtown. He has taken his family back to his grandfather's hometown in Italy - Sant'Agata dei Goti. De Blasio speaks Italian." But being more of an Italian than Lhota didn't help very much with Italian American voters. The Italian names of his son Dante and his daughter Chiara seemed also not to generate ethnic solidarity. Luckily, Bill didn't count on a wave of Italian American votes. His "landslide" citywide victory (74% vs. 24%) in the mayoral election over Joe Lhota did not include La Bella Isola where he lost 42% vs. 53%; in virtually every identifiable Italian American precinct there, and elsewhere in the Grande Mela, it was more like a 80% vs. 20% Lhota landslide.

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Links

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- [3] <http://nypost.com/2013/11/03/de-blasio-visited-communist-ussr-in-college/>
- [4] <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/subway-islam-hater-hits-de-blasio-article-1.1496110>
- [5] http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/08/nyregion/bloomberg-says-de-blasio-has-run-a-racist-campaign.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0
- [6] <http://nypost.com/2013/09/07/de-blasio-is-running-a-racist-campaign-bloomberg/>
- [7] http://www.liberation.fr/monde/2013/09/11/new-york-un-favori-tres-a-gauche-pour-la-mairie_931234
- [8] http://www.silive.com/opinion/editorials/index.ssf/2013/10/for_mayor_bill_de_blasio.html
- [9] <http://www.i-italy.org/bloggers/36467/bill-de-blasio-progressive-mayor-all-new-yorkers>
- [10] <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/election/lhota-humble-beginnings-family-immigrants-article-1.1483814>