

Bailout Blago

The governor was too honest for Washington.

By Justin Raimondo

THE STONING of Rod Blagojevich recalls Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery," a sinister short story about the inhabitants of an otherwise placid village where, periodically, someone's name is chosen out of a hat for a public stoning. Like much of Jackson's idiosyncratic fiction, a dark river of fear runs beneath the formal narrative—in this case fear of randomness, of sudden death at the hands of fate. It was, perhaps, Blagojevich's fate to go down in history as a symbol of political corruption, Chicago's Boss Tweed and the most infamous of mobster-politicians. Yet one can't help but think it could have happened to anyone—to any member of the political class, that is.

This scandal is noteworthy because of the honesty and purity of its protagonist, the Illinois governor who has become a leper in the political universe because he didn't deign to dress up his avarice and power-lust in the language of "public service" and altruism. With his fishwife of a first lady swearing in the background, the governor laid it all on the table, demanding cash for political favors, trying to sell Barack Obama's Senate seat to the highest bidder, and seeking to have members of the *Chicago Tribune's* editorial board fired as the price for state aid to the beleaguered Tribune Company. He was, in short, doing what all politicians do: dispensing favors to his supporters and punishing his enemies by withholding the same. "Why," asked H.L. Mencken, "should democracy rise against bribery? It is itself a form of wholesale bribery."

While the sale of Obama's Senate seat has garnered the lion's share of attention, the aspect of this case that gave rise to

the most unladylike language from Illinois's first lady—shocking our pious pundits and media bloodhounds—was the attempted firing of those troublesome *Tribune* editorial writers who had been crusading to get the governor impeached. In pitching a deal to the business side of the Tribune Company, Blagojevich rightly pointed out to the chief financial officer that, in granting state aid to bail them out, he would be doing precisely what the newspaper's editorial writers had cited as grounds for his impeachment: going around the state legislature and directly handing out cash.

The source of this largesse was to be the Illinois Finance Authority, whose website describes it as "a self-financed state authority principally engaged in issuing taxable and tax-exempt bonds, making loans, and investing capital for businesses, non-profit corporations, agriculture and local government units statewide." With "about \$3 billion in project financing" to hand out each year, it has approved 780 projects to the tune of \$11 billion to "stimulate the economy"—and, no doubt, to stimulate the bank accounts of the governor's friends. This is, in short, a local version of what President Obama is proposing as his first act: a \$2 trillion "stimulus package."

Everybody knows that this world-historic chunk of moolah is going to be handed out to the president's friends and that politics—not public interest—is going to be the rule of thumb in deciding on whom to lavish the loot. Paul Krugman worries that so much money will not find enough projects to fund, but he needn't worry: the Blagojeviches of this world will find endless uses for it.

This is why the Obama-ites are desperate to put as much distance as possible between themselves and Blagojevich. Their entire political program is about doling out rewards to interest groups that supported them during the campaign: union power, money power, and corporate media power that did so much to make Obama-mania politically chic. Their economic "stimuli" will re-energize the sagging political fortunes of Democratic machine politicians from coast to coast. The Illinois Finance Authority will no doubt scarf up more than its fair share to fund the extortionate activities of present and future Chicago mobster-politicians and their clones across America. Imagine clouds of flies over a gigantic pile of offal, and you've visualized the scene once the economy is properly "stimulated."

Not surprisingly, the Obama operative who most resembles a character out of "The Sopranos"—Rahm Emanuel—reportedly had 21 conversations with the Blagojevich gang, whose language he speaks fluently. This, after all, is a guy who once had a two-and-a-half-foot rotting fish delivered to an adversary, and famously, at a late night gathering with other Clintonistas the day after Bill was first elected, grabbed a steak knife, shouted out the name of someone on their enemies list, and slammed the blade into a table with full force, screaming, "Dead!"

Who knows what Rahm the Enforcer and Boss Blagojevich were chatting about while the FBI listened. You can bet it didn't have much to do with the public interest.

