

CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

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KEITH CRAIN: Am I only one outraged by judge's act?

Last week, a circuit judge decided to throw Matty Moroun in jail.

Moroun, as most everyone knows, is a party in an ongoing civil battle between the state of Michigan's transportation department and his privately held Ambassador Bridge company.

His jailing makes me very nervous for our democracy. The "state" and the courts can decide in a civil dispute to throw someone in jail indefinitely? I thought that was something left to totalitarian states around the world.

We all know that Matty Moroun and his bridge have been battling the state and the Canadian government for quite some time over lots of issues. It is obvious that over the years Matty hasn't built a cadre of allies who would support him. He has been fighting this battle alone, probably for his own gain.

But I don't care. When a judge decides to simply throw someone into jail for an indefinite period of time, something is frighteningly wrong with our system.

And what I find equally frightening is that there is not any public outcry on this heavy-handed judicial action. Every person who runs a business, regardless of how large or small, should be concerned with the actions of both our state and our court.

I've heard people say that Wayne County Circuit Judge Prentis Edwards didn't have any recourse but to throw Moroun in jail. That is a sad commentary on the intellect of the judicial system.

Besides, this whole bridge business seems to be an international issue; it seems that Moroun's fight to save his bridge from new competition should eventually be a federal court matter.

I don't see this as an issue of one company versus the state of Michigan. I see it as an issue of who and how we run our government and local court system.

I find it very scary and, more importantly, dangerous. I worry that we are seeing more and more class warfare rather than judicial judgment. This is not democracy; this could be the start of something much worse.

I wonder where the ACLU is today and why they do not jump up to get into this fundamental challenge of our liberties.

Would this travesty happen if there was a longstanding feud in downtown Detroit between the state and say, Dan Gilbert? I don't think so.

As we went to press Friday, it appeared Moroun would be released, but the issues remain the same. In a civil dispute between the "state" and an individual or company, how can the judicial branch have the unopposed power to incarcerate someone?

I would like to think that there are far wiser judicial minds, certainly in our federal court system, who could settle these disagreements without throwing someone, anyone, into jail.

This is about our civil liberties and we should all be very concerned.