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\$30 million dispute clouds state tower

Born in controversy and built over vigorous objections from much of the community, the Harlem State Office Building was formally dedicated Monday in a ceremony that attracted politicians of many persuasions and only minor references to the controversies that swirl about the \$36 million tower.

And even as the dedication proceeded, yet a new controversy was stirred, one that cast a former opponent of the Harlem office building, Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton, in the role of controversial catalyst in the building's future. There were charges this week that Sutton's role also involves serious conflict of interest.

The weather could not have been more perfect for Governor Malcolm Wilson, Mayor Abraham Beame and other unfamiliar faces to 125th Street to visit Harlem to open the new structure. But towering over all the gathered politicians just as the building itself towers over the rest of Harlem was the ghost of former governor Nelson Rockefeller, whose tenacity, political skill and money pushed the controversial project to completion. Memories of years of controversy, protests, demonstrations and bitter debate over the tower seemed to have evaporated in a very short time. Many said the almost uncanny acquiescence to the project is linked to the eventual fate of the vacant land next to the building, prime real estate in the center of Harlem that has almost as many proposals put forward as there are operators in the community.

It seems appropriate that the group with the inside track on the \$30 million state contract to develop the vacant land consists of friends and business associates

of Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton. Sutton's involvement, or lack of it, in Center City Communications has become a matter of public debate in the past week.

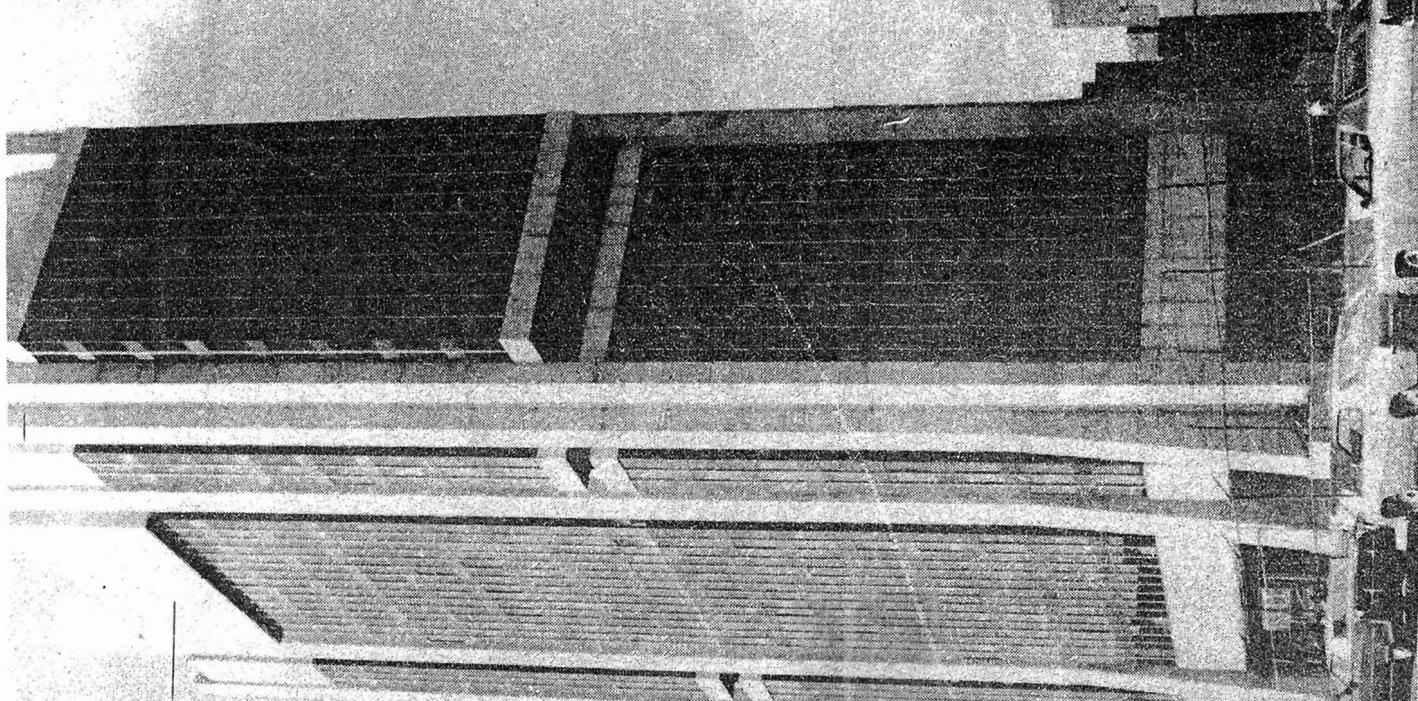
It all began late last week, when a report on WNEW-TV linked Sutton with the development project and raised questions of impropriety and conflict of interest. Sutton was seen in the report attempting to evade a persistent reporter for the station.

Then more details emerged early this week, in a lengthy report in New York magazine. Inserted in the middle of an article that appeared to concern Sutton's mayoral plans was an extensive account of the direct and indirect links between the borough president and the group that most feel will be selected by the state to get the \$30 million contract.

Sutton partisans sternly deny any wrongdoing, saying no law has been broken. The legal issues raised are fairly complex, but the basic principle involved is simple: No government official is supposed to be in a position to influence government spending to corporations or other groups with which he is involved.

Percy Sutton has no small voice in who will get the contract to develop the land adjoining the state office building, while at the same time board members of Inner City Broadcasting and Amnews (which publishes the Amsterdam News) — both of which Sutton owns, with others — are on the board of Center City. Further, Center City officials openly say they plan eventually to take control of both Amnews and Inner City Broadcasting. That means that Sutton will wind up owning much of Center

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New facade in town

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City or that Center City will have to pay Sutton to buy him out.

Either way, that \$30 million in state money will go a long way towards alleviating financial problems that may currently plague Amnews and Inner City — to the eventual financial benefit, it would appear, of Sutton and the other owners.

As THE NEW YORK AGE goes to press, we can report that documents relating to various transactions and proposals concerning the office building property have been made available to THE AGE. The documents are both lengthy and complex, and rather than summarize them after a superficial examination, they have been turned over to legal and financial analysts for close inspection. A complete report will be published in future issues.

But, as with the old controversy over the wisdom of a state office building in Harlem, the new controversy over the wisdom of a state office building in Harlem, the new controversy and charges of conflict of interest seemed distant from the Monday dedication ceremonies. Over a hundred speakers described only benefits, mostly of economic expansion, that the tower will bring to Harlem.

