

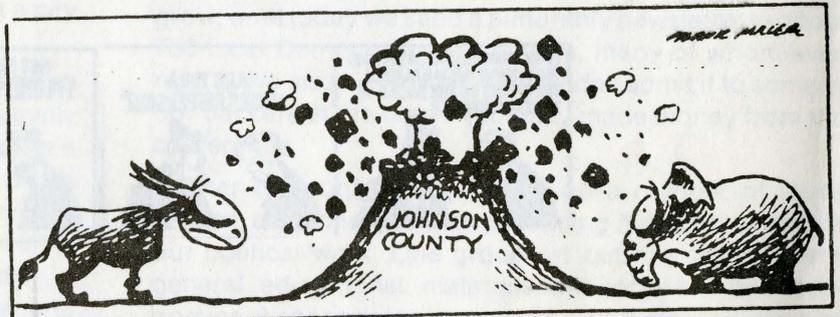
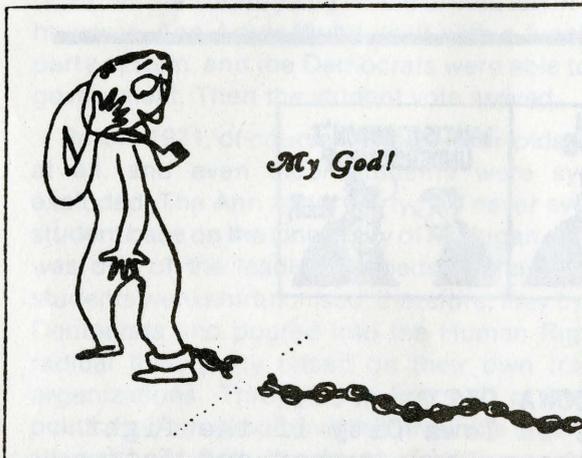
# Democratic Socialists of America IOWA NEWSLETTER

JULY 1985

Labor Donated by Iowa City  
DSA Local, Kim Jones, Chair

## DSA MEETING ....COME AND BRING AND FRIEND....

The Iowa City DSA Local will meet on Tuesday, July 9th, 7:30 p.m. at the Iowa City Public Library, Room B. Now is the time to get active in DSA, and help plan strategy for the coming year. The agenda includes: 1. a proposal to actively support the Kubby for Council campaign; 2. a proposal to actively recruit and run an anti-apartheid candidate for the state legislature in next spring's Democratic primary; 3. the possibility of doing some labor support work for the clerks at Eagle supermarkets, who are being forced to train their own replacement workers.



## JOHNSON COUNTY LEGISLATORS SELL OUT THE UNIVERSITY .....

Once again the docile Democratic electorate of Johnson County appears to be willing to let their representatives in Des Moines get away with murder. The University has received only a 1% increase in state appropriations for the coming year. This session of the legislature voted to raise taxes right and left, with new items subject to the regressive sales tax, park user fees, birth certificate fees, you name it, plus a multi-million dollar state lottery.

But where is the money? Is it being used for education? No, it was all given away, with the votes and support of our legislators, in the form of an exemption from the state sales tax for agricultural machinery and equipment (benefits only rich farmers) and industrial machinery and equipment (benefits only big corporations). Those exemptions are worth \$52 million a year at a time when the university is being starved of funds and faculty and staff are facing pay freezes or tiny raises. Is anyone willing to let Jean Lloyd-Jones and Minnette Doderer and Rich Varn know what they think about this? Is anyone willing to write a letter to the editor about it? Is anyone willing to challenge them in the primary next June?

IOWA CITY SANCTUARY PROJECT SHELTERS LABOR UNION ACTIVIST

The Iowa City Sanctuary Project is a combined effort of Faith United Church of Christ and the Iowa City Friends Meeting. The Sanctuary Movement is based on the belief that Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees indeed fit the definition of "refugee" as detailed in the 1980 Refugee Act. The United States government has refused to acknowledge Salvadorans and Guatemalans as refugees. Therefore over 230 congregations in the United States have opened their doors for the protection of Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees, and they have declared themselves public sanctuaries. In the following statement Jose Sanchez, one of seven refugees who have been welcomed in Iowa City, explains why he had to leave El Salvador

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We left El Salvador on the 20th of March, 1981. Before that date I worked in a government institution for four years. When I started to work there I joined the union, and two years later I took part in one of the union commissions. In 1980 the military came to our office and confiscated a list of all the active members of that local union. To cover up this act, they placed guns, uniforms, and many military instruments in the office and took pictures which appeared in the national newspapers-making the people believe that our union was subservise. Two days later two officers of the union, along with their families, were murdered in their homes. Also, they were investigating all the members of the union commissions. They were looking for me at my work. That is when I decided I had to leave with my wife and our two children-one two years old and the other eight months.