Another potential victim of Blago-gate is the sainted Jesse Jackson Jr., who met with the governor hours before the Don Corleone of Illinois politics was hauled off to the hoosegaw by Fitz and the feds. A few months before, the network of East Indian businessmen who fund Jackson got together and decided to raise a million bucks for Boss Blago-

— OLD AND RIGHT —

THE SPENDING OF BORROWED MONEY as a permanent policy with a continuous rise in the public debt can have only one effect. A rising public debt means a continuously rising interest charge and persistently rising taxes to service the debt. And this is only the beginning. For as the war ends, the government is planning new and more adventurous and, as it likes to say, “dynamic” uses of public debt than ever. ... Only in a totalitarian state can these oppressive levies be imposed and enforced...

We have, without knowing it, been turning first to one and then another of those devices for escaping our economic difficulties to which Italy and Germany turned before us. ... [E]ach of these devices offered the political administration the easiest escape. The alternative has been to make difficult and sacrificial corrections in our system and to make unpopular alterations in our course. These sacrificial measures and hard corrections are possible and might be made under a courageous and heroic leadership. Instead we have had a confused, selfish, and utterly political leadership which has sought out, not the remedies, but the special demands of great and powerful minorities and set about satisfying those demands—running with the streams even though the streams were running over the abyss. ... Always we adorn those measures here with decorative and patriotic names, while giving to the same measures in Italy and Germany odious names...

The test of fascism is not one’s rage against the Italian and German warlords. The test is—how many of the essential principles of fascism do you accept and to what extent are you prepared to apply those fascist ideas to American social and economic life? When you can put your finger on the men or the groups that urge for America the debt-supported state, the autarchial corporative state, the state bent on the socialization of investment and the bureaucratic government of industry and society, the establishment of the institution of militarism as the great glamorous public-works project of the nation and the institution of imperialism under which it proposes to regulate and rule the world and, along with this, proposes to alter the forms of our government to approach as closely as possible the unrestrained, absolute government—then you will know you have located the authentic fascist...

Fascism will come at the hands of perfectly authentic Americans, as violently against Hitler and Mussolini as the next one, but who are convinced that the present economic system is washed up and that the present political system in America has outlived its usefulness and who wish to commit this country to the rule of the bureaucratic state; interfering in the affairs of the states and cities; taking part in the management of industry and finance and agriculture; assuming the role of great national banker and investor, borrowing billions every year and spending them on all sorts of projects through which such a government can paralyze opposition and command public support; marshaling great armies and navies ... and adding to all of this the most romantic adventures in global planning, regeneration, and domination all to be done under the authority of a powerfully centralized government in which the executive can hold in effect all the powers with Congress reduced to the role of a debating society. There is your fascist...

It is part of the government’s plan to continue this new and abrasive order. ... We shall presently be presented with the final crisis—the necessity of taking the last few steps of the last mile to fascism in some generated crisis, of ending the prologue and running up the curtain on the swelling theme—or of calling off the whole wretched business in some costly, yet inescapable, convulsion.

—As *We Go Marching*, John T. Flynn, 1944

jevich, an act of charity that had nothing whatsoever to do with influencing him to appoint their man to Obama’s seat.

“People know me,” Jackson avers. “They know who I am. I’m confident that no one on my behalf made a single offer to anybody for anything.” Well, you don’t really know someone until you’ve listened in on his private conversations, which the feds may well have been doing when Jesse Jr. met with the Boss.

With Patrick Fitzgerald listening in on the other end, it looks like Jesse Jr., Rahm, and any number of Illinois Democratic Party muckamucks have met their nemesis. They don’t call him “Bulldog” Fitzgerald for nothing—a nickname Scooter Libby came to realize was well-earned and one the holier-than-thou Obama-ites will have good reason to remember.

During the Scooter scandal, the left wing of the blogosphere endlessly dissected each development, eagerly anticipating “Fitzmas” back in the winter of ’05. Now that the tables are turned, however, it doesn’t matter how many interesting angles and side-narratives this affair develops: the folks over at DailyKos, Fire-doglake, and the Huffington Post won’t be mapping the highways and byways of corruption as they were last Fitzmas.

This year, a new crowd will be celebrating the season, with the Bulldog playing Santa and showering them with gifts. So join in the holiday cheer because

It’s beginning to look a lot like Fitzmas
Everywhere you go!
Can’t you just hear those wiretaps,
Oh don’t keep it under wraps
We could use a laugh or two these
days, you know!

It’s beginning to look a lot like Fitzmas,
A bug in every phone!
But the prettiest sight to see
Is the indictment that could be
Tacked to the White House door. ■

Justin Raimondo is editorial director of Antiwar.com.