But three speakers, Assemblyman Jesse Gray, uptown Chamber of Commerce President Hope Stevens, and attorney and Rabbi Judah Anderson, dissented from the chorus of praise for the new building, calling on Mayor Abraham Beame, Governor Malcolm Wilson and other dais guests to provide housing for the Harlem community.

"Let the word go forth from this place to Mayor Beame and Governor Wilson," Stevens said as the two men sat directly behind him, "that we want housing and that we demand it now. Otherwise this magnificent building will be nothing but a mockery and not a monument."

Loud cheers from a crowd estimated at over 1,000 followed his remarks, which seemed to surprise a good number of his listeners.

But Stevens was not through. As he

looked toward the American flag flying beside the emblem of the State of New York, Stevens pointed to the national colors and declared, "This community has no loyalty except to all the people who inhabit it."

Assemblyman Gray (D-70) seemed to take a verbal blast at the building later when he told the small crowd, which by this time had diminished along with the dais guests, "The real issue is housing and employment for this community. This building should remind us each time we see it that we must renew our efforts to work for our people in Harlem, because we can't sleep in this building."

Rabbi Anderson, a Black Jew and a community worker with the Harlem Salute Committee, was held off until last, just as Gray was not allowed to speak until after Governor Wilson left.

The rabbi castigated the "establishment" for omitting the names of several "Black revolutionaries" from the long list of names called when Master of Ceremonies Kenneth Sherwood mentioned outstanding Harlem and Black leaders who made contributions to the planning and completion of the building, as well as to the community.

Earlier, in his address the Governor said that Harlem residents will be "employed in the building." But most of the 3,000 employees will come from other areas to work in the 20-story building. Most of the employees will be white, working in 17 departments scheduled to move into the building. Wilson's remarks drew a restrained response.

The audience saved their outpouring of applause for African Memorial Bookstore owner Louis Micheaux, whose store with over 225,000 volumes on Black history was originally situated on the office building's site. Apparently referring to economic growth for Harlem, as well as the need of Blacks to obtain knowledge, Micheaux said, "You can be Black as a crow or White as snow, but if you don't know and ain't got no dough, you can't go!"

Guess Who's Coming to Gracie Mansion

By Nicholas Pileggi

"... Percy Sutton has just eclipsed Herman Badillo as the minority candidate for mayor most likely to succeed with white voters ..."

After twenty years of the most dazzling mystifications, Percy Ellis Sutton, the ex-barnstorming stunt pilot from San Antonio, the cocoa-colored, silky-voiced master of clubhouse sleight of hand, the 53-year-old Democrat who has miraculously juggled the oddball factions of his own party in defiance of all the laws of political gravity, the one and only goateed Manhattan borough president, Percy E. Sutton, is about to perform his most extraordinary magical act—he is about to emerge from behind a screen of color-blinding alliances and hurl himself and his hatful of commitments into the 1977 mayoral race.

Sutton has been preparing for this show since 1952, when he first volunteered his legal services at Assemblyman Joseph Pinckney's Central Democratic Club in Harlem.

"I learned politics and election law on the clubhouse and election-day level," Sutton said. "All day long for over a year, I apprenticed myself to Joe Pinckney, practicing law free of charge for the club's regulars, organizing tenant groups, pushing voter registration, and working at night as a subway change booth clerk at the Van Wyck Boulevard station in Queens. I volunteered for that rather isolated booth because I didn't want any of my clients to see that their hotshot lawyer needed another job in order to live. One night, about a year after I started at the club, I was giving out change when I recognized a bright young lawyer against whom I had just argued some motions earlier. I remember he came up to the window and kept looking at me. Finally, he said, 'Hey, aren't you Percy Sutton?' I was so embarrassed.

I said, 'No, I'm Oliver Sutton. You're talking about my brother.'

"As soon as that guy left the window I knew that when morning came I would resign from the T.A. I saw that I was beginning to develop a crutch in that booth. Certainly I needed it, because young black lawyers weren't exactly being signed up out of law school in those days. You had to pretty much piece together a practice one client at a time, but that guy drove me right out of the subway, and with Joe Pinckney's help, I ran for district leader of his club."

Sutton lost that race and continued to lose elections for the next eleven years, but during that period he learned Byzantine politics in New York. He learned about sworn allegiances that dissolve overnight, about paying off election captains to get out the vote, about voting machines that jam on request, and about the voracious young reformers who devour their elders during biennial voting frenzies. He even learned to live on four hours' sleep a night. But, perhaps most important, Sutton learned the art of being elusive. He saw that survival in Harlem politics during the fifties required a talent for evasion. For instance, in his very first race against Assemblyman Lloyd Dickens for a district leadership, Sutton found that one candidate had been kidnapped, a clubhouse burned, and an inquiring assistant U.S. attorney pistol-whipped. Only the nimblest of men could succeed on that kind of stage or amid the precariously balanced and ever shifting *détentes* between Congressman Adam C. Powell, Tammany boss (later City Councilman) J. Raymond

Jones, the established Harlem churches, the emerging and diverse civil-rights activists, and the sidewalk interests of policy racketeers.

Sutton learned to finesse his way past the diametrically opposed demands of his closest allies. First you saw him, then you didn't. Alliances with other young rebels like Charles Rangel, who is now a congressman, and Basil Patterson, the vice-chairman of the National Democratic Party, appeared to change from election to election, and yet no one was ever certain. Sutton seemed to nurture secrets, and behind an easy smile, he learned to keep his mouth shut. Like The Shadow, he had so completely mastered the art of clouding men's minds that no one ever knew exactly where he stood. At one time in the early sixties he managed to head the prestigious and middle-of-the-road New York branch of the N.A.A.C.P., represent Malcolm X during a shooting and bomb-throwing war with the Muslims, and maintain a daily liaison with Captain Yusef, who headed the Muslims' toughest supporters, the Fruit of Islam.

With the collapse of Adam Powell's machine and Ray Jones's move to the Virgin Islands, Sutton began not only to take control of most of Harlem's organized political structure through the Martin Luther King Jr. Democratic Club (he's still a district leader), but also to establish himself as a major force in distributing millions of dollars in anti-poverty funds, Model Cities jobs, and Harlem Urban Development Corporation contracts.

