



Another “Old-time Chicago Pol” Convicted of Racketeering, Bribery, Extortion

Another old-time corrupt Chicago politician [has just been convicted on 13 counts of racketeering, bribery, and attempted extortion](#). Ed Burke, who represented Chicago’s 14th Ward from 1969 to 2023, will turn 80 tomorrow. If sentenced to the maximum under the law, he will spend the next 20 birthdays — if he lives that long — in federal prison.

Burke is one of the last of the Mayor Richard Daley pols. The trial for similar charges begins for another survivor of that era, former House Speaker Michael Madigan, next June, and charges are pending against former 34th Ward Alderman Carrie Austin — the second-longest serving alderman next to Burke — for similar self-dealing.



AP Images
Edward Burke

This brings to 38 the number of Chicago politicians of one stripe or another to be convicted of such various felonies since 1971, and nine just this year.

Readers are likely to remember former Illinois governors Rod “Blago” Blagojevich, Otto Kerner, and further back in history, George Ryan, each of whom considered their political positions as offering ways to enrich themselves at the expense of their electorate.

For a time Burke was considered one of Chicago’s “most powerful aldermen” (the *Chicago Sun-Times*) and one of the “100 Most Powerful Chicagoans” (*Chicago* magazine). He was also described as “one of the last of the old-school Chicago Machine pols.”

His history of milking his position as chairman of the city’s Council on Finance included “ghost payroll” of people he was rewarding by giving them no-work jobs in exchange for favors granted. He helped arrange for millions of dollars of public subsidies to companies that then hired his law firm (Klafter & Burke) to make property-tax assessment appeals to the city. At one point, Burke had 37 law clients that did business with the city or other local government agencies, reflecting an enormous conflict of interest.

He attempted to shake down the developers of the \$600 million Old Post Office renovation, as well as the owners of a Burger King restaurant in his ward who needed permits for some remodeling work.

He was the only Chicago alderman to have four full-time Chicago police officers assigned to him as bodyguards.

Burke secured his position as a grantor of favors to the favored few by first making them dependent upon him. The *Chicago Sun-Times* called those favored few an “army of allies” that he placed in various city jobs. The paper noted that “even mayors who despised Burke didn’t dare to oppose him ... fearing



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on December 28, 2023

the potential he had to stymie their legislative agendas.”

The jury spent 16 days hearing testimony from 38 witnesses explaining how Burke pressured companies seeking to do business with the city to grease his palms along the way. As the *Chicago Sun-Times* reported:

Chicago history books will remember Edward M. Burke as the dean of the City Council, [former Chicago Mayor] Harold Washington’s foe, a storyteller armed with tales of yore, a judge maker and a political giant who learned how to wield his clout at the height of the Machine’s power.

And now, Chicago’s longest-serving council member will also be remembered as a brazen extortionist who used the trappings of his office to squeeze developers big and small, complaining with impunity that “they can go [expletive deleted] themselves” when they didn’t play ball.

That’s the image a federal jury embraced Thursday when it found Burke guilty of racketeering, bribery and attempted extortion after nearly 23 hours of deliberations at the end of a historic corruption trial for which Chicago has waited five years.

The paper added:

“This case was about bribery and extortion occurring at the highest levels of Chicago city government,” said Acting U.S. Attorney Morris Pasqual. “In this case, defendant Burke had his hand out for money. He tied the giving of official action by him to the giving of money to him.”

Also caught in the net was one of Burke’s co-defendants, Charles Cui, who was charged and convicted of bribery and lying to the FBI.

Sentencing is scheduled for next year.

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