

POINTS OF VIEW

Beware of growing police state thinking

A Middle Eastern region was ruled by a military government. No local elected officials. No law. No due process or trial. No appeal. I've read dozens of news stories like this: A young man was suspected of taking part of a rock-throwing incident. The authorities sent a bulldozer to his parents' house and leveled one room.

Why, you ask, punish the family for the sins of the young man? Why punish before an arrest and trial? The authorities never bothered to answer. We're talking about a police state.

Can it happen here? It's happening. The Michigan Legislature is fashioning a set of reforms for Friend of the Court — that's the agency that collects child support payments from a working parent and transfers the money to the custodial parent.

The House passed one oppressive bill 87-12. Interestingly, the harder-nosed conservatives rather than the bleeding-heart liberals dissented most vocally. Here is the formal protest of Rep. Deborah Whyman, R-Canton:

"I am opposed to revoking a driver's license for anything other than a driving offense. It doesn't make ANY sense to revoke an occupational license for alleged non-payment of child support and eliminate their ability to earn a paycheck. I have had many complaints on Wayne County Friend of the Court. Fathers pay their child support to FOC via payroll deduction, yet have sanctions brought against them for ALLEGED non-payment of child support." (Emphasis here.)

Rep. Greg Kaza, R-Rochester Hills, entered his formal objection on a companion bill that passed 68-46. This time the negative ranks were swelled by Democrats like Maxine Bauman of Southfield and Eileen DeHart of Westland as well as Republicans like Whyman, Barbara Dobb of Union Lake, John Jamian of Bloomfield Township and Al Cropsy of DeWitt. Said Kaza: "The legislation before us implements license sanctions for matters that have nothing to do with professional ability or driving record. By



TIM RICHARD

eliminating an individual's means to practice his or her profession or occupation, the bills would eliminate their ability to pay support."

A more recent trick is differential punishment. Whack me over the head and you get two years in the slammer. Whacking a 62-year-old brings you four years because it's a senior citizen. Our statute books are like a page out of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, where "all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others."

During the handgun debate, readers in many Michigan counties learned that police and prosecutors rigidly controlled the licensing process, awarding permits only to cops, ex-cops and a handful of pals. It's just like the aforementioned Middle Eastern police state: disarm civilians.

The U.S. Supreme Court soon will be looking at a federal forfeiture case from Michigan that smacks of police state thinking.

Guy Usery of Perry (near Lansing) was convicted in 1993 of manufacturing marijuana and sentenced to five years. Fair enough. But the prosecutors filed suit for civil forfeiture of his home, where the pot was grown and harvested. To settle the case, Usery agreed to pay the feds \$13,250.

The U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, in Cincinnati, nixed the scheme, saying the conviction was "a second punishment" for the same offense — a violation of the double jeopardy clause in the Bill of Rights.

Keep in mind the top U.S. prosecutor is a former law professor named Bill Clinton, who allegedly is a "flower child" liberal. The Clinton prosecutors say, shucks, forfeiture of drug-related property is not punishment. They're appealing to the Supreme Court.

You probably already know about the 18-year-old two-bit drug dealer from Westland who was sent to prison for life under a law designed to weed out kingpins. And the Ferndale guy who picked up a Detroit lady cop disguised as a hooker and had his wife's car confiscated. The law was supposed to be used on organized crime, not a john in an aged car.

I leave you with one thought: It's fashionable to say the teachers' unions are too powerful. I suggest instead that the law enforcement lobby is far more dangerous and in need of our scrutiny.

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events. To leave a message for him, you may call (810) 349-1700.

Hillary — poised, smart — wows suburban women

Do you still want to go to see Hillary?

That's the question a friend asked me last week. She was referring to attending a fund-raiser for Sen. Carl Levin at which Hillary Rodham Clinton was the special guest.

It happened Tuesday night at the Hyatt Regency in Dearborn.

We both had been excited at the invitation from a group called The Women of Michigan, many of whom are our Oakland County neighbors.

I've admired Hillary Clinton on a number of levels, ranging from her abilities as a lawyer to her tenacity at protecting her teenage daughter's privacy.

I have also been critical at times, ranging from why she chose to cloak the welfare discussions in secrecy to

the wish that she'd forego any other image than what she is — a bright, educated, proven woman of the '90s.

My friend was asking the question based on recent news stories that revisited Mrs. Clinton's reputation for truthfulness in regard to Whitewater, the White House travel office and the atmosphere following Vince Foster's suicide.

It was this information that New York Times columnist William Safire used to come up with his now infamous "congenital liar" label. But Safire is a former Nixon speechwriter (a case of the pot calling the kettle black, don't you think?) whom I generally discount.

