



Charles Rangel's Fall

Another of the House mighty has fallen. Charles Rangel (D), 40-year veteran Congressman from Harlem and the senior member of the New York state congressional delegation, was convicted today of 11 counts of misconduct by a House ethics panel.

During his four-decade rise to seniority in the House, Rangel was a protégé of the likes of Dan Rostenkowski, the former powerful Illinois representative who was also convicted on numerous ethics charges. Like Rostenkowski, Rangel became the Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee — the committee with ultimate authority over all matters concerning taxation — before being forced to step aside under suspicion of misconduct.



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Rangel served with distinction in the Korean War, where he received a Bronze Star for heroism, but became involved in '60s and '70s radicalism that carried over into his congressional career. In 1972, for example, he allied with Louis Farrakhan to thwart a police investigation into the murder of a New York City policeman, Philip Cardillo, at the Nation of Islam mosque in Harlem. Rangel and Farrakhan successfully persuaded the police to withdraw all white officers from the case and to refrain from arresting a suspect, threatening that a riot would break out if arrests were made. Although not as sensationalistic as the likes of Farrakhan and Al Sharpton, Rangel has long been the besuited, "respectable" face of race-baiting on Capitol Hill; in recent years, he has pushed to reinstate the draft solely on the grounds that middle- and upper-class whites should be forced to fight in our wars alongside "the poor, the black, and the brown."

Rangel's radicalism has gotten him arrested various times during his tenure in the House, as for example when he was nabbed at a protest against apartheid outside the South African consulate in New York in 1984, and more recently in 2004, when he was arrested on trespassing charges while protesting at the Sudanese embassy in D.C.

To his credit, Rangel's warmed-over '60s radicalism has occasionally prompted him to take a principled stand, as with his consistent and vigorous opposition to the Iraq War. But overall, Rangel has been for decades the very embodiment of old-school, hamfisted, corrupt-to-the-bone big-city politics of the sort that is in no small measure responsible for the deplorable state of our federal government. Rangel, like most of his old-school associates, has never scrupled to spend other people's money freely, and has no more grasp of the Constitution he has sworn (20 times!) to uphold than the street criminals of whose rights he has been so solicitous over the years.

It is therefore ironic that one of the charges on which Rangel has been convicted was failure to claim assets on tax returns — in other words, tax fraud. It seems that the man who, for a season, presided



Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on November 16, 2010

over House tax policy (and, lest we forget, all tax levies must originate in the House, per the U.S. Constitution), conveniently neglected to report earnings from a rental property he owned in the Dominican Republic. He also failed to report some \$600,000 in assets and income in a series of reports to Congress and used a rent-subsidized apartment in New York for a campaign office.

Rangel has claimed that these and other actions were not criminal or corrupt but were “good faith mistakes” resulting from “sloppy and careless recordkeeping.” Ah, yes, Charlie, as those of us who aren’t well-connected Congressmen who have managed to become filthy rich over four decades as the “people’s servants,” the “honest mistake” defense works wonders with the understanding folks at the IRS!

Accustomed to blustering his way through life, Rangel has sought to delay the inevitable, demanding the House halt its investigation when he ran out of money to pay his legal team. When the ethics panel refused to be cowed, Rangel on Monday stormed out of the proceedings, and was conspicuously absent when the convictions were read. No sooner was the verdict out than Rangel blamed the panel for daring to deliberate after he had chosen to abandon the proceedings. “How can anyone have confidence in the decision of the ethics subcommittee when I was deprived of due process rights, right to counsel and was not even in the room?” Rangel’s written statement railed. “I can only hope that the full committee will treat me more fairly, and take into account my entire 40 years of service to the Congress before making any decisions on sanctions.”

If there is any justice on Capitol Hill, Charlie Rangel will be sent packing. As recent elections have shown, Congressmen of his ilk have fallen out of favor across much of this country, excepting perhaps payola-permeated precincts like Harlem. But don’t expect Rangel to gracefully acknowledge that fact. If past is prelude, the embattled Congressman will probably attempt to frame his ethics convictions as a racially motivated lynching, and his fall as evidence that, after all, whites are still trying to oppress blacks. Wait for it.

Photo of Charles Rangel: AP Images



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