On many of the important boards, such as H.U.D.C., Sutton is suspected

“... Sutton has been sweeping away potential scandal for years and before our wondering eyes coming up with clean hands...”

of having one or even more of his allies (usually unknown to each other) sitting as members. The H.U.D.C., for instance, controls the spending of more than \$150 million in state-financed bonds to build 3,000 new apartments in Harlem and will shortly select one of several anxious community groups vying to build a theater, office complex, and 500-room hotel on state-cleared land at 125th Street and Lenox Avenue. Since H.U.D.C. has had Sutton campaign contributors, business partners, clubhouse pals, and even employees sitting as board members, it is not surprising that Center City Communications, Inc., which also has a number of Sutton associates as officers, is considered the odds-on favorite to win the \$30-million development contract from the H.U.D.C.

In fact, since Sutton first decided to emulate his fellow Texan, Lyndon B. Johnson, and put together an almost impenetrable complex of entrepreneurial, political, and media interests, he and a very tight group of partners have dominated the financial life of Harlem. The original group included Clarence B. Jones, a lawyer and former vice-president of CBWL-Hayden, Stone, brokers, and now editor and publisher of *The New York Amsterdam News*; Reverend H. Carl McCall, a former chairman for the city's Council Against Poverty, currently chairman of *The Amsterdam News's* editorial board and a Sutton-backed candidate for the State Senate; Wilbert Tatum, a former Sutton assistant in the Borough President's office, a housing relocation official, and now *The Amsterdam News's* treasurer and Abe Beame's liaison to the garment industry (he, too, was almost deputy mayor); and John Edmonds, formerly director of the Harlem-East Harlem Model Cities Committee and now secretary of *The Amsterdam News* and vice-chairman of the H.U.D.C. board. In 1971, as AM-NEWS, Inc., this group bought *The Amsterdam News*, Harlem's 80,000-circulation weekly for \$2-million, \$1.5 million of which was in a loan from Chemical Bank. Sutton, who controls 37 per cent of the company, has refused to say where they got the \$500,000 for such a venture but did say "we used all of our personal resources."

A month later, Sutton started another company, Inner City Broadcasting, which included as its stockholders such Sutton regulars as Carl McCall, Wilbert Tatum, and John Edmonds, and introduced his son, Pierre, his brother, State Supreme Court Judge

Oliver Sutton, and M. S. Woolfolk, the treasurer of his 1972 testimonial dinner (which raised \$75,461) at the Americana Hotel.

In July of 1971, Inner City, with Carl McCall as its president and Pierre Sutton as vice-president, bought radio station WLIB-AM for \$2 million with yet another loan from Chemical Bank, this one for \$1.7 million.

"When I leave this office," Sutton told a *Times* reporter at the time of these purchases, "I'm going to travel the length and breadth of the country trying to convince every black person who will listen to me that they ought to get into this business. Communications is where blacks are going to make their greatest strides in the coming decades."

In 1972, when Center City Communications was formed, Sutton's name was not among the officers, but his pals Clarence Jones and Carl McCall were listed as chairman of the board and president, respectively. In a letter to the H.U.D.C. in March, 1973, however, offering Center City Communications as the developer of the sought-after hotel, theater, and communications complex, Clarence Jones said that C.C.C. was actually a holding company that will "acquire substantial equity interests" in *The Amsterdam News* and Inner City Broadcasting Corporation, the very companies in which he, McCall, and Sutton have substantial interests. Sutton, in fact, has first option on any sale of stock in the Inner City Broadcasting Corporation, according to the incorporation papers.

While these complicated business maneuvers do not appear to be illegal, they are filled with possible conflicts of interest. Sutton, however, has been sweeping away potential scandal for years, and, before the wondering eyes of his appreciative urban audiences, coming up with the cleanest hands in town. There was, for instance, that matter in the early sixties of his owning two slum properties up on West 141st and West 142nd Streets with 276 building violations. But in 1968 the city's Board of Ethics found that there was no "impropriety" in his ownership of the buildings since Sutton had resigned from the company six months before he first took office as an assemblyman in 1965. Joseph Kahn, *The New York Post's* investigative reporter who first broke the story in 1967, was never very impressed with the board's conclusion. The "new" company, Kahn wrote, was headed by Sutton's accountant, Esmar

Bradford, who had also been an official in the original company. Bradford, who insisted to Kahn that he was only the president and not the owner of the company, steadfastly refused to divulge the names of the buildings' real owners. Bradford eventually pleaded guilty in criminal court to the building violations, and last year he was listed as having contributed \$1,000 to Sutton's re-election fund dinner.

There was also the sticky matter of two letters Sutton wrote in 1971 calling upon the commissioner of correction, George McGrath, to reinstate a suspended Board of Correction guard. Sutton later explained that he had been requested to intervene in the case by the guard's brother, the owner of a Harlem construction company. The suspended guard, Sutton wrote Commissioner McGrath, had been "cleared of a disorder" and should be reinstated. In testimony before a State Legislative Committee on crime a few years later, Sutton angrily declared that he had been misled about the nature of the suspended guard's problem. He did not know that by "disorder" the guard's construction-company brother had been referring to charges of kidnapping, robbery, and selling two kilos of cocaine. While Sutton may really have been upset with the guard's family at that time, he has apparently borne no grudge. Last year the construction-company brother, the one who wrote the "misleading" letter, received a \$6.5-million H.U.D.C. contract and his father brought \$150 to Sutton's campaign dinner.

Where Sutton may have his biggest problem, however, is not with his financial entanglements or control of his black political base but with his riverboat-gambler style. At a time when politicians are increasingly being forced to bare their 1040's, when charisma is almost a dirty word, Percy Sutton may be just a little too smooth. It is one of the first things heard from politicians and concerned citizens, black as well as white, whenever Sutton is discussed.

"It's not Percy's fault," said Basil Paterson, an old friend. "That's just the way he is. It's his natural style. He used to be even worse. He just can't help it if he talks *preee-cisely*."

Sutton's elaborate, almost courtly manners and careful grooming are in marked contrast to the style of most of the city's politicians. Where most ink-stained pols seem addicted to their uncapped Bic Bananas and groaning brief-

Percy Sutton knows: Like *The Shadow*, the Manhattan borough president has mastered the art of clouding men's minds so that no one knows where he stands.

“...The more of his tricks Sutton is forced to reveal during a prolonged mayoral maneuver, the less impressive they’ll appear...”

cases, Sutton rarely carries anything bulkier than his Binaca and frets about wearing a navy blue tie to a black-tie dinner.

He is extremely conscious of his public appearance. He will not drink or even smoke a cigar in public.

“I like a Scotch and water, and I love a good cigar,” he said, “but outside, when you’re supposed to be a public official, I think it’s unseemly.”

Sutton did not begin to emerge as a masterful conjurer with citywide potential until 1964, when he was finally elected to the Assembly. Two years later he managed to get himself chosen by the City Council to replace Constance Baker Motley (she had been appointed a federal judge) as Manhattan borough president. Even in the Assembly, Sutton’s moves were impressive.

