

# Challenge to Koch: Klenetsky's program

by Vin Berg

Because the Democratic primary is coming up in September, Mayor Edward I. Koch has increased the general frequency with which he claims to have "put New York City back on its feet financially again." Candidate Mel Klenetsky charges that "the only thing Koch has put back on its feet is David Rockefeller's Chase Manhattan Bank."

Mel Klenetsky is a New York native of Polish-Jewish descent who grew up in Brooklyn, went to school there and in Manhattan, has studied law and taught mathematics in both a city high school and the City College of New York. The maternal grandfather of his wife, Kathy Murphy Klenetsky, was Tom McGee, a powerful Brooklyn Democratic leader. Since 1979, he has been national operations director for the National Democratic Policy Committee, coordinating the NDPC's campaigns against Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker's high interest rates.

Since 1975, the Municipal Assistance Corporation ("Big MAC") and the Financial Control Board (FCB) have been a power above the mayor's office, running all city finances on a budgetary pattern that each year diverts more funds away from city services into debt service to institutions like Chase Manhattan.

In the three and a half years he has been mayor, Koch has cut total spending on services by 21.4 percent; cut the budget for police by 36.2 percent; for fire protection by 34.4 percent; for sanitation by 30.1 percent; for health care by 38 percent; for education by 25.5 percent; and for transportation by 18.1 percent.

According to Klenetsky, service cutbacks erode the city's tax base. "The only thing austerity begets is more austerity, until the city collapses." His first priority would be restoration of services, to keep manufacturing and a stable workforce in the city. "In this way, the city becomes a good credit risk, because its future revenue-potential guarantees means of payment for any debt incurred." Were he mayor, Klenetsky would abolish "Big MAC" and the FCB—"Rockefeller holding companies."

## Klenetsky's program

Klenetsky has pledged a total revision of New York City's tax structure, heavily penalizing real-estate speculation while relieving the burden on homeowners and

wage-earners, and granting tax credits to manufacturing expansion. His "three-tier" property tax is designed to raise an additional \$3 billion for city services. It would do so by raising assessments on selected properties—downtown office buildings, luxury hotels and high-rises, entertainment palaces, etc., which are now assessed at only 15 percent of their true market value.

Klenetsky would also place a heavy "capital gains" tax on purely speculative real-estate operations, but he would grant selective tax credits and abatements for low- and middle-income housing construction, job-creating manufacturing, construction, and other productive investments.

The mayoral contender places manufacturing and warehouse properties on a "second tier" of taxation, applying existing rates. On the "third tier" is owner-occupied housing, on which he would sharply reduce assessments.

With these tax increments, Klenetsky proposes to:

- Reopen 53 schools closed down since 1975;
- Reopen 27 hospitals closed down by Koch;
- Restore the police from 27,000 to 35,000 officers, emphasizing patrolmen on the beat;
- Reduce subway and bus fares to increase ridership, while restoring service, maintenance, and personnel to much higher 1969 levels;
- Reopen dozens of firehouses closed down over the past decade;
- Launch a major crackdown on drug traffic, currently \$30 billion cash-flow annually, twice the city budget.

On the last point, Klenetsky is emphatic: experts estimate that 80 percent of all New York crime is drug-related. Mayor Koch pioneered in "decriminalizing" marijuana; Klenetsky would make it a crime again. He would deploy the police to handle "street pushing," and use federal and state laws to reach those "citizens above suspicion" and "respectable" corporations who are engaged in drug traffic or in "laundering" drug monies.

Education he has declared a special priority: "At present, about the only thing a student can be sure of learning in New York's public schools is how to use drugs." He has pledged to reopen all closed schools, to rehire 10,000 fired teachers, sharply reduce class size from near 40 to 22-28 students per class, and also, to restore 179 city libraries to a full seven-day week, mornings, afternoons, and evenings. (Under Mayor Koch, library hours are 40 percent below state standards and nearly the lowest in the nation.)

"I want our schools teaching science, engineering, mathematics, and reading and writing in literate English and literate foreign languages—the English of Shakespeare and Milton, the Spanish of Cervantes, not 'Black English,' 'New Math,' and other racist forms of watered-down miseducation."