

PRIVATIZATION'S STELLAR FAILURE IN MICHIGAN'S PRISONS

Since the publication of my article, "Prison privatization is a crime," in the Jan-Feb. 2014 issue of News & Letters, over 100 Aramark Correctional Services (ACS) employees have been fired and banned from Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) prisons for smuggling in drugs, cell-phones and other contraband, sex with prisoners, and, most recently, paying one prisoner to kill another at a prison in Kincheloe. Moreover, ACS has proven completely incapable of maintaining sanitary kitchens and foodlines and has utterly failed in following the MDOC menu by continuously running out of food as it's being served, failing to follow required progressive cooking procedures, and making numerous menu item substitutions, all in violation of its 3-year \$145 million contract with the MDOC.

This blatant ACS corporate culture of criminal acts and contractual malfeasance should come as no surprise to readers of my previous article and has resulted in \$98,000 in fines being levied against ACS in March and another \$200,000 in August. Also, coming as no surprise, are the numerous reports of prisoners becoming sick - 179 in July at the Egeler Reception & Guidance Center, followed by another 182 at Parnall Correctional Facility, both at Jackson, attributed to being served spoiled and maggot-infested food. (Gary Heinlein, "Prison food service faces scrutiny," The Detroit News, 7/11/14.)

In fact, since the advent of MDOC's contract with ACS, prisoners' health has been in general decline across the state. All for an estimated annual savings of \$12 million in food service but, with healthcare costing several hundred millions annually, one wonders if there are any "savings" at all. Especially, as this "estimate" is based on MDOC Food Service's revised pre-bid claim that it costs \$2.15 per day to feed each prisoner, when previously they claimed it only cost \$1.65 per day per prisoner. The \$2.15 per day per prisoner claim conveniently manifested itself just prior to ACS's "bid," the only bid, for the food service contract. Thus, the purported "\$12 million in savings" to taxpayers is highly suspect. All the more so, in light of the increased healthcare costs for hundreds of sick prisoners and the costs for 100 plus investigations of criminal and corrupt ACS employees or, as we like to call them in Michigan, scabs.

How high does this corruption reach? Pretty high, considering that it was only recently disclosed in e-mails between MDOC director Daniel Heyns and governor Rick Snyder's chief of staff, Dennis Muchmore, that \$98,000 in fines levied in March against ACS for contract violations were cancelled, manifesting that sickeningly sweet stench of a sweetheart contract at the expense of state taxpayers and the 370 fired MDOC food service workers. (Paul Egan, "Prisons director made fine disappear," 9/21/14.) Adding to this stench, gov. Snyder appointed Edwin Buss, a former executive of a private prison healthcare services corporation, to "independently" monitor the ACS contract. This fox guarding the henhouse will be paid \$160,000 per year, with his first year's pay coming out of the \$200,000 fine levied against ACS in August. The whole affair almost smells worse than the food coming out of our chow halls these days!

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