In his two years in Albany, Sutton organized the thirteen black assemblymen—all Democrats—into a solid voting bloc. He then persuaded Assembly Speaker Anthony Travia that Travia could lose his post if blacks were not appointed to five important legislative committees that had remained until

then all white. Travia got the message, Sutton delivered the votes, and suddenly the majority whip was a black assemblyman, and for the first time, there were black assemblymen on every major committee. Somehow, Sutton managed this maneuver and many others like it without ever applying enough pressure to antagonize the regular Democratic leadership of whom he was making his demands.

“That’s Percy,” one legislator told a reporter. “Anybody else who lived in his area would have had to claw his way through, but not Percy. With him you never see the talons.”

Percy Sutton is one of the few politicians who have been deft enough to emerge from the Democratic regular and reform battles of the sixties with close allies on both sides. It is Sutton who has allowed Carmine De Sapio’s last disciple, Assemblyman Frank Rossetti, to continue as county leader in Manhattan while at the same time maintaining an intimate working relationship with many of Rossetti’s sworn opponents in the reform clubs of the West Side. In Brooklyn, where the power

struggle between Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm and City Councilman Samuel D. Wright has completely divided the borough’s 656,000 black voters, Sutton alone survives as a friend of both. He recently flew to Washington with Wright to argue before the District Court in an effort to have Brooklyn redistricted and get Wright a congressional seat. Much of Sutton’s new-found political strength comes from the Legal Defense Fund action that was argued by Eric Schnapper that day. It will very likely result in a number of new congressional, State Senate, and Assembly seats for minority candidates in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. In New York, meanwhile, Shirley Chisholm gives Sutton her highest accolade. “To be truthful about it,” she told Tom Buckley of *The Times*, “there’s just me and Percy.”

During last year’s mayoral race, when his old pal from the Assembly, Al Blumenthal, ran in the Democratic primary, many liberal Democrats thought Sutton would have been among Al’s strongest supporters. After all, Sutton and Blumenthal had marched for civil



Separate but equal breakfasts: Twice a morning in his Lenox Terrace apartment Percy Sutton courts and is courted. Here William vanden Heuvel (left) breaks bread with Sutton (center) and Sutton’s press secretary Frank Baraff (far right).

rights, voted for liberal issues, championed abortion, divorce, and election reform together. In the end, Sutton wound up endorsing Abe Beame, with whom he had never marched and only occasionally voted. To Sutton, Beame was not only the potential winner, but the vehicle to the citywide, mainstream support that he has always sought.

Percy Sutton's support of Abe Beame not only gave him access to citywide patronage and the previously remote, predominantly white clubhouses of outer Brooklyn and Queens, it also helped him become the first black politician to solidify a position with such mainstream white fund-raisers as Henry Waxman, Abe Feinberg, Charles Bassine, and Bill Shea. His early endorsement of Beame was unquestionably the first step in his own mayoral bid.

Around the Board of Estimate, where Sutton is now clearly the dominant voice, he has eight years of favors upon which to draw and countless day-care centers, senior citizen centers, bus shelters, school lunchroom annexes, street lights, stop signs, and housing developments for which he can begin, very selectively, to take credit. Earlier this year, for instance, in Flushing, Queens, at the annual dinner of the Congress of Italian American Organization, he was cheered by at least 1,000 Italian Americans when Mary Sansone,

CIAO's executive director, told them: "He was beautiful. He helped get us senior citizen centers and day-care centers when some of our own wouldn't lift a finger." At the Hellenic American Neighborhood Action Committee rally in April, Sutton could not help but smile when he heard Lee Gournades, the committee's assistant director, introduce him to at least 10,000 cheering Greek Americans as a future mayor.

"Why not?" Gournades asked. "Sutton relates to our people. He got us English language schools, day care, senior citizen centers, and he always shows up at the archbishop's dinner."

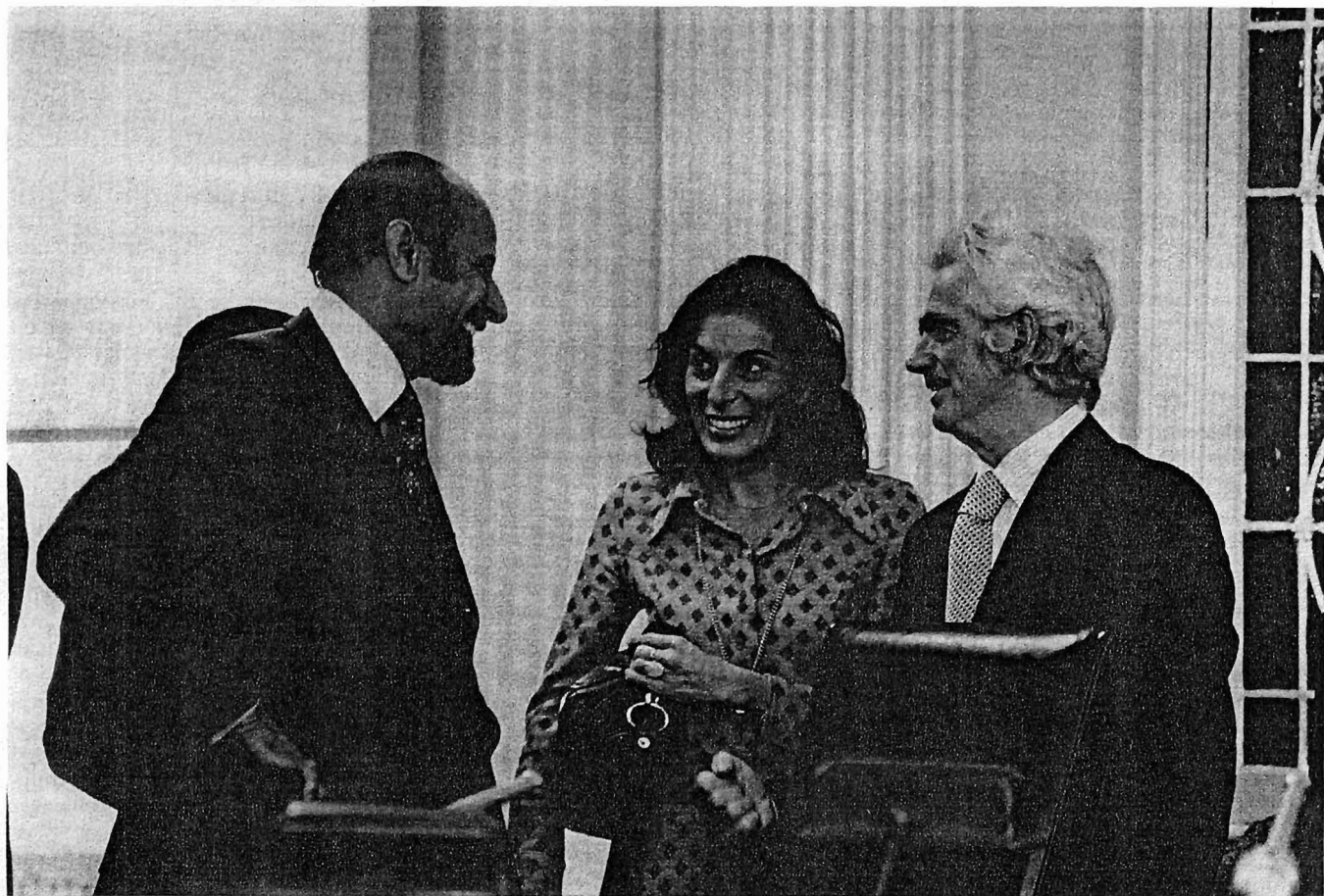
And last month, Sutton even found himself identified on the front page of the fleet owners' newspaper, *City Life & Taxi News*, as the man "considered by many political leaders as 'most likely to be our next mayor.'"

