

A dark future for taxless Lorain

What happens to a city whose residents vote against taxes time after time? What's the future for such a place where the colonial rallying cry of "No taxation without representation" has been truncated to "No taxation"? The city of Lorain, cranky and distrustful, poor and poorly represented by government, might arrive at such a future soon and the results, in one hypothesis, would look like this.

The future's mayor, acclaimed and much loved, is Mike Scherach, the tax terminator. His pledge to strip Lorain of taxes was accomplished as efficiently as a ravenous hyena gnawing at the remains of the rotting carcass of a gazelle. First, he eliminated taxes for residents of Lorain who work outside the city. Then, it was no taxes for those who lived outside and worked in. That left those who lived in and worked in and in the future, there are none of those. So zero out that column, too.

In this fanciful scenario, Mayor Mike, as he's affectionately called, is not seen as an unscrupulous and opportunistic demagogue as he nudges the city toward feudalism. No local taxes, hosanna in the highest. Sure, there are certain services to be sacrificed, but it's a workable system MM has cobbled together.

The streets, except for state highways, are gravel or dirt, which is actually an upgrade from the current rumble-strip roads. There are no streetlights or stoplights, which makes it easier for the criminal class to skulk and lurk, but by this time everyone in Lorain carries a gun. And wears body armor. Everyone. MM calls it self-policing and it's pretty effective except for some innocent bloodshed, but, hey, no taxes.



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In the future, the courts have been closed for budgetary reasons and also because it seems everyone is represented by Tony Giardini. It's a huge legal logjam with every case a conflict of interest. The Port Authority sues the city? Giardini represents both sides. The schools sue the band-wife, criminal-police? Both sides. Both sides. Both sides. He's like a hamster in a wheel and getting just as far.

The schools, of course, are operated and subsidized by the state. The good old days when Lorain would hire a boatload of teachers one year and confusedly lay them off the next have, by this time, been replaced by a no-frills regimen of reading, writing and arithmetic. There are no extracurriculars from football to French club. Anything innovative or illuminating or costly, the things that make Lorainites suspicious and fearful, has been stepped on and smashed like a cockroach in the cafeteria. No taxes. No headache.

The parks have been sold to speculators, few of whom have enough cash or contacts to build anything so the grass has grown taller than MM himself. They have come to be regarded as mini game preserves except the game is of the urban variety — mice and rats, feral pigs and packs of dogs. The word on the street is to avoid the vicinity of what used to be called Oakwood Park after dark. The coyotes are quite territorial.

In its taxless future, Lorain has reverted to a volunteer fire department. The trouble is that some volunteers respond only when they want to, not when they're napping or washing their boats or eating chips or practicing the accordion. Still, it's better than just using your garden hose when your three-car garage and everything in it is going up in flames. By this time, 90 percent of Lorain is rental property owned by disinterested, heavily insured landlords. Easy come, easy go.

It's interesting to note, even though it was never tax-supported, the International Festival has survived into the future. It has evolved inevitably into a celebration of our sameness, not our differences. The Puerto Rican princess, for example, lists kielbasa as her favorite food. The festival has acquired an antic atmosphere, an affirmation of the rejection of civic responsibility. Just don't ask MM about his plans for water and sewers. It's not pretty.

Granted, it's cruelly ironic that cities and schools ask for more taxes at times when their constituents can least afford to pay. When a voter is forced to choose between rent, food, medicine, the gas bill and a new winter coat or civic improvements, it's not that difficult. But paying no taxes comes with a price.

When a city is placed on a starvation diet, over time it will change from a group of neighbors with bonds and shared goals to a group of strangers who happen to live in the same place. Each voter, each family, each household has to weigh their needs against that dark future. It seems we're sitting at the high stakes table. So choose wisely.

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