

by Scott P. Richert

Meet Rod Blago

As the former governor of Illinois crisscrossed the country on his farewell tour, I kept imagining him lying back in his seat, scalp being massaged by his personal hairstylist (it takes work to keep that Serbian gangster hairdo in pristine shape), while an old Mac Davis song played on an endless loop on his iPod:

*O Lord, it's hard to be humble
When you're perfect in every way
I can't wait to look in the mirror
'cause I get better looking each day*

"Here, Bobby, hold that mirror up. I gotta work on my smile. Those gals on *The View* are gonna fall for my eyes."

And fall they did. Once Hot Rod's hand was on her knee, Whoopi Goldberg could feel his pain. A colored man just can't get a break in the white man's world.

In the end, though, it was Blagojevich who fell the hardest, but that wasn't his fault, either. Turns out that federal district attorney Patrick Fitzgerald is a regular Mr. Potter, trying to keep Milorad Bailey from helping the people of Illinois live a wonderful life. On January 23, he explained it all to WLS's Don Wade and Roma:

You know those old black and white movies from the 30's and the 40's with Jimmy Stewart and Gary Cooper? *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and *It Happened One Night* and *Meet John Doe* and the other one is *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*? How the good guy was up against the establishment, and yet they tried to make him look like he had violated rules, but he stood firm for the people because he was trying to help people in all of those movies. . . .

That's what my story is. It's a Frank Capra movie.

In this 21st-century remake of *It's a*

Wonderful Life, the score, of course, is also by Mac Davis.

*Some folks say that I'm egotistical.
Hell, I don't even know what that means.*

*I guess it has something to do with
the way that I
fill out my skin-tight blue jeans.*

With his leather bomber jacket, those blue jeans were Governor Blagojevich's business suit. (Business casual was sweats and running shoes.) Some might find that a bit down-market for the governor of the sixth-largest state in the Union, but those jeans are the uniform of the working man, and Rod Blagojevich is nothing if not true to his roots.

That's why he voted for Ronald Reagan (twice!), he told Chicago's morning commuters, but as a working-class Democrat

I like to see myself more as a Teddy Roosevelt kind of Republican than Richard Nixon. The guy who's fightin' for the average guy. And willing to, you know, be in the arena and have his face marred by dust and sweat and blood—strive valiantly and err and come short again and again. Because there is not effort without error and shortcoming, but who actually strives to do the deed.

With such a mastery of syntax, is it any wonder that, in conversations taped by federal investigators just days before his arrest and indictment, Governor Blagojevich still thought he might one day rise to the office then occupied by George W. Bush?

And who knows? He might have, if not for the treacherous Potter—er, Patrick—Fitzgerald. But once the arrest and the indictment came down, the Illinois House finally did the right thing



and impeached the governor. At that point, he had only two choices: Return to his ancestral homeland and get lost in the mountains of Montenegro, or go down fighting.

He chose to fight, but in his own special way. Where a lesser man might actually have shown up for his impeachment trial and attempted to mount a credible defense, this son of an immigrant steel-mill worker went on every TV and radio talk show that would have him and defended himself against charges no one had leveled.

Democrats hated him because they wanted to raise taxes, and he wouldn't let them; Republicans hated him because they wanted the Democrats to raise taxes so they could campaign on the issue. Everybody hated him because he, like Mother Teresa, cared for the sick and the poor, especially children. But they were all so corrupt that they would hate Mother Teresa, too, as he revealed on the *Today Show*: "You can conceivably bring in 15 angels and 20 saints led by Mother Teresa to come in to testify to my good character, to my integrity and all the rest. It wouldn't matter." (Why a Serb would want to be defended by an Albanian was a question that, sadly, nobody asked.)

When he finally arrived in Springfield (a rare event in his two terms as governor) and deigned to make an appearance at his own impeachment trial, his long-winded defense could be summed up in two lines: "*To know me is to love me. / I must be a hell of a man.*"

Well, he was half right. So long, Hot Rod, and thanks for the nine-billion-dollar deficit. ◊

Letter From Chile

by Christie Davies

Thoughts on Pinochet and Castro



While traveling by bus in Chile in January 2008, I drew the attention of two other English-speaking passengers to a graffito, which read:

VIVA PINOCHET
LIBERTAD!