Perhaps the years of sharing scrambled eggs, sausages, and sweet rolls with disparate souls at separate, but equally important, seven and eight o'clock breakfasts in his Lenox Terrace apartment have begun to pay off. Over the years he has met with welfare clients and bank presidents. With his wife, Leatrice, and his son, Pierre, helping to care for the guests (daughter Cheryl Lynn is at Smith), Sutton's breakfasts are homey and quite infor-

mal. It is at these meetings that Percy can be his most persuasive. On one recent morning he entertained a pair of East Harlem politicians with whom he had been feuding. At the beginning of the meeting the two men sat rather stiffly on a long sofa in the Sutton living room while Percy, immaculately dressed in dark blue at 6:30 A.M., listened intently and sympathetically to their complaints. Soon Pierre arrived to announce that breakfast was ready, and the two men, Percy's arms around their shoulders, moved as family friends toward a large dining table where six places were set. As scrambled eggs, orange juice, and bowls of fresh fruit were served, Percy, who eats at the eight o'clock sitting, began to explain the advantages of their all working together. He made it sound as though all of their differences had existed only because they had never really talked.

He is not always successful. At a recent breakfast he had William Ronan, who was then the head of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, as his guest, Sutton spent the hour trying to persuade Ronan to release a piece of M.T.A. land in Harlem for use as a community hospital. Ronan apparently wanted something in return, and what he wanted, Sutton was not willing to give.

"The M.T.A., since 1971, has sought



Suave manners and shrewd maneuvers: At Board of Estimate meetings Sutton enhances his considerable power through budgetary bartering. Here he confers with his Deputy Borough President Jolie Hammer and City Council President Paul O'Dwyer.

“... In the black community there are those who feel Sutton might be selling out to the Beame administration ...”

the permanent use of Pier 57 at the foot of West 15th Street for use as a garage for its lower Manhattan operations,” Sutton later explained.

“Because of traffic, air, and noise pollution, the people of the Chelsea community, and I agree, have opposed this permanent use of Pier 57. The M.T.A. has taken the position that if they cannot have the permanent use of Pier 57—they now lease it on a year-to-year basis—they will not make the 129th Street site available for the new hospital.”

Most of these breakfasts are successful, however, because his guests, just like most of the allies he has been sprinkling throughout the city’s political camps, have begun to sense that Percy Sutton could be a winner.

Sutton has begun to strengthen his party control by running, or threatening to run, hand-picked candidates for any office in which the incumbent might potentially be unfriendly. Last month, for instance, he chose business partner Carl McCall to run against Harlem State Senator Sidney von Luther, a move that was calculated to warn assemblymen like Jesse Gray, Mark Southall, and George Miller to stay in line. Even his staff, who are usually tight-lipped, have begun a slight escalation of his press activities and quietly let it be known that, according to a recent poll, Percy Sutton has just eclipsed Congressman Herman Badillo as the minority candidate most likely to succeed with white voters.

Born on a farm near Prairie View in eastern Texas on November 24, 1920, Percy was the youngest of fifteen highly competitive brothers and sisters. The twelve who survived graduated from various colleges, badgered relentlessly by their father, S. J. Sutton, who knew something about ambition. Percy’s father, who was principal of a San Antonio high school and a moderately wealthy man with a profitable farm, a real estate business, a mattress factory, a mortuary, and a skating rink, was born a slave. Percy remembers great restlessness in his highly charged house. Everyone worked, learned discipline, and was ambitious. But somehow, for Percy, it was not enough. Inspired by the old radio drama about life in New York, *Grand Central Station*, he ran away from home several times.

“I used to sit there under the porch listening to that program and imitating the announcer. ‘Good evening ladies and gentlemen. This is Percy Sutton at

radio station KTSA high in the clouds of the Smith Young Towners. *Down the magnificent Hudson Valley,*” he paraphrased, “*speeding past the grim tenements of Harlem, plunging into the tunnel beneath fashionable Park Avenue and then Grand Central Station, crossroads of the millions of dramas...*” It was really a dream.”

Texas, however, was not a dream. He received his first beating from a San Antonio policeman at age thirteen when he was spotted handing out N.A.A.C.P. pamphlets in an all-white neighborhood.

“‘Nigger,’ he asked me,” Sutton told an interviewer years ago, “‘what are you doing out of your neighborhood?’ and then he proceeded to beat the hell out of me.

“You know, the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect January 1, 1863, but the good white folks in Texas didn’t get around to telling their slaves about it until June 19.

“Well, the Negroes [Sutton says ‘blacks’ today] still celebrate ‘Juneteenth’ every year in Texas. I remember when we were kids Juneteenth was the one day in the year that Negroes could go in and play in the white park. It was never a big day for me, or for my brother Buster, or any of the rest of us Suttons. We didn’t go.

“I remember we had many advantages growing up, but I always used to look at my father and his friends and think that if they were all that damn smart why couldn’t they ride in the front of the streetcars?”

