

Emergency Powers Bill

A Veto That Should Stand

Arguing against one of the many so-called "anti-riot" bills in suburbia is like arguing against motherhood and patios and swimming pools.

Yet we propose to argue against one of those bills. Indeed, it's even a bill from which, on the surface, local government seems to benefit.

The bill is HB 3302, which would give local government officials power to declare 48-hour states of emergency, cutting off sales of guns, ammunition, liquor and gasoline and imposing curfews.

The governor already has such power, but the power of local officials has been in doubt. The bill which the Legislature passed would give emergency-granting powers to mayors of cities, supervisors of townships and three-man committees in counties (prosecutor, sheriff and chairman of the board of supervisors).

Gov. Romney vetoed it—correctly, we think.

AND NOW SUBURBAN legislators are getting together to try to override the veto.

Conservative Republican Sen. George Kuhn has his drive going. A group of 22 Democratic representatives, including most from Observerland, has served notice it will vote to override.

The crux of their argument is personal against Romney: They contend he failed to act quickly enough in the July, 1967, Detroit riot.

Which is beside the point. When the riot broke, the governor was on the job and made the best decision he could. If that decision was wrong, the solutions are to learn from experience or to elect a new governor. It's foolish to seek a remedy through diluting his powers by passing them around to every little mayor, township supervisor and county panel in the state.

THE LIST OF ARGUMENTS in favor of the veto is considerably longer and more coolly reasoned. Most of them reflect directly on the nature of suburban government—"a checkerboard," as Romney put it.

"When a major civil disturbance is threatened or takes place, the problem (usually) exceeds the confines of any one locality," said the veto message.

With the danger ignoring municipal boundaries, it's necessary to have a single policy covering the entire danger area. It's patently unwise to have one town doing one thing, the next town another.

Any real emergency will usually require the services of the state police and the National Guard. It follows that a state official—the governor, who is their boss—should be the one to declare the state of emergency. It would be demoralizing to the citizenry to have a trigger-happy local official unilaterally declare an emergency and then be unable to command the help that an emergency requires.

Sen. Kuhn believes "local leaders have the best feel of any situation or crisis that might arise and can exercise better judgment than anyone in Lansing or Washington."

Romney's counter argument, however, seems far more accurate: "Unfortunately, past experience has shown that frequently officials within the immediate area of any disturbance have not been able to obtain such information as will give them an accurate overall picture of the problem." Thus, he said, many local calls for the National Guard "have proven to be unfounded."

THE CASE FOR LOCAL dec-

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larations of emergencies has been hurt by the behavior of some local officials.

We need look no further than Redford Township, where the chief of police, before a number of audiences, circulated wild and misleading stories about the attacks that would be made on the suburbs in the next riot—and then, during the April emergency, turned the police station practically into an armed camp.

We can look to Livonia, where police and mayor are asking for money for equipment that could lead to a drastic overkill of human beings if they ever get panicky enough to use it.

We can see an east side suburb buying a tank.

We can look unhappily at the positive, unholly glee with which some of our officials greeted the April state of emergency in southeastern Michigan following the King assassination.

It's not hard to imagine our local chief executives, who are essentially reliant on those officious posturants for information, going off half-cocked and declaring emergencies and curfews willy-nilly.

A FINAL ARGUMENT against the bill is one that in the news media know rather well.

It's highly possible that one community could declare a state of emergency and that the next community could be uninformed about it. The effect on

unsuspecting citizens crossing local boundaries would be unpleasant and unnecessary.

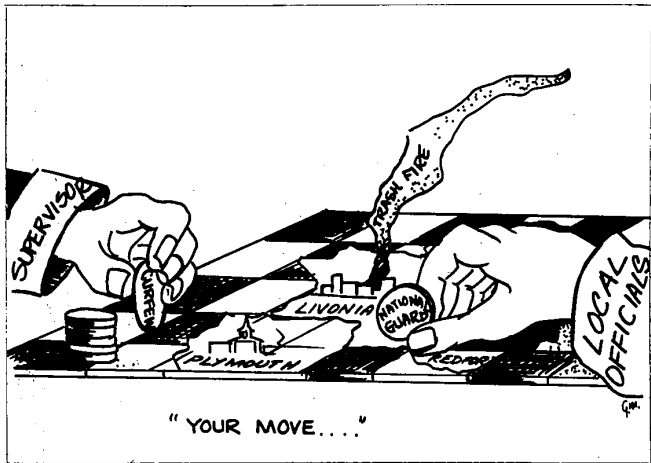
"It is essential," said the governor's veto message, "in times of public crisis and civil disorders that a uniform plan of action be established—not just within a particular city or township, but throughout the area."

