



Mobsters - James Hines - The Ultimate Political Fixer

By Joseph Bruno



He started off as a simple Harlem blacksmith, but when he dug his fat fingers deep into Tammany Hall, James Hines became the biggest political fixer in the history of New York City.

Hines was born on December 18, 1876, on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. His father operated a blacksmith shop on 121st Street and Eight Avenue, and when his father became ill, Hines took over his father's business at the age of 17.

Through his father's connections in politics in the 11th Assembly District on the Upper West Side, Hines became close to Big Tim Sullivan, a politician so crooked, he actually took part of the profits from the rackets perpetrated by street gangs, who were plundering the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Sullivan was the main cog in the political machine called Tammany Hall and he played his constituents like a fiddle, getting certain people to vote on Election Day several times, by constantly changing their appearances. Hines learned the ropes from the master, and in 1907 Hines ran for the position called Alderman. With the help of Sullivan's manipulation of the election process (Sullivan had men, who wouldn't vote his way at the polls, beaten up badly by his street gangs, most notable the Whyos), Hines won the election going away.

In 1910, Hines took the bold move of running for District Leader against the incumbent. After both sides used roughhouse tactics against the other, Hines was able to emerge victorious. With his new-found power as District Leader, Hines formed the Monongahela Democratic Club, which was his base of operations for many years to come. At the Monongahela, Hines played the good old boy; providing the poor in the neighborhood with Thanksgiving turkeys, donating clothes to the needy, and finding jobs for whomever needed jobs. Of course, that meant Hines could count on those people's votes on Election Day, for whomever candidate Hines deemed should be the winner, no matter what District that candidate was running in.

Every year Hines sponsored an annual "June Walk and Picnic" in Central Park, which drew as many 25,000 people, mostly children. On one such occasion (The 22nd Annual Walk), Hines, after carrying a kid on piggyback, then depositing him by a table brimming with a huge spread of the finest food, Hines wiped the sweat from his brow and said, "Kids who came to the first of these things are voters now. They're not all voting my district, but they're voting somewhere. In politics, the thing to do is build yourself an army."

To supplement his income, and with no experience at all, Hines, along with his brother Philip, started a trucking company, and then a construction company. Almost immediately, the Hines brothers were able to garner the best

and the biggest city trucking contracts and state construction projects, which they subsequently subcontracted out to people who actually knew how to do those jobs.

Even though Hines was the biggest player of his time in Democratic politics, he had very little future in running for elective office. Hines was an unskilled public speaker, and was more adept at back room dealings, where a mere nod of his head, would signify which person was getting elected, or appointed to a political job. As generous he could be with his friends, if someone crossed Hines, as far Hines was concerned, that person may as well have been dead.

During Prohibition, Owney "The Killer" Madden and "Big Bill" Dwyer were running the biggest bootlegging operation in the entire United States of America. However, both bootleggers knew their business could never thrive if they didn't have the police in their back pockets. And the man who controlled the all police promotions at the time was none other than Jim Hines. Dwyer and Madden paid Hines, and they paid him well, to take care of the police, judges, prosecutors, and bail bondsmen. By taking care of Hines properly, Madden and Dwyer knew if any of their men did have the misfortune of being arrested by a cop, who either wasn't getting paid, or was just being plain disobedient, Hines would arrange for that person's immediate release.

Tammany big shot George Washington Plunkitt, a man who schooled Hines when Hines first started out in politics, said that it was a good thing for a crooked politician like Hines to be associated with known gangsters. The idea being, if anyone was stupid enough to either report Hines to the authorities, or refuse to play ball with him, they'd think twice, knowing someone like Owney "The Killer" Madden was waiting in the wings to correct them if they did.

Plunkitt once explained exactly what a District Leader like Hines was expected to do. He said, "As a rule a District Leader has no business or occupation other than politics. He plays politics every day and night of the year, and his headquarters bears the inscription 'Never Closed.'"