To escape Texas, Sutton even tried stunt flying. In exchange for helping to wash planes at nearby Stenson Field, Sutton was taught to fly by an older friend, “Red” Dawson. By cutting classes and extending his weekends from high school and Prairie View College, Sutton was able to join Dawson on the barnstorming circuit. In an old biwinged Ox-Swallow, Sutton performed loop-the-loops, roll-overs, and delayed parachute jumps for small county carnival crowds in East Texas, Alabama, Oklahoma, and Louisiana. His flying career ended at nineteen when his friend Red Dawson was decapitated while pulling out of a low dive under a bridge that spanned the Chehaw River, near Tuskegee, Alabama.

“Going back with Dawson’s body to San Antonio,” Sutton recently said, “I remember feeling relieved by his death. I also remember feeling guilty for feeling that relief. Until then I had

had no idea how much I hated that flying.”

Sutton never barnstormed again, but at the beginning of World War II, he did try, on several occasions, to enlist in the Army Air Force.

“I was so naïve, I really thought the Army would be different in the North. I came all the way to New York, certain that blacks with flying experience could enlist in the Air Force up here. I finally did manage to get in, but it was as an intelligence officer, and even then, I remember being instructed by superiors to make sure I didn’t march on the outside during parade review.” Sutton marched on the outside anyway.

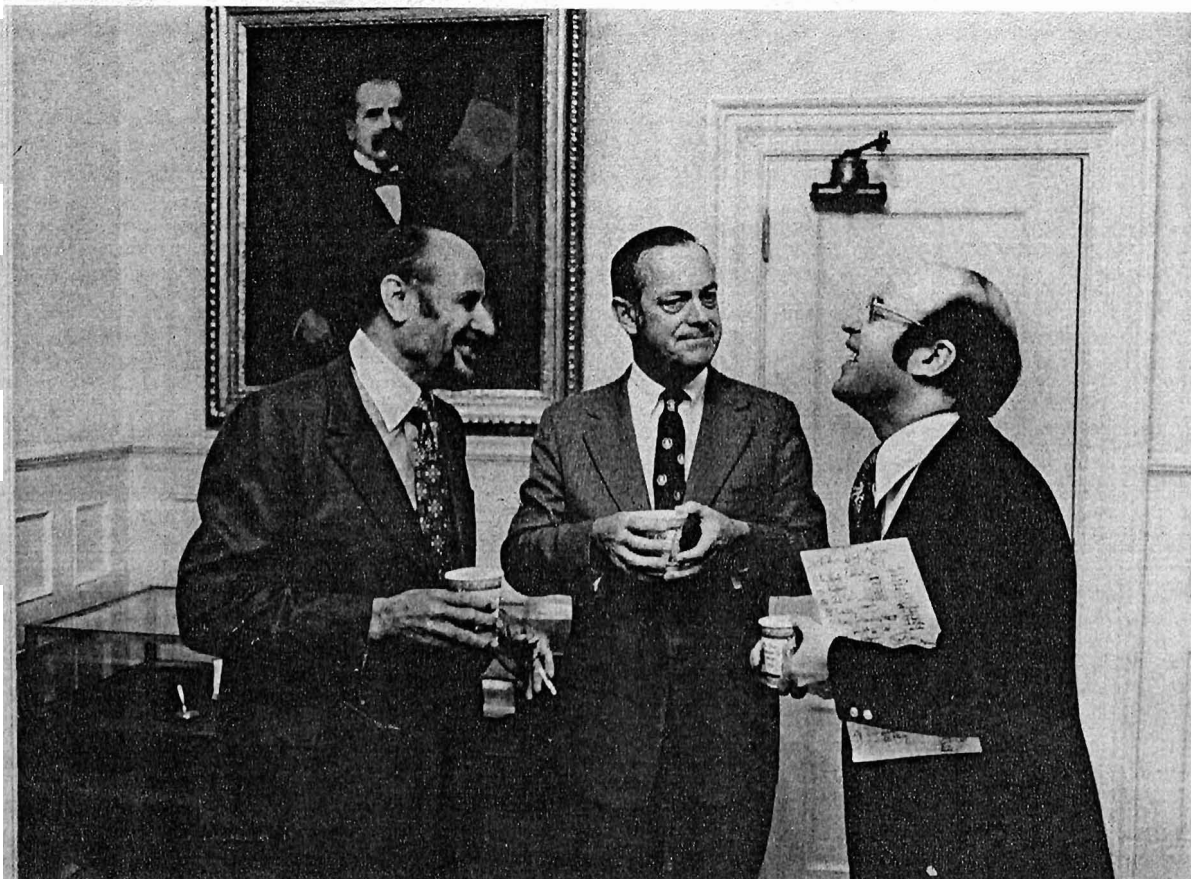
In 1945 he returned to New York and worked his way through Brooklyn Law School as a subway conductor and change clerk.

It seems that nothing Sutton does is ever simple. He married a native New Yorker, Leatrice O’Farrell, in 1943 and lived in Springfield Gardens, Queens, where, in 1947, their son Pierre was born. It was a difficult time for Sutton and, for a short period, he divorced Leatrice and married another woman. His daughter, Cheryl Lynn, was born in 1951, and then he remarried Leatrice a few years later.

As soon as he passed his bar exam, however, and began putting together the bits and pieces of a legal practice, much of it from fellow transit workers in disputes with the city, he decided to enter politics.

He consciously thought out the broad outlines of a political strategy and purposely chose the borough, the community, and the clubhouse in which to learn. His entire life was not plotted day-by-day, but he did have a master plan for political success. He knew that if a black wanted to be in politics in the 1950’s, Harlem was where he had to start—and he had better start right.

No one knows whether the Sutton strategy will continue to work on a citywide basis. Voters, like most audiences, grow restive with too much razzle-dazzle, and the more of his tricks Sutton is forced to reveal during a prolonged mayoral maneuver, the less impressive they will appear. His unquestioned showmanship, his knife-pressed suits, his carefully modulated diphthongs, and his political and business acrobatics have left his audiences astonished, but slightly suspicious. In the black community there are those who feel he might be selling out to the Beame administration by not fighting



Men in waiting: Three borough presidents gather outside the office of the mayor. They are, left to right, Sutton of Manhattan, Robert Connor of Richmond, and Robert Abrams of the Bronx. Sutton, clearly, wouldn't mind being inside in '77.

hard enough on such minority issues as the three-in-one civil-service hiring practice, the new 8 per cent sales tax, the proposed layoff of provisional employees—predominantly black and Puerto Rican—and the effort to force more minority members into construction unions working on city-financed projects. Others feel that he did not challenge Beame hard enough on the racially volatile school board elections on the Lower East Side. There, according to a stinging editorial in *The New York Times*, Beame had allowed himself to become the ally of Albert Shanker and the predominantly white teachers' union where, the paper chided, "impartiality by city officials is clearly called for."

