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Honesty among Thieves **by Michael Tennant**

The state of Minnesota is prosecuting a 19-year-old college student, Max P. Sanders, for the crime of [having offered his vote in this year's presidential election to the highest bidder on eBay](#). He is being charged with this heinous crime, which could land him in prison for as long as five years and cost him as much as \$10,000, under an 1893 law that criminalizes the buying and selling of votes.

The AP report linked above notes that this law is “scarcely used.” That explains why most Minnesota voters and practically every politician who sets foot in the Land of 10,000 Lakes are not currently behind bars or in hock to the state to the tune of a buck per lake.

“Government,” wrote H.L. Mencken, “is a broker in pillage, and every election is sort of an advance auction sale of stolen goods.” That is, the government owns nothing that it did not first steal from the people it rules, and its officials obtain and retain power by doling out these stolen goods to their constituents. The only difference between Sanders’s approach to this election and almost everyone else’s approach is that Sanders is honest about selling his vote, while the rest of the people couch their vote sales in friendlier terms such as “entitlements,” “the public good,” “government services,” “subsidies,” and “disaster relief.” Rather than being strung up for this, then, Sanders should be applauded for his forthrightness!

If you doubt that elections are all about buying and selling votes, consider a few of the promises being made by the two major-party candidates for president.

Democrat Barack Obama is offering up the following stolen merchandise to those who will pull the lever for him in November:

- [\\$50 billion](#) in “economic stimulus” spending. (\$20 billion is described as a “tax rebate” but will, of course, be conjured up by the Fed out of thin air.)
- [\\$60 billion](#) toward a “National Infrastructure Reinvestment Bank.”
- A “[doubling](#) [of] federal funding for basic research.”

- [\\$250 million](#) per year to create “a national network of public-private business incubators.”
- Unspecified amounts, no doubt in the billions, for various [education programs](#).
- [\\$150 billion](#) to “advance the next generation of biofuels and fuel infrastructure.”
- [\\$50 billion](#) for a “Clean Technologies Venture Capital Fund.”
- [\\$50 billion](#) to cut “extreme poverty around the world in half by 2015.” (Why not make it \$50 trillion to eliminate worldwide poverty altogether while he’s at it?)
- Unspecified amounts, but surely in the hundreds of billions or even trillions, to “make available [a new national health plan](#) to all Americans” for which no applicant can be turned down and which will be comprehensive.
 - [\\$1 billion](#) for “transitional jobs and career pathway programs.”
 - [\\$50 billion](#) to “move the U.S. health care system to broad adoption of standards-based electronic health information systems.”

And that’s just a sampling!

Meanwhile, over at the GOP-Mart, [John McCain](#) doesn’t put the price tags in the windows or get too specific about the details of his proposals — he’s too cagey for that — but nevertheless he’s giving away these “hot” items, among many others:

- A HOME plan to let “every deserving American family or homeowner [wonder who gets to define “deserving”] ... trade a burdensome mortgage for a manageable loan that reflects their home’s market value.”
 - A “Justice Department Mortgage Abuse Task Force.”
 - A “Student Loan Continuity Plan” to “expand the lender-of-last resort capabilities for each state’s guarantee agency” (and guess who gets to foot the bill for deadbeat loan recipients).
 - Enlarging “the size of our armed forces to meet new challenges to our security” because the solution to an overextended military, as McCain sees it, “is not to roll back our overseas commitments” but to spend more tax dollars on ever more commitments.
 - Spending money on research to “Promote the Innovation, Development and Deployment of Advanced Technologies” to reduce the dubious threat of carbon emissions.
 - “A Global Solution to Global Climate Change,” which includes “Government Incentives and Partnerships for Sales of Clean Tech to Developing Countries.”
 - “[Strong support] of NASA and the space program, including “a return of astronauts to the Moon in preparation for a manned mission to Mars.”

McCain is even offering to spend *Iraqis'* tax money, calling on the Iraqi government to disburse “a portion of its budget surplus to employ Iraqis in infrastructure projects and in restoring basic services.”

Every dollar that these two men propose to spend has to be taken from individual taxpayers, either by taxation or by inflation. Every recipient of these dollars is therefore guilty of accepting stolen property. Given these gigantic promises of “free” money, then, is there any doubt that the overwhelming majority of votes will be cast for the candidate who vows to give the voter — or someone the voter likes, such as farmers, teachers, or defense contractors — more of his neighbor’s property than the other?

The election, in Mencken’s apt phrase, is indeed “an advance auction sale of stolen goods,” and most voters will indeed be selling their votes to the highest bidder. Only one man, Max P. Sanders, had the courage to admit this up front, and he’s being threatened with jail and a fine for his honesty. What does that tell us about the state and those who continue to participate in its fencing operations?

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