Madden and Dwyer met often with Hines at his Monongahela Democratic Club on the Upper West Side to discuss business. Some of this business concerned which politician, looking to advance their career, were the best for the business of the "Combine," as Madden and Dwyer's operation was called. In 1925, it was decided by all that ex-Tin Pan Alley songwriter Jimmy Walker would be the perfect pick for Mayor of New York City. With Hines' backing, and Madden controlling the polling places, Walker won by a landslide.

In 1929, Walker was reelected again, this time defeating reformer and future mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. But Walker was as crooked as they came, and spent very little time actually being Mayor of New York City. Once, after he was questioned by a political opponent after he gave himself a raise from \$25,000 to \$40,000 a year, Walker quipped, "Hell, that's cheap. Imagine what I would be worth if I worked full time."

But all good thing must come to an end. In 1932, after Walker was grilled by the Seabury Committee, which was looking into police and political corruptions, New York Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt, working hand-in-hand with Hines, pressured Walker to retire. Walker took the cue, and quit his office immediately. Walker took the first boat available and sailed, with his girlfriend Betty Compton, to the more friendly confines of France. Walker remained in France for four years before he deemed it safe to return to New York City.

The Presidential election of 1932 was an even bigger coup for Hines. In 1928, New York Governor Al Smith, a man who had tried to take control of Tammany Hall from Hines, ran unsuccessfully for the President of the United States against Republican Herbert Hoover. Under Hoover, the stock market crashed in 1929, and by 1932, America was in the throes of The Great Depression. Smith wanted to run for President again, but he was opposed by Roosevelt, who had taken Smith's place as Governor in 1928.

Hines had a long memory concerning Smith, and he threw all his weight behind Roosevelt for the Democratic nomination for President. Roosevelt won the Democratic Nomination against Smith quite easily, and also the Presidential election against Herbert Hoover. With his man Roosevelt snugly in the White House, Roosevelt rewarded Hines for his unyielding service by giving Hines the job of awarding all federal patronage in Manhattan, to whomever Hines deemed fit for the jobs.

By 1933, Hines was riding high in New York City politics. Money was flowing in in bushels from the mobsters, and Dwyer was known as a "King Maker" -- a man who could influence any election he chose to, throughout New York State, and even if need be, throughout America.

The start of Hines' downfall was when Hines was introduced by his fellow gangsters to the only gangster in New York City that Hines wasn't doing favors for: Dutch Schultz (real name Arthur Flegenheimer). The meeting was supposed to be so secretive, it started with Hines waiting surreptitiously under the elevated trains, on a street corner on Sixth Avenue, in Greenwich Village, far away from Hines' domain on the Upper West Side. Minutes later, Schultz picked up Hines in a bulletproof Cadillac. In the car was Schultz's associate George Weinberg, and Schultz's lawyer, and master fixer -- Dixie Davis.

In 1938, when Hines was a defendant in the first of his two trials for political corruption, George Weinberg testified in court for the prosecution. Weinberg spoke in detail about the pivotal conversation which took place in the Cadillac amongst himself, Hines, and Schultz, on that fateful day in 1933.

Weinberg said, "I explained to Hines, that in order to be able to run our business and bring it up the right way, we would have to protect the controllers that are working for us. We would have to protect them from going to jail, and if we got any big arrests that would hurt our business, we would want them dismissed in Magistrates' Court, so that they wouldn't have to go downtown (that meant the sometimes tougher three-judge Court of Special Sessions). I explained to him that we did not mind the small arrests, but if we got any large arrests we would want them dismissed in Magistrates' Court, to show the people in Harlem that are working for us that we had the right kind of protection up there, and that we would want to protect them from going to jail."

In the bulletproof Caddy, Hines, and Schultz also came to an agreement that Schultz would give Hines, as a measure of his good will, one thousand dollars on the spot. Also, Schultz told Hines that Dixie Davis would be the go-between to funnel Hines another \$500 per week, to keep Schultz' various enterprises free from law enforcement intervention.

In 1937, when Davis himself was tried for policy rackets involvement, he testified in court, "I cultivated Jimmy Hines right from the beginning. I soon learned that to run an organized mob you've got to have a politician. You have heard about the suspected link between organized crime and politics. Well, I became the missing link."

