



Svorinich: Nobody's fool

The Charter End Game

Councilman Svorinich discovers global capitalism

BY MARC B. HAEFELE

MAYBE I'VE JUST BEEN LUCKY. BUT I NEVER BEFORE have been compelled to consider who's the dumbest Los Angeles City Council member. It's not as important as knowing who's the smartest, or most venal. Or least honest.

As the fiscal year wanes, however, I think we do need a tentative negative-intelligence assessment. So here we go: The least cerebral person sitting on the ruling body of the nation's second largest city is 15th District member Rudy Svorinich. He proved this last week when he got in way over his head on a major issue and forgot to tread water.

"I wonder if this is not one of the most gross attempts to change the way the city of Los Angeles is being run in the future," Svorinich said Friday. He was speaking of a political contribution of \$200,000 by Rupert Murdoch's DLO Corp., the political contribution arm of Murdoch's News Corp.

Now, News Corp. isn't exactly a mystery in this city. By now it owns most of Fox Broadcasting, the Dodgers, the Staples Arena, and chunks of the Lakers, the Kings and, for all I know, the Metropolitan Water District.

But Svorinich seems never to have heard of it. Nor of Murdoch. It appeared he'd barely heard of Delaware, where DLO is incorporated. Svorinich seemed uncertain that Delaware was a state of the Union, but he knew it was an unsavory venue in which to be incorporated.

"This is the largest political contribution in the history of the city," the councilman intoned several times. Which is not true. According to the Ethics Commission, four larger contributions — one of them \$900,000 — were logged back when millionaire Armand Hammer was trying to drill for oil in Pacific Palisades. "It is a gross attempt to change the way this city is run," the councilman continued.

Not that \$200,000 isn't a huge contribution. Particularly to the campaign for Measure 1, the charter-reform proposal. Indeed, though Rudy didn't get there, you might well ask whence the Australian-born, now-U.S.-citizen Murdoch's sudden interest in charter reform. Then you might recall his long L.A. residency (though recently he's been spending more time in New York) and his palship with Mayor Richard Riordan, our primal charter promoter. And wonder no more.

Svorinich was peddling more than just the notion that this was too big a big donation, though. He contended that News Corp., whose stock recently traded on the Big Board for \$35 a share, was maybe a furtive, foreign cabal, perverting our all-American form of local government by persuading voters to overthrow the omniscient city charter of 1924.

In other words, this was some alien plot. News Corp. "might well be" controlled by a faction of noncitizens — as the councilman put it — "for which it is the sole owner of it."

On Wednesday, Svorinich proclaimed himself among "those of us who know how business is conducted across the United States." The unwary might forget that Svorinich's expansive business knowledge was acquired running a paint store he owned in Wilmington.

Svorinich was obviously trying to impute a scandal to the yea-sayers for charter reform. Or, as the councilman himself tried to put it, "for those of you who see reform as the buzzword of the day." I don't think he likes reform. (Rudy, lest we forget, led the anti-charter council forces.)

Svorinich then tried — in a move without precedent — to order the Ethics Commission to probe the donation. As Councilman Mike Feuer pointed out, however, that commission isn't subordinate to the council, so the order became a request. Even so, it seemed sheer arrogance for the council to ask the agency that is its legal regulator to do its corporate-research laundry. That's what the chief legislative analyst is for. Not to mention Internet-literate council staff, who could have picked up (as I did) the basics on the \$54 billion News Corp. from its Web page.

Councilman Joel Wachs went wild at this "attempt to disrupt the Ethics Commission," which, he reminded us, admonishes council members for their lapses in professional ethics. Wachs was in turn assailed by several other members for his outburst — notably Hal Bernson, whose lack of cooperation with the Ethics staff has been second to none.

Following the council's invitation, the forbearingly diplomatic Ethics Commission director, Rebecca Avila, testified Friday to what most of us already knew: that News Corp. is a public, U.S.-based firm and that DLO's previous nine major contributions — all in federal elections — had raised no hackles with federal campaign-spending regulators. It had taken her 15 minutes on the Internet, she pointed out, to discover all this. A few minutes poring over the *Times* business section would have told the council members the same thing.

At this point, Svorinich's anti-charter allies turned tail. Having done no homework, they looked as foolish as Svorinich. Jackie Goldberg, who really must have known better all along, scurried for cover with a backward shot about how maybe we ought to do something about outlawing such huge contributions. Such a resolution was made by charter-friendly Councilwoman Cindy Miscikowski. That should have ended it.

Svorinich, however, kept playing Horatius at his conspiratorial bridge. No one — particularly those Washington doofuses — had actually proved to his satisfaction that News Corp.'s previous contributions had been clean. Nor that News Corp. wasn't party to the vast global conspiracy to give Dick Riordan more control over his fire commission.

Or was the conspiracy really just to make Rudy Svorinich look like San Pedro's own village idiot?

COUNCILMAN JOEL WACHS' RESIGNATION AS COUNCIL president pro tem followed the Wednesday News Corp. rhubarb by just 24 hours. Wachs said he could no longer hold a leadership position on a council whose majority was opposed to the charter approved by its own charter commission. Apparently, Svorinich's bid to concoct a global pro-charter conspiracy was the last straw for Wachs.

Hostile colleagues called the resignation a stunt. And there was indeed the possibility that his fellow council members might not have re-elected Wachs to the pro tem position next month as a punishment for his charter support. But I think Wachs made a smart move. The council members who opposed this charter belong in the dumpster of history. Like the British-sanctioned colonial legislators of 1776, they were too sunk in their own power-grabbing agendas to perceive the desperate need for change. In distancing himself from their detestable consensus, Wachs showed himself a far better politician than they.

Living Wage: The County Continuation

THAT LONG-OVERDUE LOS ANGELES COUNTY LIVING-WAGE proposal is still stuck in simulated melodrama. When it was re-agenda'd last week, for instance, there was an amendment on the table which proposed that the wage be extended to all county contract wage earners, both full- and part-time.

Good news, right? This was just what living-wage proponents have sought all along, knowing as they do that an ordinance covering only full-time workers could result in the replacement of full-timers by underpaid 30-hour-a-week unfortunates. But this is something the board's liberal majority — more particularly, Supervisors Yvonne Burke and Gloria Molina — has been slow to grasp. Could the scales finally have fallen from their eyes?

Actually, no. The amendment was by none other than conservative Mike Antonovich — not exactly the living wage's best friend on the board. The measure's proponents suspected another "love it to death" tactic, since, thus amended, the entire measure might not get the required three votes. But all that transpired, after a two-hour backstage shuffle, was yet another 14-day postponement of the long-overdue law's consideration.

Frida and Whatsisname

TWELVE YEARS AGO LAST MARCH, THE LATE, LAMENTED *L.A. Reader* published a story I wrote slamming the L.A. art-museum establishment, such as it was, for slighting Latin American art in general and Mexican painting in particular. The problem at that time was that if you wanted to see a really good collection of Diego Rivera's work in this country, you had to book a flight to Detroit. Whose municipal art collection is rich in Rivera's work.

Now, however, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art is mounting what could be one of the great Rivera shows of all time: so it seems appropriate to thank those responsible for finally bringing all those fantastic pictures to town. I can't wait to stand in line three hours to see them.

But since the '80s, Rivera's own star seems to have shifted in the canonical firmament, so that the great muralist's significance for many has less to do with his painterly virtuosity than with another association. I recently overheard two young Los Angeles women downtown commenting on a poster for the show. "Diego Rivera," one asked: "Wasn't he Frida Kahlo's husband?" 