There are many Sutton backers who will expect him to go to the mat with Abe Beame on every one of these intensely felt issues, and if he does not, his supporters could begin to drift toward some other minority candidate whose rhetoric is not encumbered by a dream of citywide, mainstream political support.

James Q. Wilson, in his book *Negro Politics*, points out that black political structures within a city will generally reflect the kind of politics already in existence in the same town. In Chicago, for instance, where Mayor Richard Daley represents a kind of mono-

lithic establishment with very little party divisiveness, William Dawson maintained similar clout with Chicago's black political structure. In New York, where the white political structure is characterized by its intimate relations with law firms, insurance companies, real-estate businesses, builders, and banks, so too will the most successful of the city's established black politicians arrive at that same marginally ethical state. Sutton may have already done it.

"No one will really know until a year before the next election whether the climate is right for a non-white mayoral candidate," Sutton said, "but if the climate is such that people would tend to vote on the basis of whether you could solve their problems or not, then I," he paused, "or some other person," he paused again, "might fit into that climate."

"So far, I haven't really made a decision, and I discourage those who suggest that I run. It's too early. It wouldn't be smart. About a year before the next election I'll know, and if the time is right I will. But now, if you make too much noise, you bring down upon you all those who wouldn't want your egg to hatch."

To the city's Democratic party establishment, however, if an off-white egg is being incubated in the city for a 1977 hatching, then there is no one

it would rather have pop out of that shell than Percy Sutton. His business sense, his understanding and appreciation of the clubhouse rules, his apparent ability to deliver black votes without scaring away white (83 per cent of his votes come from whites), and his talent for canoodling reformers and even radicals while still being able to nominate a knee-jerk regular like Bernie Ruggieri to be chairman of the city's Democratic Committee, have not failed to impress the machine. Party leaders like Meade Esposito, Pat Cunningham, Abe Beame, Stanley Steingut, and the wealthy bankers, insurance brokers, and builders who support their campaigns may find that Percy Sutton, no matter what the color of his shell, is really one of their own.

But they, like many others who thought they knew where Percy Sutton stood, may be fooled. After all, Sutton has done many surprisingly unmachine-like things. His staff is good, politically varied and, with few exceptions, not from the clubhouse employment office. And even Percy's business dealings, for all their complexity, are not, so far, as politically indecorous as Steingut's and Esposito's insurance companies.

In the end, Sutton may manipulate the manipulators. "The trouble with Percy," John Lindsay once said, "is that he won't stay bought." ■

THE SONO WEEKLY NEWS

June 6, 1974

Across 110th St.

Last Tuesday morning Borough President Percy Sutton pulled out the troops in support of H. Carl McCall, his hand-picked candidate for state senator in the 28th S.D., which includes Harlem and the upper west side. It seems that the incumbent, Sidney Von Luther, a former organizer for Local 1199 of the Health and Hospital Workers Union, just isn't following orders. Last year, when Sutton blew a large part of his liberal credentials by endorsing Abe Beame over Herman Badillo, Von Luther supported Badillo.

But an even more persistent problem for Sutton is Von Luther's gadflying about the Harlem Urban Development Corporation. The corporation was set up as a result of a

recommendation by Carl McCall to the state U.D.C. One of the major projects of H.U.D.C. is the development of a large site just east of the new state office building at 125th Street and 7th Avenue. The H.U.D.C. board, which is controlled by Sutton associates, was just about to award a \$30 million development contract to Center City Communications, Inc., when Von Luther and a few other dissidents on the board demanded open bidding on the contract. It seems that C.C.C. is basically a holding company for Sutton interests. Clarence Jones, the editor and publisher of the Amsterdam News (major stockholder: Percy Sutton), is the chairman of the board of C.C.C., while Carl McCall, who recently resigned as chairman of the editorial board of the Amsterdam News, is its president. Sutton, according to Nick Pileggi's recent New York Magazine profile of Sutton, has the right to convert his stock holdings in the Amsterdam News and radio station WLIB into C.C.C. Inc. stock; so if the deal is approved by the H.U.D.C. board, on which McCall will undoubtedly sit if he is elected to the state senate, Sutton has much to gain personally. Moreover, C.C.C.'s proposal includes the building of offices for the Amsterdam News, WLIB, WBLS (for which Inner City Broadcasting has a purchase option) and other Sutton owned or optioned businesses.

The inside dealings between H.U.D.C. and the Sutton controlled C.C.C. group were so obvious that the board at one point authorized open bidding—in the Amsterdam News, of course—for the development contract even though H.U.D.C. president Jack Wood, Jr. had already notified Clarence Jones of the designation of C.C.C., Inc., as developer.

At this writing C.C.C.'s designation as developer has been temporarily thwarted by Von Luther and others, who claim that Center City Communications fraudulently stated that they had \$9 million of assets, when in fact C.C.C. had no assets at all.

So Percy dragged them out for Carl McCall. State Senator Manfred Ohrenstein was slightly embarrassed when I asked him why he was no longer supporting his colleague in the senate. "I'm not going to say anything negative about Sidney; I'll leave that to Carl and the others." Of Carl McCall, Ohrenstein said, "We need people who know how the system works and how to take advantage of that system. Carl McCall has succeeded in working that system." Ohrenstein claimed ignorance of any of the dealings of H.U.D.C. and C.C.C. "It's not my job to investigate that," he said just before endorsing McCall.

Others endorsing McCall included Assembly Minority Leader Al Blumenthal, Congressman Charles Rangel (see

the story by Allan Wolper in this issue), Eleanor Holmes Norton, and City Councilman Fred Samuels.

As a state senator Von Luther has been particularly interested in health and education. "I wrote the first sickle-cell anemia bill that passed in this country," he said. He has worked on successful legislation which provides kidney machines to those who need them; he has obtained funds for the Schumberg Collection in Harlem; and he has sponsored a "ghetto medico" program which pays for the training of doctors who commit themselves to working in poor communities.

"Percy is afraid that if he supports the black community too strongly, he will alienate white voters," Von Luther said. Sutton is thought to be a major candidate for the 1977 mayoralty. "He wants to create a black empire up in Harlem—to go back to the days of the clubhouse. I absolutely refuse to be part of any machine," Von Luther told the SWN.

At the McCall press conference Sutton said, "If you're good, don't worry about bosses." He didn't say who the bosses were.

If Matty Troy, out in Queens, is serious about launching a "vendetta to the death" against Arthur Katzman, who made the egregious error of voting for the Gay Rights bill, he could probably pick up a few tricks from Percy.

