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## Upstate's gain is city's loss

By MITCHELL L. MOSS

**A**N AMBITIOUS upstate assemblyman, Michael Bragman, is trying to engineer a coup d'état against Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver. This represents the greatest threat to New York City since the British seized control during the Revolution.

Despite the fact that New York City generates more than half the state's taxes and is home to most of the state's intellectual, cultural and financial power, the city has only one major political player in Albany — Silver.

That's trouble, because the state has enormous power over the city. It determines, for example, whether the city can raise taxes and how much it can borrow to finance water tunnels and stadiums.

Bragman's attempted coup is based on Silver's reluctance to share authority and involve Democratic legislators in the day-to-day business of the Assembly. Moreover, Silver, who is viewed as an aloof, remote politician, has tried to balance the city's interests with those of suburban Democrats — a seemingly impossible task.

Yet in a party accustomed to infighting and ideological combat, Silver has kept the 98 Assembly Democrats outwardly unified.

Bragman's bold maneuver is built on a foundation of upstate Democrats who have found an ally in Thomas Manton, the Queens County Democratic leader. Manton resents Silver's efforts to undermine City Council Speaker Peter Vallone's candidacy for governor in 1998 and Silver's willingness to help Queens Councilman Walter McCaffrey in his primary challenge against Manton's hand-picked successor in Congress, Joseph Crowley.

Bragman, of Onondaga County, also thought he could count on the Bronx Democratic leader, Assemblyman Roberto Ramirez, who would replace Silver as the

city powerbroker in Albany. That appears to be a vain hope.

But this is far more than a battle over one job. The outcome of this fight will influence the mayor's race in 2001 and the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in 2002. Silver is a strong backer of federal Housing and Urban Development Secretary Andrew Cuomo for governor. Bragman supports state Controller Carl McCall.

Ironically, to comply with legislative rules, Bragman had to telegraph his plan to oust Silver, thereby giving the speaker time to mobilize the White House, union leaders and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton — all of whom need a unified Democratic Party in November.

Beyond the politics, Silver's defeat would be another step in the erosion of downstate power in Albany.

Six years ago, state Senate Majority Leader Ralph Marino (R-Nassau) was ousted by Joe Bruno of Rensselaer County, substantially weakening Long Island's leverage in Albany. Now, if Silver, of Manhattan, is replaced by Bragman, the Legislature will be controlled by politicians who represent the economically weakest part of the state: upstate.

Bragman's base of Syracuse, a city with no redeeming value except an excess of snow, would wind up with all sorts of patronage and pork paid for by everyone south of Bear Mountain.

Silver is not a warm or telegenic politician, but he's a city guy who knows the difference between Sunset Park and Rego Park. He is an Orthodox Jew who has managed to work with Latinos and African-Americans — no small feat in this climate. Can we really afford to trade him in for an appleknocker from Onondaga?

*Moss is director of the Taub Urban Research Center at New York University.*



DAVID SMITH

**Silver: Endangered species**