

With a Blunt Instrument

by Anton Chaitkin

Rep. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) has not yet summoned the nerve to move into the perhaps haunted office-suite of the House Majority Leader, in the second week after Blunt's appointment to replace Tom DeLay.

Tom "The Hammer" DeLay was indicted on Sept. 28 and again Oct. 3, charged with conspiracy and money laundering, for channeling \$190,000 in corporate political donations to the Republican National Committee and back into Texas state election races, thus apparently trying to hide the origin of contributions illegal in Texas.

DeLay's indictment followed the September indictment of his campaign fund managers Jim Ellis and John Colyandro for the same offenses. The financial godfather of DeLay's Congressional career, Jack Abramoff, was arrested on Aug. 11 in the massive SunCruz fraud case involving DeLay and others in the extended DeLay organization. Mafia-linked Abramoff "consultant" Anthony Mosciatello and two associates were arrested on Sept. 27 (the day before DeLay's indictment), charged with murdering the former owner of the SunCruz floating casino cruise line that Abramoff took over.

A review of Roy Blunt's career as an accomplice in the DeLay-Abramoff machine should make clear the cause of Interim Leader Blunt's trepidation.

Rep. Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) began clawing his way up after the 1994 Conservative Revolution in the House of Representatives, becoming Republican Whip, third in party power after the House Speaker and the Majority Leader. Lobbyist Jack Abramoff helped shape DeLay's alliances with corporations and rightist political and religious forces, giving the gang the power to grant or block membership and influence in Congress, in exchange for donations. The Abramoff era began with huge donations from Enron to DeLay's funding agency, Americans for a Republican Majority (ARMPAC).

When Roy Blunt first ran for Congress in 1996, Blunt went to Washington, met with DeLay, and pledged himself to serve The Hammer's powerful apparatus if he were elected.

In 1999, DeLay maneuvered to make his malleable Deputy Whip, Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), Speaker of the House. DeLay chose the novice Roy Blunt, then in his second Congressional term, as chief Deputy Whip, assigned to manage the details of relations with the lobbyists.

DeLay held weekly strategy meetings, presided over by Blunt, with corporate lobbyists and political movers assembled by a DeLay "kitchen cabinet" consisting of Jack Abra-

moff, Grover Norquist, Ralph Reed, and DeLay staffers such as Ed Buckham (who was personally funded by Enron).

One of the team's projects was keeping immigrant garment workers in the Northern Marianas Islands enslaved at sub-minimum wages, on behalf of Abramoff's clients, the garment manufacturers and the Territory's government. Abramoff flew DeLay, Buckham, and others on junkets to the Islands, and conduited political donations, while DeLay and Blunt managed the blocking of minimum labor standards.

The Laundry Whirls

Roy Blunt stepped in as Tom DeLay's money cleaner soon after becoming Deputy Whip.

Jim Ellis, coordinator of DeLay's mighty ARMPAC, started up Blunt's own funding agency, called "Rely On Your Beliefs" (or ROYB or ROYBPAC) on May 26, 1999. That vaguely religious title might conjure up, for the astute observer, W.C. Fields' assertion that "a man has to believe in something—I believe I'll have another beer."

But the character of this entity is best suggested by the fact that it occupied the same Washington, D.C. townhouse at 132 D St., SE as DeLay's ARMPAC, managed, like ROYB, by Jim Ellis; the Alexander Strategy Group, a lobbying firm run by former DeLay chief of staff Buckham, which employed DeLay's wife; and the U.S. Family Network, a tax-exempt religious-theme group set up by former DeLay election manager Robert Mills, who owned the townhouse, and employed Buckham's wife as a Network staffer.

