

tigation revealed that Colavita has worked himself into the processes of both the legislative and executive branches of the county government to an extent that makes him a de facto official of that government.

Commission inquiries over the past two and a half years have revealed that local governments throughout the State are often dominated by party leaders who are not elected by or accountable to the voters. In Westchester County, the Commission found a graphic illustration of this reality. In making recommendations, the Commission takes into account the inherent symbiotic relationship between leaders of government and the political parties from which they emerge, but at the same time seeks to eliminate practices which needlessly foster the perception that access to government may be obtained by making contributions to particular parties. In short, the reforms sought are aimed at drawing clearer lines of distinction between the political and governmental structures where appropriate and possible, and, to the extent that divisions are not feasible, making party leaders more accountable under the law for the influence they exercise.

In response to revelations made at the Commission's public hearings in November, 1989, County Executive Andrew O'Rourke has indicated that he will propose several



TONY BROWN

COMMENTARY

Ex-county clerk tells Tony Colavita stories at integrity hearing

It was a smiling, utterly delighted George Morrow who walked out of the building at 1 Martine Ave. in White Plains late yesterday morning. Was the beaming former Republican county clerk enjoying himself as much as he appeared to be?

"Yes," Morrow said, grinning. "Yes, I am."

George Morrow, you see, finally got to tell his best stories about Tony Colavita.

And they were wonderful stories yesterday, colorful stories that bespoke a petty power broker, a Republican tap on public money,



George Morrow

political extortion — stories that together spoke volumes about Colavita, the county Republican chairman, and the Republican Party's way of doing business in Westchester County. Morrow was witness No. 1 in Day No. 1 of hearings by the state Commission on Government Integrity.

He mentioned, for instance, the time just before the 1982 elections when Colavita — the self-styled "little Italian lawyer from Eastchester" — put a price on his party's nomination.

Morrow told the commission how Colavita once called him over to Republican Headquarters at 214 Mamaroneck Ave. in White Plains. Testifying under oath, Morrow recalled how the chairman said the party's nomination would be his, but first they had "loose ends to tie up."

The nomination, in other words, would cost Morrow something. First, according to Morrow, Colavita said the county clerk "and my deputies" weren't contributing enough money to the Republican Party. Buy more dinner tickets, Colavita said, write more checks, fork over more cash. It was a shakedown, a holdup, jobs bought and sold.

Second, Morrow said Colavita informed him that, henceforth, his deputy clerks would be approved by 214 Mamaroneck Ave. No more independent hires. Colavita would control all appointments. Did Morrow, an elected public official, agree to this arrangement?



Anthony Colavita

"With Tony," he told the commission, "there was no agreeing or disagreeing." Later, Morrow added, "I don't recall Mr. Colavita ever making a request — he gave orders. He, in effect, had the power to control nominations."

Of course Morrow, by this time, was a veteran of Colavita's demands. Morrow, after all, was saddled with E. Richard Keeler, the longtime Republican functionary and the now-convicted former director of Playland Amusement Park.

In the early 1980s, Keeler worked in Morrow's office. And, according to Morrow, Keeler had to be promoted twice at the direct order of Tony Colavita. Those promotions came despite the fact that Keeler, according to Morrow, was an unproductive, often absent and widely hated member of his staff. Morrow told Colavita this.

"It meant nothing to him," Morrow said of Colavita, adding: "It was demoralizing to others in the office. . . . It was obvious he (Keeler) owed his allegiance to 214 Mamaroneck Ave."

Ah, 214 Mamaroneck Ave. — the Republican County Committee of Westchester!

"One time," Morrow remembered yesterday, laughing, "Colavita complained that I didn't hang around Republican headquarters enough."

Morrow — unlike, say, Andrew O'Rourke or Edward Brady — wasn't going to be one of Tony Colavita's boys. One of Colavita's boys wouldn't have done what Morrow did when he saw Keeler doing so much Republican business on county time. Morrow — in an inspired move — began charging a day of vacation for every day Keeler spent on party work, some of which included chauffeuring Tony Colavita's car.

Tony Colavita, according to Morrow, was not amused.

"He said Keeler shouldn't be charged for the time," Morrow recalled yesterday. "We had some serious words about it."

Or how about the time Colavita wanted Morrow to hire some Conservative Party officers, sight (and resumes) unseen. The unseen Conservative Party people, Morrow said, wanted "jobs of management stature."

Or how about the time Morrow hired an entry-level office clerk without consulting Tony Colavita. The chairman objected later, Morrow said, not to the person, but the way the person was hired. The new clerk, to Colavita's shock, was hired without being beholden to the Republican Party.

"He (Colavita) wanted the person to think the appointment was coming through 214 Mamaroneck Ave.," Morrow said, "not my office."

But Morrow, even with Colavita's expensive endorsement, lost the '82 election to Democrat Andrew Spano. Morrow found himself without a job and nine months short of 20 years of service toward his Civil Service pension. So he recalled yesterday how he approached then-County Executive-in-waiting Andrew O'Rourke. Morrow asked about a job.

It seemed that O'Rourke, too, knew how the system worked.

"Jobs at that stature," Morrow said O'Rourke told him, "have to be cleared through Tony."

Tony Brown's column appears Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

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