It's a sad commentary on the state of jitters that HB 3302 was ever passed in the first place.

When the bill was correctly vetoed, it was unwise that suburban legislators began whooping it up to override the veto.

We would urge them to cool off, reconsider their emotions, and let the veto stand.

—The Observer Newspapers



From the Publisher's Desk

OBSERVATION POINT

By Philip H. Power

Remember the days back in the 1950's when Engine Charlie Wilson was Secretary of Defense and John Foster Dulles was Secretary of State? Those were the halcyon times for the advocates of simplicity in our national life.

The slogans of the period are suggestive:

• "Massive Retaliation"—This meant that whenever the commies went too far (in someone's judgment) we'd dump the big bomb on them. This doctrine went down the drain when some bright guy realized that while we might be able to dump a bomb on someone else, they could dump one back on us almost as easily.

• "Rollback of Communism"—A favorite in the State Department, this one meant that the U.S. was going to push back communism wherever it showed its ugly head. The only problem with this was that it was never clearly explained just how we were going to do it, and when the Hungarians revolted in 1957 we sat around on our hands while this slogan went up in smoke.

• "More Bang For a Buck"—Thoroughly linked with the doctrine of massive retaliation, this policy urged concentration of the big (nuclear) bang to the ex-

clusion of other weaponry. It soon proved just as clumsy as the other slogans of the time when it became apparent that recourse to nuclear weapons in all situations was, to put it mildly, insane.

NOW WHAT DOES all this have to do with us now? Our law enforcement bodies are in danger of being strangled with just as rigid and inflexible a batch of policies as was the country in the 1950's. These have to do with what kinds of weapons are needed by the police to effectively carry out their functions.

Normally, our police departments issue officers with pistols, night sticks, and occasionally riot-type shotguns. In some cities like Livonia, governments are being urged to buy things like grenade launchers, Stoner rifles, and bayonets.

The intended use of these latter items in situations other than an invasion by the Chinese communists is not clear, but usually accepted police doctrine suggests that pistols are useful not only for protecting an officer when his life is in danger but only for bringing down a fleeing suspect.

SOMEHOW I WONDER if there aren't more effective ways of doing the job.

After all, the function of a gun is to kill people. And killing

people, as any responsible police officer will tell you, is not the primary function of a law enforcement body.

In addition, if you're running after a fleeing suspect, it's darn hard to fix anything other than a barn door with a pistol. I tried it once on a firing range belonging to the Alaska State Police. Out of 20 shots taken on the run with a .357 revolver, I came within six inches of a human-sized target only once.

Perhaps that just shows I would be a lousy policeman.

Then there's the problem of hitting the innocent bystander.

DEPENDENCE ON GUNS, seen in this light, may be just as rigid and counter-productive as some of the government slogans of the 1950's.

Police departments in this area are gradually moving toward a more flexible approach. Some of them are issuing their men with chemical MACE, which temporarily blinds and incapacitates people without permanently harming them. Enough doubts, however, have been raised about the long-term effects of MACE that the State Police have urged suspending its use for the time being.

But the idea behind MACE is a good one: To design means of stopping fleeing suspects, or disarming dangerous felons, or cooling off angry people in such a way as not to kill them.

There's something called "Instant Banana Peel," which is supposed to make any street on which it is strewn so slippery that no one can run away. That seems like a good beginning.

But there must be more. Our police have an enormously difficult job to do. Shackling them with outdated concepts and ordinances seems silly.

Perhaps the gun companies which are now so busy fighting sensible gun control legislation might perform a more useful public service by turning their brains and money to designing some more useful and effective means of helping the police get their job done.

Why Westland Should Join COG

The Westland City Council more than a year ago ignored a request to join the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, a voluntary association of governmental agencies, to study and solve common problems.