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#### SOCIALISTS FIGHT BUS FARE INCREASES IN IOWA CITY.....

The socialist left is the only left in Iowa City if the fight over bus fares is any evidence. DSA members Phil Nychay and Jeff Cox and Socialist Party member Karen Kubby showed up at a public hearing before the city council, which had already worked out an agreement among themselves to raise fares to 50 cents on July 1 and was not in the mood to discuss it further. However, after hearing arguments which they had never heard before, such as the radical idea that lower fares would bring in more riders, some members of the council actually changed their minds. At one point both Clemens Erdahl and George Strait had indicated a willingness to postpone the fare increase, and the Chamber of Commerce faction had to call in the big guns in the form of city manager Neal Berlin to explain why higher fares and fewer riders are absolutely essential. This was enough for council member Larry Baker, who made the crucial decision to continue raising fares and driving away riders.

A socialist transportation policy means that public transportation should be treated as a public service, not as a small business. Our goal in Iowa City should be to make our buses so cheap and efficient that they can actually compete with the automobile. There is an enormous amount of public support for a socialist transportation policy, just waiting to respond to the right leadership.

## ANN ARBOR STORY

Eric Ebel

In the last five years, the Ann Arbor Democratic Socialists of America have achieved a position of influence in our local situation that might draw the envy of some other locals. Two of the five Democrats on City Council are members, while the remaining three, though not exactly dues-chiselers, take our ideas seriously. Local candidates, including some who aren't even liberals, bid for the endorsement of our Political Action Committee. Membership in the DSA offers no barrier to gaining positions of influence in the local Democratic Party, as the current Chair of the Ann Arbor Party has shown. But our success, as will become clear, has its own ambiguities.

We got where we are by cultivating a special position in a unique political geography. Traditionally, Ann Arbor was a Republican city. Until the late 60's, the local Democratic Party served mainly as a social club for liberal faculty and professionals. Protected for years from the responsibility of power, it became the farthest left in Michigan; it also developed a tradition of isolation from the rest of the State Party, which is dominated by organized labor. As the country as a whole drifted left in the late 60's, however, Ann Arbor found itself with a functioning two-party system, and the Democrats were able to elect a city government. Then the student vote arrived.

Before 1971, of course, 18 to 20-year-olds couldn't vote at all, and even older students were systematically excluded. The Ann Arbor Party had never even tried for a student base on the University of Michigan campus, which was one of the leading hotbeds in the 60's. When the students were enfranchised, therefore, they by-passed the Democrats and poured into the Human Rights Party, a radical third party based on their own traditions and organizations. Through the first half of the 70's, local politics in Ann Arbor revolved around a bitter fight for the allegiance of a left-of-center majority between the farthest left Democratic organization in Michigan and a student-based party even more radical. Predictably, the Republicans regained power in the mid-70's and have held it ever since. After a string of electoral defeats and the general cooling of the campus, the HRP disintegrated. A few of its activists remain on the local scene, but most left town.

It was in the quiet of the late 70's that the present DSA local was born. Since the mid-70's there had been a shadowy DSOC organization. It had the same faculty and professional social base as the local Democrats and

occupied itself mainly with holding regular potlucks. About 1979, this group drifted apart just as a new group was joining. This new group drew from the same social base but was younger — faculty and professionals gave way to graduate and professional students. It was therefore in a position to serve as a bridge between previously hostile forces. On the one hand, we could cultivate contacts with radical student groups, which began to grow again toward the end of the Carter years, and with the activist community that clusters around a large liberal college campus. On the other, we fit easily into the local Democratic Party. Just how easily became clear in 1981, when Lowell Peterson, one of our main activists, was elected to City Council as the *establishment* Democratic candidate.

In the Fall of 1981, after helping organize local participation in Solidarity Day, we announced ourselves publicly with a major Conference on Alternative Economics. For two days we brought several hundred people from the campus and community to hear prominent radical and labor speakers, many of them from around the state. It was from this conference that our regular mailing list started to grow, until today we send a bimonthly newsletter to about 700 local Democrats and activists, many of whom even read it. We also — through we couldn't admit it to some of our backers at the time — actually made money from the conference.