Follow the little pea under the shells! On Oct. 20, 1999, the National Republican Congressional Committee gave \$500,000, its largest contribution ever, to the U.S. Family Network. Buckham, running the Network, transferred \$300,000 to "Americans for Economic Growth," headed by Blunt's funding manager, Jim Ellis. Ellis bought \$260,000 in radio ads attacking Democratic Congressional candidates and supporting Republicans who favored privatizing Social Security. The Federal Election Commission later fined the National Republican Congressional Committee \$280,000 for this pass-through, as an illegal use of corporate money. The incestuous PACs and lobbyists were soon forced to leave the laundry-house when Washington zoning authorities caught up with them.

In 2000, DeLay's ARMPAC gave \$150,000 to Blunt's ROYB, two arms both headed by Ellis, who was paid by Blunt's arm as a consultant. This was the largest share of money received by Blunt's committee. In the same year, Blunt's ROYB contributed \$145,000 to Buckham's Alexander Strategy Group, and \$10,000 to the DeLay Foundation.

The Marianas project was grinding away, though such Abramoff clients as Concorde Garment Manufacturing had been fined in the 1990s for notorious sweatshop conditions. On April 14, 2000, Concorde gave \$3,000 to Blunt's ROYB. On Nov. 27, 2000, Abramoff's firm charged his Marianas clients for meeting with Blunt's aide Trevor Blackan. On

Septemre 5, 9 and 30, 2001, Abramoff representatives met with Roy Blunt and his aides to discuss strategy for keeping slave labor conditions legal in the Marianas.

Abramoff flew boss DeLay to Scotland in May 2000, for a week of golf and a talk with Margaret Thatcher, followed by DeLay's legislative intervention for Abramoff's and Norquist casino clients.

Flush with DeLay's cash, much of it from Abramoff's casinos and sweatshops, Blunt's ROYB gave \$100,000 to the Missouri Republican Party on June 15, 2000.

The Missouri Republican Party turned around on July 25 and gave \$11,000 to Roy Blunt's son Matt's campaign for Missouri Secretary of State, the first of \$160,000 the state party was to donate to that campaign. Matt Blunt later moved up to Governor, his present post. Shortly before the 2000 election, DeLay's ARMPAC, headed by Ellis, gave another \$50,000 to the Missouri Republicans.

For the 2000 Republican National Convention, DeLay's ARMPAC and Blunt's ROYB jointly sponsored the most exotic events and perks for politicians and lobbyists under their spell. A car and driver for every Republican Congressman, a rock concert, a luxury five-car hospitality train, 24-hour concierge service, all costing an estimated million dollars. Jim Ellis ran the show for DeLay and for Blunt.

Ellis then coordinated a notorious thank-you event in Las Vegas: partying for those who contributed \$50,000 or more to the DeLay/Blunt convention activities. Blunt's big backer, United Parcel Service, donated a chartered flight between Washington and Nevada for Blunt and 50-60 lobbyists, aides, and political supporters. At DeLay's Las Vegas suite, a reveler poured champagne over DeLay's daughter, the hostess in the hot tub.

It was all business for corporate contributors. In 2003, the normally free-trade fanatic Blunt inserted a clause in the Iraq War appropriation, that military cargo must be carried only by companies, such as PAC donors United Parcel Service and Federal Express, with no more than one-quarter foreign ownership.

Meanwhile Philip Morris jumped ahead as Blunt's sponsor. When DeLay became Majority Leader, and just hours before Blunt was elevated to Whip, Blunt tried to secretly stick an anti-smuggling clause benefitting Philip Morris into Homeland Security legislation. Blunt soon divorced his wife of 31 years and married Philip Morris's lobbyist, Abigail Pearlman.

Following the indictment of ARMPAC/ROYB fund manager Jim Ellis, Blunt contributed \$10,000 for Ellis's legal defense—from the corporate-donations fund ROYB that Ellis had been paid to manage.

Now warily looking over his shoulder, Interim Majority Leader Blunt declares that news media accounts of his money washing for DeLay, Inc. are "thin reporting" and that it is "irresponsible" to say that his acts are similar to what got DeLay and others indicted.