As people whose sole knowledge of the world came from the left-wing press and broadcasters, they were both shocked and puzzled that *Pinochet* and *liberty* could be linked in praise. How could a man who had been responsible for 2,000 to 3,000 deaths, caused many more to be jailed and tortured, and created the conditions whereby well over 100,000 people went into exile inspire such a tribute? Pinochet had overthrown a democratically elected socialist government by a military coup. How could he be a champion of freedom?

Shortly afterward there came a curious but decisive answer. The gaga dictator Fidel Castro resigned, though only to let his brother take over. Castro was not truly leaving voluntarily but merely going the way of Mao and Tito. Pinochet, by contrast, allowed the Chilean opposition parties to organize fully in 1987 and gave the Chileans a plebiscite in 1988 as to whether he should continue as military ruler or allow a democratic regime to take over after multiparty elections. When he lost the referendum, he resigned. Even so he had got 45 percent of the votes, which is a lot of support. He had been in office for a mere 15 years when he quit. The leftists in Chile are still complaining that the plebiscite was unfair because Pinochet had undue influence over the mass media; curi-

ously, this objection is never made in Europe when the European Union pours in money to advertise its cause in national referenda. Like the European Union, Pinochet lost his referendum. Unlike the European Union, he accepted his defeat. Had there been any such vote in Cuba they would have made sure that 98 percent or even 105 percent of the votes would have gone for Castro. The proof that the Chileans had a fair vote is that Pinochet lost by ten percent. It is rare for dictators to cede power in this democratic way. Castro would never have dared even to put it to the test.

Today, Chile is both prosperous and democratic. Cuba is a dictatorship with an appalling human-rights record and a socialist economy that is in a shambles.

Many of the left-wing Chilean exiles have returned to Chile, and there is nothing to stop them all from doing the same. None of the more than one million Cuban political refugees has been able to go home. Even post-Castro, most will not want to because their country is in economic ruin. A Chilean can return to a free and prosperous country; it will be a long time, if ever, before Cuba is as attractive. It is worth noting that Cuban refugees very greatly outnumbered Chilean ones even though the population of Chile is 18 million, and Cuba's, only 11 million. Likewise, there were far more executions in Cuba, as well as more torture and more political prisoners. Even among Cuba's large numbers of prisoners locked up for criminal offenses (there are more than twice as many as in Britain, a country with five times the population), a large proportion are incarcerated for trivial economic malpractices, such as illegal petty trading, that would not be a crime in a democratic country.

The person who wrote the graffito knew that his government had bestowed on the people the kinds of economic freedoms that are unknown in Cuba. That is why Chile is now the most prosperous and fastest-growing

country in Latin America. The Chilean economy had long been in serious trouble, particularly in the 1960's, because, even before the election of Marxist President Salvador Allende, it was characterized by price controls, permits, subsidies, and a high proportion of nationalized industries. Local industries that could only survive on subsidies inefficiently produced expensive and substandard manufactured goods. Price controls on food meant that neither landowners nor farmers had any incentive to invest in agriculture. It was a recipe for failure, and it was that failure that brought Allende to power on the promise that he would intensify those very causes of failure.

Leftists used to love to call Pinochet a fascist, but his economic policies were as far from fascist as any in Latin America. On the advice of the "Chicago boys," Chileans who had studied under Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago, Pinochet's government scrapped controls and subsidies and privatized most of the economy. Friedman himself, though no supporter of dictatorship, wrote to Pinochet to advise him on economic policy. The full benefit of these policies was not felt until the mid-1980's. Pinochet's democratic successors have been the greatest beneficiaries; even their enhanced welfare spending is based on the strong and free economic institutions they inherited. If anyone can complain, it is the old oligarchy of state-subsidized businessmen who went bankrupt when competition hit.

When Friedman was awarded the Nobel Prize for Economics, radicals tried to disrupt the ceremony in Stockholm because they hated the advice that he and his former students had given the Pinochet government. It was proof that they had no serious interest in the economic progress of poor countries but merely loved to indulge in slogans and gestures. The Nobel laureate who should have been booed was the ideologue