

BREAKING NEWS

DEMOCRACY UNRAVELING IN MICHIGAN?

"Shock Doctrine" in

play say some

March 25, 2011

"Shock Doctrine" in play in Michigan?

(MICHIGAN) -- So you say you want less government involved in your life and in the daily lives of Americans in general? "Government is the problem, not the answer," you say?

You say it's the "heavy hand of government" that is killing the country? Then you should be having heart failure at what's going on in the state of Michigan and elsewhere.

Residents in Michigan are about to get government in their faces like they have never seen it before.

Some say this new bill is nothing short of economic martial law. The government will now run just about everything.

Opponents say what has happened in that state it is one of the most stunning moves to short circuit the democratic electoral process, overturn the results of elections, kill off unions and consolidate power for a political ideology ever seen in the those parts.

They call it "disaster capitalism."

A week after Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder signed a law that gives state-installed leaders broad powers over financially distressed communities and school districts with the "Emergency Manager Law", more than 200 people have signed up for "emergency manager training." And more are on the way.

The training program ostensibly aims to educate individuals in "best practices" for stepping in and running any "fiscally troubled" municipalities and school districts as deemed so by the state.

BY GOVERNMENT ORDER JUST ABOUT ANYTHING CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED

This sweeping new government powers bill gives the state the legal right to throw out previously negotiated union contracts, fire duly elected officials - in essence "overturning" the results of elections - and privatize jails and prisons, allowing huge corporations to run them instead of state workers and managers.

The law gives state government the power – at its discretion – to authorize "emergency managers" who then have the power to cancel contracts (including union contracts), dismiss officials at will and dissolve elected councils and boards in communities and school districts

that are operating at a deficit.

In a story in the *Michigan Messenger*, reporter Ertha Jane Melzer writes, “In addition to allowing previously negotiated union contracts to be voided, Michigan’s new Emergency Manager law gives the government the authority to privatize police services and jails.

Indeed, voiding labor contracts and outsourcing government services is a key aspect of how they are expected to balance the budgets of financially stressed towns.”

Michigan Association of Police Chiefs executive director Tom Hendrickson is quoted in the *Messenger* as saying there are sound, age-old reasons why communities don’t want private “mercenary” police forces and why civilizations moved away from them hundreds of years ago.

Public control of policing is important, says Hendrickson, adding that privatizing police work will put a crucial public function under the control of corporations and take us back to a time few would like to revisit.

“[Early police or sheriff’s (sic) in England were the feudal lords army,” he said via e-mail to the *Messenger*. “As a result they were controlled by the local nobility. Abuse was rampant. To this day in Europe there is fear of a private police force ... they are mercenaries.”

In terms of privatizing jails studies show that cost savings are often illusory and never seem to approach the mythical 20% savings figure often touted –they are mostly in the range of 1% to 8%.

But perhaps the most disturbing aspect of privatizing jails is that some studies show private jails and prisons have significantly more safety problems, including escape attempts and assaults on guards and other inmates.

THE ROLE A LITTLE KNOWN THINK TANK HAS IN THE MICHIGAN EVENTS

The *Daily KOS* noted in a recent report that “It might not result in significant public savings, but it does result in putting more public employees out of work, making it that much easier to break those unions.”

Mother Jones in a March 23 report [here](#) notes that, “gone unmentioned (in the sea of stories and protests about the new law) is a little-known Michigan think tank that for years has been pushing for the most controversial provisions in Snyder’s bill — and that’s bankrolled by some of the same right-wing millionaires and billionaires that backed Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker and his anti-union legislation.”

“Since 2005, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy has urged reforms to Michigan law giving more power and protection to emergency financial managers, state-appointed officials who parachute into ailing cities or school districts and employ drastic measures to fix budgets on the brink of collapse. In January, the free-market-loving center published four

recommendations, including granting emergency managers the power to override elected officials (such as a mayor or school board member) and toss out union contracts. All four ended up in Snyder's legislation," said the report.

"The Mackinac Center has been tied at the hip with the Republican Party establishment for years," says Doug Pratt, public affairs director at the Michigan Education Association. "It goes to their funding sources; it goes to their ideology."

The MJ report says Mackinac is part of a network of state-based groups "associated with the Heritage Foundation, the influential right-wing think tank in Washington. Its past and present board members include Robert Teeter, a GOP strategist and '92 campaign manager for George H.W. Bush; Margaret Rieker, a former vice chairwoman of the Republican National Committee; and Joseph Lehman, a former vice president at the libertarian Cato Institute in Washington."

HOW ALL OF THIS PLAYS INTO THE "SHOCK DOCTRINE"

As a number of anti-union bills have been introduced across the country following the wake of the Wall Street caused *Great Recession* and resulting financial crisis – and now this Emergency Powers bill in Michigan - many citizens are starting to understand the theory that award-winning journalist and author Naomi Klein first proposed in her 2007 best selling book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*.

In the book, she reveals how those in power use times of crisis – like this one - to push through undemocratic and extreme "free market" economic policies.

In essence, Shock Doctrine, goes the theory, is a bid by political ideologists to grab power without having to go through the messy ordeal of pesky elections.

Nobel Prize-winning economist, *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman, recently referenced the book in his column called "Shock Doctrine, U.S.A."

He wrote that the story of the "privatization-obsessed Coalition Provisional Authority [in Iraq]" was the centerpiece of Naomi Klein's best-selling book 'The Shock Doctrine,' which argued that it was part of a broader pattern.

"From Chile in the 1970s onward, she suggested, right-wing ideologues have exploited crises to push through an agenda that has nothing to do with resolving those crises, and everything to do with imposing their vision of a harsher, more unequal, less democratic society," wrote Krugman.

"Which brings us to Wisconsin 2011, where the shock doctrine is on full display," he wrote.

USING A CRISIS TO CENTRALIZE POWER

In a recent interview with a labor group Klein said, "The core argument of and the thesis of

the book, is not that there's something wrong with responding to a crisis decisively. Crises demand decisive responses. The issue is this backhanded attempt to use a crisis to centralize power, to subvert democracy, to avoid public debate, to say, "We have no time for democracy. It's just too messy. It doesn't matter what you want. We have no choice. We just have to ram it through." And we're seeing this in 16 states. I mean, it's impossible to keep track of it. It's happening on such a huge scale... It's a kind of a corporate coup d'état at the municipal level."

Earlier this month Klein was a guest on the Rachel Madow Show on MSNBC where she discussed the Shock Doctrine and what it means for Democracy.