Much more damaging in my mind was Safire's fellow New York Times writer Maureen Dowd's column "All About Hillary" in which she referenced the First Lady as "a scary Mommie



JUDITH DONER BERNE

Dearest."

But President Clinton couldn't very well get away with the suggestion of punching Dowd's nose, now could he?

Meanwhile, I was still intent on hearing Hillary. But my confidence was shaken to the extent that I did place a call to Levin headquarters to make sure she was still on the docket.

Or would Levin consider her the liability to him that some people were saying she was getting to be for the President?

Levin's spokesman was direct and assured. Mrs. Clinton was absolutely going to be there. And the Levin campaign was looking forward to her appearance on his behalf.

Although fog delayed her Detroit landing by a couple of hours, it was clear that the more-than 800 people who enthusiastically greeted her at the Hyatt weren't thinking liability.

Her apology for the tardiness beyond her control was much more than cursory. And her speech on behalf of Carl Levin was much more than rah, rah. Yes, I'm a Democrat and, yes, I'm a woman, but frankly I was surprised at just how impressive she was in person. And I wasn't the only one.

"She was very poised. I like the way she tied in the national with the state picture and I'm proud of her," said Paula Creed of Farmington Hills.

"I haven't been a big fan," said Marcia Miller, another Farmington Hills resident. "But we were really front row. And she was very disarming, very down-to-earth. I was very pleasantly surprised."

"I think she's a powerful and exciting woman of her times," said Marge Alpern of Bloomfield Hills. "She's too smart to do something that would jeopardize all of this."

Judith Doner Berne, a West Bloomfield resident, is former managing editor of the *Eccentric Newspapers*. You can leave her a voice mail message at (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1997 or write or fax a letter to the editor in care of this newspaper.

A wrenching change coming for our state's workforce

It is in Michigan — cradle of the automobile industry, the Arsenal of Democracy, the home of the United Auto Workers — that the transition from the old economy to the new will be the most wrenching.

As anybody older than 60 knows down to the sweat glands, the old economy that made Michigan rich was based on hard, human labor in return for good pay and good benefits.

Generations of Michigan kids left school and countless thousands of adults left their farms in the South to work in the auto plants. Bolting on right fenders at Ford's didn't require many skills, other than the ability to tolerate hard, boring work. The old line was: "If you can stand and take a breath and have a friend at the UAW firing hall, you'll get a good job."

That was the old economy. It was solid, and it was stable. And it built a middle class here in Michigan that made Detroit — where at one time more houses were occupied by their owners than any other big city in America — the envy of the world.

But it isn't the new economy. The new economy is characterized by last week's announcement that AT&T, up to now the most paternalistic and stable corporation in the country, intends to lay off 40,000 workers — the equivalent of at least 10 auto plants. "Most of the cuts," according to the *Wall Street Journal*, "are facilitated, one way or another, by new software programs, better computer networks and more powerful hardware."

In other words, people — 40,000 of them at AT&T and countless hundreds of thousands elsewhere — are being replaced by computers. "The wholesale substitution of machines for workers is going to force every nation to rethink the role of human beings in the social process," writes Jeremy Rifkin in an important book, *The End of Work*. "Redefining opportunities and responsibilities for millions of people in a society absent of mass formal employment is going to be the single most pressing social issue of the coming century."

Rifkin quotes William Wimpelinger, a smart man and the past president of the International Association of Machinists, a union that has lost half its members to automation, to the effect that within 30 years, as little as 2 percent of the world-wide workforce will be able to produce all the goods needed to meet total world demand. No wonder the UAW has made job security its top priority in the coming contract negotiations with the auto companies!

It's this phenomenon — the transition from the old economy to the new and the displace-



PHILIP POWER

ment of unskilled human labor by machines and computers — that undergirds so much of the general anxiety so many people feel today. "My God, if the can lay off 40,000 middle managers at AT&T just like that, what can they do to me?"

It's also this same transition from the old economy to the new that makes so much of the political debate about welfare reform so utterly misplaced.

Of course it makes sense to require people getting public assistance to work.

Some people don't work because they aren't enterprising enough to get off their butts and get a job. But most people on welfare are there because they don't have enough skills to get a job. And if the only jobs available are those which involve skills, demanding that unskilled people take them is both silly and futile.

And the contradiction between the glories of political rhetoric about welfare reform and the hard reality of what jobs will be available is going to get sharper and sharper as the transition to the new economy progresses.

That's why University of Michigan professor Sheldon Danziger's new book, *America Unequal*, makes so much sense. "The Contract With America essentially takes the position that anybody who tries to work hard can get ahead, and that characterization, if it was ever true, was true from the end of World War II until about 1973."

I wonder how long it's going to take until somebody proposes "jobs of last resort," government-supported, low-paying, low-skill jobs to move the unemployed poor from a welfare check to a paycheck.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047 ext. 1880.

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