Davis also testified that Schultz's policy banks kicked in the \$500 a week for Hines, but that Davis, "Tossed in another \$500 himself to Hines without even telling Schultz." Davis said that he put up the extra money, so that the big spender (Hines) had the cash he needed for the "Friday night fights and whatever else Hines needed to do when Mr. Hines did the necessary entertaining--judges, officeholders, big businessmen -- that kept his political power mower oiled."

Because of his cooperation, Davis was sentenced to a mere one year in prison, plus he was disbarred.

Hines also controlled the appointments of the various New York Judges, and when he did appoint a judge, he made it clear that judge now worked for him, and was compelled to do anything Hines said needed to be done. On one occasion, Weinberg and his boys were caught with the goods, when an enterprising detective busted an apartment they used for business, which contained over \$20,000 worth of policy racket receipts. Weinberg told the arresting detective that he was making a very big mistake, and if he insisted on arresting Weinberg and his men, the detective would soon be busted back to a plain uniformed cop, walking a beat somewhere in Harlem.

After he was released on bail, Weinberg immediately ran to Hines. After hearing Weinberg's story, Hines told Weinberg he would take care of the situation.

That same night, Hines took Weinberg to a steak dinner at the Andrew B. Keating Democratic Club where, they met a Hines appointee, the very honorable (not) Judge Hulon Capshaw. Hines told the judge, "I have a policy case, a very important one, coming up before you that I'd like you to take care of for me. "

The Judge replied, "I haven't failed you yet. I'll take care of it."

And that the judge did, when he ruled that the policy slips found in the apartment could in no way be connected to the men who were in that same apartment. The case was dismissed and the detective who did the aborted bust was soon busted himself, back to patrolman, by Police Commission James Bolan, also a Hines appointee.

The wheels started spinning off Hines' gravy train when Special Prosecutor Thomas E. Dewey began investigating Dutch Schultz's many illegal business activities. The Dutchman didn't like the heat too much, so he told the other

men on the National Crime Commission, of which he was a member with gangsters like Lucky Luciano, Meyer Lansky, Bugsy Siegel, and Frank Costello, that he wanted Dewey hit, and hit right away.

When the Commission voted down his request, Schultz said, "I still say Dewey should be hit, and I'm going to do it myself."

The Commission didn't like hearing that too much, so on October 23, 1935, to save Dewey's life, Schultz was shot in the bathroom of the Palace Chophouse, at 12 East Park Street, in Newark, New Jersey. Schultz lingering for a few hours at the hospital, in a delirious state, before he finally passed away.

With Schultz now eliminated, Dewey now turned his attention to Hines. Dewey claimed that Hines was "a co-conspirator and indispensable functionary of the Schultz organization."

Things started looking mighty bad for Hines, when George Weinberg suddenly turned canary and testified against Hines at Hines' first trial in 1938. With Weinberg talking non-stop on the witness stand about Hines' involvement in Schultz's rackets, Hines seemed doomed to be convicted. However, on September 12, 1938, four days into the trial, a mistrial was declared on a technicality, by New York General Sessions Court Justice Pecora.

As Hines was waiting to be re-tried by Dewey, George Weinberg suddenly became overcome with grief for turning rat against Hines. Down and depressed, Weinberg committed suicide by firing a single bullet into his own brain.

With Weinberg out of the picture, it looked like Hines was in the clear. However, Hines took a roundhouse right to the jaw, when the new judge ruled in Hines' second trial (which took place in 1939), that Weinberg's testimony from the first trial could be admitted into evidence.

With corroborating testimony from men like Police Commissioner James Bolan, and crooked Tammany Hall politician John Curry, Hines was found guilty on all thirteen counts of the indictment; one of which was accepting more than \$200,00 in bribes from Dutch Schultz.

As Hines left the courthouse he was asked by a snotty reporter if Hines felt "tired." Hines snapped back, "How would you feel if you were just kicked in the belly?"

Hines was sentenced to 4-8 years on his convictions, but he was released on parole on September 12, 1944, after serving a little more than five years of his term.

Alone with his wife in their home on the beach in Long Island, Hines spent the rest of his years in relative obscurity. On March 26, 1957, James Hines died of natural causes at the age of 80.

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