After the conference, we set up a number of study groups, each charged with producing materials to further our political work. One group set out to produce some general educational materials on socialism and economics. A second was to produce a statement on socialist feminism. A third, which never got started, was to work up some local policy proposals; the failure of the third study group is still costing us, as will be seen. The two surviving groups took very different directions. The first group quickly produced a number of drafts. It then shriveled into a tight, intense, impenetrable little work group of three people, who spent hours haggling over language. It eventually produced four pieces of lit which have since circulated nationwide. The second group, the one on socialist feminism, remained much more accessible to outsiders. It succeeded quite well as an outreach tool. At the same time, it never got down to producing the hoped-for statement. A study group, it seems, has to choose between outreach and productivity.

The study groups consumed much of our excess energy in 1982 and early 1983. We also founded our Political Action Committee in 1982 — calling SOCPAC, after NCPAC — and were frankly a bit surprised at how much local candidates *wanted* a public endorsement from the socialists. The following spring Jeff Epton, a long-time Ann Arbor activist, won a second DSA Council seat.

By the Summer of 1983, we were ready to move on. We had established good personal contacts with a wide variety of groups — not least because we had Lowell and Jeff, two genuine politicians, among our activists. At our annual planning meeting, we decided to invite the local progressive groups into a formal network. Most of them were already involved in the Coalition of Conscience, putting together the Martin Luther King March, and we joined heavily. After the March, we took the initiative bringing most of the Coalition members — the NOW, NAACP, Grey Panthers, Michigan Alliance for Disarmament — as well as some others, into a series of planning meetings. Out of these meetings came a loose structure called the Washtenaw Progressive Coalition — named for our county in the brave hope of bringing in groups from Ypsilanti, a neighboring blue-collar city — with a statement of shared concerns and an agreement to join in a number of shared activities: voter registration, candidate evaluation, skills training, policy development, and inter-group communication.

But the attempt at a formal coalition miscarried. The WPC circulated, and got answers on, a unified candidate questionnaire for the 1984 Spring election. After that, the Coalition faded, mainly for want of a unifying project. Most of the same groups worked together on a major voter registration drive last Fall, but under the auspices of a different network, the Voter Mobilization Project. The WPC did not part in any hostility, however, so it may yet come back together. And the Voter Mobilization Project, which we also helped organize, itself bridged the long-standing division between the local Democratic Party and the issue-oriented activist groups. Even though a formal coalition was premature, therefore, two of the key elements of DSA strategy — coalition-building and work within the Democratic Party — have begun to develop local traditions over the last year and a half. Without the catalytic effect of the Ann Arbor DSA, the sequence would not have proceeded so smoothly.

In the last few months, the DSA itself has gone through a major change. Surprisingly for a town with a traditionally radical university, we have never had a functioning Youth Section. Although we always kept track of the on-campus political situation, we put most of our energy "west of Division Street", in the city itself. This Fall a group of newcomers decided to start work on a campus base. Their primary activity so far has been helping the drive to organize the University clericals, a drive that met a frustratingly close defeat in December.

The Youth Section is still too new to judge. The regular local, meanwhile, expects to meet some new challenges in the months and years ahead. We are hoping to see the Democrats come back into power in this Spring's election. Then all the credibility we have built over the years will be tested when we are asked for our practical proposals. We will be in a position to suggest policies with a real possibility of seeing them enacted, and it is becoming clear how much the stillbirth of that third study group, the

one on policy, cost us. (Some readers may wish *their* locals had that problem, but they might find that power can sneak up uncomfortably fast when one isn't prepared.)

At the same time, power in our local geography doesn't necessarily lead to anything else. The Ann Arbor Democratic Party is still the farthest left in Michigan, and still isolated from the labor-dominated mainstream. Local victories have their own value, but they won't necessarily break us out of the traditional political ghetto of the left. Indeed, one of the main reasons socialists do so well in the local Democratic Party is that the Party shares some of the debilitating traditions of the socialist movement. So our success, as was noted earlier, has its ambiguities. In the next period, while we hope for a piece of a Democratic city government, we also hope to continue bridge-building. And this time, we want to bridge the widest chasm of them all, at least in our geography, between labor and non-labor progressives. This will involve making and cultivating contacts with local labor activists and doing some public education on new directions in the labor movement. We have generations of hostility and class-prejudice — on *both* sides — to overcome.

Wish us luck. rep from SOCIALIST STANDARD

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### JOIN US, AND HELP BUILD A SOCIALIST PRESENCE IN IOWA

Socialists of all people should pay their dues (or at least subscribe to our newsletter), so here's your chance.

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