Fraud Charges Heat Harlem Senate Race

By SANDRA SATTERWHITE

Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton and the Rev. H. Carl McCall, a candidate for the State Senate seat now held by Sidney Von Luther, have both denied charges by Von Luther that they participated in a possibly fraudulent scheme to secure a \$50 million contract from the Harlem Urban Development Corp.

"He's [Von Luther] been peddling these charges for months," said a spokesman for Sutton. "This is a last-minute desperation tactic by a candidate who is held in such low esteem by his colleagues that all of the legislators who've taken a position in this race have endorsed McCall."

McCall called the charges of fraud "outrageous and completely untrue."

Host of Endorsements

McCall, who has received endorsements from State Sen. Manfred Ohrenstein, Assemblyman Albert Blumenthal and a host of other public officials, is running for the State Senate seat in Manhattan's 28th District against Von Luther, an incumbent of four years.

Von Luther, standing in front of McCall's campaign headquarters at 2743 Broadway yesterday charges that McCall was president of a subsidiary of City Communications when the company allegedly falsely stated that it had assets in excess of \$9 million. It was making a proposal to HUDC for the development of the eastern portion of the site at the State Office Building in Harlem.

Von Luther charged that

more than \$7 million were assets of subsidiaries not owned by the corporation and that the remaining \$2 million just didn't exist, but he said in a pro forma financial statement approved by a certified public accountant, the inflated figure was presented in order for the company to win the contract.

McCall, Von Luther said, was president of Central City Development Corp., a subsidiary created by CCC to handle the development of the site.

He said that he's filed a formal complaint with the office of Manhattan District Attorney Richard Kuh, asking for an investigation to determine if fraud was involved.

A contract has not yet been awarded, and HUD says

it is considering several proposals.

Von Luther further charged that in closed-door sessions with HUDC officials in May 1973, Center City had been designated, without competitive bidding, as the developer for the site but that he and other HUDC board members balked and the job was opened to other bidders.

The other subsidiaries of CCC include, he said, Am-News, the parent company of the New York Amsterdam News, and Inner-City Broadcasting, which operates radio station WLIB-AM and holds an option to purchase WBLS-FM.

McCall, who said he had resigned as president of Center City Development Corp., before running for office last March, denied any involve-

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Harlem Election Heats Up

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ment in any company now bidding on the site.

He admits to owning stock in both Am-News and Inner-City but called Von Luther's charges of fraud "outrageous and completely untrue." He called them very obviously a smear campaign in the final days before the Sept. 10 primary.

McCall said that if elected his stock in the two companies would be put in a trust fund.

Clarence Jones, editor and publisher of the New York Amsterdam News and chairman and chief executive officer of Center City Communications, was unavailable for comment.

HUDC Still Thinking

When asked if Von Luther's charge had any substance, Donald J. Cogsville, general manager of the Harlem Urban Development Corp., said only, "We're now evaluating several proposals and have not made any decision about the developer or which programs will be on the site."

Von Luther asserts that HUDC still expects to grant the multimillion dollar contract to Center City following the election and that McCall as a stockholder will benefit financially, as will Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton, who also owns stock in the two companies.

Von Luther said he bases his contention, partly on the details of the proposal still in the offing submitted by Center City which he said had called for: a commercial complex to accommodate the offices of the New York Amsterdam News and radio station WLIB; a 500-room hotel-motel with convention facilities; a 3000-seat Apollo Theater and two Loew's mini-theaters.

Speaking for Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton, press secretary Frank Sutton, press secretary Frank Baraff, said that Sutton has never been involved in Center City, is not now involved, and will not be at any future time.

Sutton and McCall Are Accused on Harlem Project

By CHARLAYNE HUNTER

State Senator Sidney A. Von Luther charged yesterday that his Democratic primary opponent, Carl McCall, and Borough President Percy E. Sutton of Manhattan were involved in a contract for the undeveloped part of the State Office Building site in Harlem "that raises serious questions of conflict of interest and fraud."

Standing in front of Mr. McCall's campaign storefront at 2743 Broadway, near 105th Street, Mr. Von Luther accused the two political allies of having "ripped off from the people of Harlem," a \$50-million contract that was the result of "certain arcane deliberations," rather than competitive bidding.

The tentative approval of the contract which called for Center City Communications, Inc. to develop a commercial and communications complex on the site at 125th Street and Lenox Avenue, was the result of a closed meeting in March, 1973, according to Mr. Von Luther.

Attending the meeting, he

said, were Clarence B. Jones, a business associate of Mr. McCall and Mr. Sutton; Edward J. Logue, president of the State Urban Development Corporation, and Jack E. Wood, president of its Harlem subsidiary, according to Mr. Von Luther.

Mr. Von Luther said however, that the proposal was tabled at a meeting of the full Harlem Urban Development Corporation Board after he and others protested the manner in which it had been accepted.

Mr. Sutton is honorary co-chairman of the development corporation, and all elected officials in the area, including Mr. Von Luther, sit on its board.

Mr. Von Luther further charged that in an effort to secure the contract, Mr. McCall, who was president of Center City Development Corporation, "knowingly participated" in a "gross misrepresentation of the fact," listing the group's corporate assets at \$9-million.

"That was a lie," Mr. Von Luther said. "They had no assets at the time."

The Senator, who represents the 28th Senatorial District, which includes the Upper West

Side and Harlem, said he had filed a formal complaint yesterday with District Attorney Richard H. Kuh for possible criminal action.

Mr. Kuh said he had adopted the policy of his predecessor, Frank S. Hogan that his office would have no comment on charges made during a political campaign.

Mr. McCall, who came and stood within a few feet of his opponent during the news conference, said when Mr. Von Luther had finished reading a prepared statement that the charges were "outrageous and completely untrue." Both he and Mr. Sutton denied any impropriety or fraud.

Mr. McCall said he resigned from Center City on March 1 when he entered the Senate primary race.

Mr. Sutton said he had "no influence directly or indirectly upon H.U.D.C., U.D.C., Clarence Jones or anyone else. He also said that he had "never owned a share of stock in Center City nor has Center City owned a share in anything in which I owned shares."

Mr. Jones, the principal shareholder in Center City and the publisher of The New York Amsterdam News, said "obviously whoever made that report does not know how to read a financial statement."

"H.U.D.C. asked for a pro forma statement, assuming that we would consolidate all the companies if we went into this venture," he said. "And it is not a misrepresentation of the facts. The words pro forma are on the consolidated balance sheet."