The council, in its infinite wisdom, agreed to ignore the request and go its own way.

Nearly a month ago, the council asked the federal government for help in the wake of serious flooding in the community which resulted in an estimated 800 flooded basements.

But Westland wasn't the only community hit hard by the heavy rains. Not only were the suburbs in western Wayne County hit, but also the city of Detroit, Oakland County, and Macomb County.

The problem for the flooding, among other things, was the lack of large enough drains to handle the rains and the overflowing of the Rouge River, which affects Wayne and Oakland Counties, and the Clinton River, in Macomb and Oakland Counties.

MAIN PURPOSE of the Council of Governments (also known by its initials, SEMCOG) is to get public agencies to review and resolve regional problems on a regional basis, instead of on the past methods of each community looking after its own few acres and forgetting about the real problem and answer, which lies many miles outside of its boundaries.

The idea of Westland getting

any federal help in a situation which affected dozens of other cities in three counties is too minor to worry about.

If there are any federal grants, they should be given to the Council of Governments, which is the only agency, public or private, that has the framework for handling a regional problem, such as flooding of the Rouge and Clinton Rivers.

The same can be said for other regional problems, such as water and air pollution, highways, airports, public employee negotiations, to mention a few.

PART OF THE CAUSE for the current urban (and suburban) crisis in America is the narrow-minded viewpoint shared by too many city officials who behave like they are in 18th century America and have to defend their boundaries against the Indians.

The only way to get out of the current mess is to widen our vision and look beyond our city limits to the core of the problem and the subsequent answers.

Next time Westland and other cities think of going to Washington, D.C., for an answer to their problem, they should look to the Council of Governments close to home.

But this also requires a degree of willingness and acceptance of the Council of Governments—not only by Westland but by other communities in Observerland.

—Leonard Poger

This Is The Week That

By DON HOENSHILL

Now is the time in the heat of the summer to unveil the Secret Weapon Assigned To Combat Hate (SWATCH).

Just organize it, folks, give it a jargon and a roomful of secretaries and filing cabinets, apply for a federal grant and we're off on the road to serenity in the streets.

Go ahead and scoff. They laughed at Benjamin Franklin flying a kite in the rain. Ha!

THERE WILL BE neighborhood SWATCH centers, coordinated by city government, to allocate the federal money; field workers to interview bigots of all types and make reports.

The employment market for draft card burners, Birchers, black power folks, ex-nergymen, and others waging militant confusion on both sides would be limited only by the size of the federal grant.

Daily, semi-weekly, weekly, semi-monthly and monthly reports would be made to the federal government in five copies each. There would be contracts, easements, rentals and bank deposits.

A regular business. SWATCH would hold executive board meetings, conduct neighborhood seminars and make transcripts available to all civic agencies, plus analyses of all post-meeting reactions. There would be seminars to analyze the post-meeting reactions and arrange new conferences.

AT NO TIME would they discuss or contemplate anything so mundane as action. The fact that they're making five copies and

debating the verities would be enough. A family that shuffles papers together stays together.

Instantly this new unit of society would be establishing integrated management options, total organizational flexibility, balanced incremental programming and optional third-generation hardware.

They would get into responsive financial projection and balanced budget capability, and functional policy concept. Finally, they'd get parallel reciprocal mobility.

Jargon has its own reward. There would be in-house staff, those with steady paychecks, and the parttime folks out in the neighborhoods, called out-house staff.

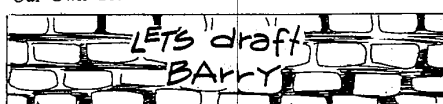
ORGANIZATIONS LIKE THIS give an employee self-respect and pride. A kid can climb up on a knee after dinner and ask: "What did you do today, Daddy?"

"Well, I ran off 40,000 newsletters on the mimeograph machine, child. Worked an hour of overtime, too. And exceeded my own one-day record of 33,553."

Pretty soon police departments would stop buying guns and stop and frisk would be ended, since all an officer would get on a pat-down would be a dirty look.

The principle of SWATCH is simple. Keep people so busy with paper work and seminars they don't have the time or energy to get into trouble or even to practice innocent bystanding. Every major movement needs a slogan and this one is easy. SWATCH it, fellow.

Our Own Grafitti



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