

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Prairie Dog's Honor Roll for 1987

When just a pup, Prairie Dog was told by a wise old city dog, "Publicize your victories and learn from your defeats."

That old city dog's advice can be taken a step further: "Compliment your friends and learn from your enemies." Even the chronic pessimists of the left need to recognize and praise those who continue to fight for social justice, open government, and an early end to the awful eighties.

In the New Year spirit, Prairie Dog salutes the brightest lights of 1987. May their efforts give you strength for the battles to come.

Pat Gilroy

A venerable Democratic warrior who can always be counted on when traditional ideals are at stake. Gilroy spoke forcefully and eloquently against the proposal for a regressive city sales tax.

Karen Kubby

Rare on the left are those willing to risk the slings and arrows of running for public office. Karen has twice put herself on the line. This year she came within 180 votes of bringing a progressive voice to the Iowa City Council.

Mary Neuhauser

Former Mayor, currently state representative. The only elected official with the courage and conviction to publicly endorse Kubby.

Minnette Doderer

As chair of the Iowa House Ways and

Means Committee, she held the line against pressure from Democratic state senators to raise the regressive state sales tax once again.

Lolly Eggers & Charlie Drum

Library Director & Library Board President. Tireless fighters for a free and accessible public library.

Gary Sanders

A peripatetic gadfly who focused his energies into writing a bi-weekly column for the *Press-Citizen*. Sanders' commentaries, ranging from local politics to the sorry state of American education, are consistently provocative, often talked-about, and sometimes funny.

Women's Resource and Action Center

WRAC sponsored an inspiring concert by Sweet Honey in the Rock last spring.

Al Babbitt

The owner of Simmy's Restaurant gave Iowa City 4 years of good food and progressive ambiance. Simmy's was always willing to donate wall space and money for *la causa*.

Phil Nelson

Trying to do the same with Farmer's Market.

Orville Townsend

The conscience of the Iowa City School Board.

Ernie Zuber

The City Councillor everyone loved to hate. His style was exasperating but he never waffled. Zuber was the only council member who voted against 2 more years of funding for Iowa City Area Development; indeed, he was the only one who even questioned how ICAD benefits city taxpayers.

Rick Graf

Director of the Iowa Center for AIDS-Related Education (ICARE). Graf lobbies legislators, bureaucrats, and other hard cases in an uphill effort to educate Iowans about sexually transmitted diseases, the pitfalls of mandatory testing, and the need to confront our own fears and prejudices.

Riverside Theater

In a community loaded with high-priced "culture," Ron Clark and Jody Hovland showcase creative talent and innovative performances on a shoestring budget.

Gone But Not Forgotten:

Marianne Salcetti

Former muckraking editor of the *Coralville Weekly*, now on the staff of Nine to Five, the national working women's organization based in Cleveland.

Frank DePirro

Former President of AFSCME Local 183 and contributor to the *Prairie Progressive*, now working in Detroit for Teamsters for a Democratic Union.

Second Special Session Ends Battle over Tax Reform for 1987

By Jay Larson and Mary Bergstrom

In 1986, Citizens for Tax Justice, a national non-partisan organization that promotes fairer taxation, released a report that listed Iowa as one of 15 states that taxes its lowest income citizens at twice the rate of wealthiest citizens. Fortunately, the passage of the federal tax reform bill that same year gave Iowa the opportunity to leave the list of the "Filthy Fifteen" and several organizations including the Iowa Citizen Action Network (ICAN) joined with concerned citizens to lobby state legislators to pass tax reform that would finally restore a measure of fairness to Iowa's tax codes and relieve the tax burden placed upon low- and middle-income Iowans.

The majority of House members were supportive of progressive tax measures such as "coupling" with the federal tax bill (making changes in the state tax code correspond to the changes in the new federal tax system), thus closing many loopholes for the wealthy. Unfortunately, potentially progressive tax reform proposals were narrowly defeated each time in the Iowa senate, largely due to intensive lobbying of big business and wealthy Iowans who called themselves "tax relief groups."

The final one-day special session of the Iowa Legislature held in October ended the fight over tax reform for 1987. Although "coupling" with the federal bill was one of the provisions passed, this was unfortunately combined with lowering the top income tax rate to 9.98 percent. The new tax bill also provides only minimal relief for low-income Iowans while increasing taxes for Iowa's middle-income taxpayers. The big winners again are

the wealthy who will receive \$18 million more in tax giveaways in the name of improving Iowa's business climate.

This "tax relief" for upper-income Iowans is funded with money originally intended for social programs that were line-item vetoed by Governor Branstad last June. The new tax bill passed in the October special session does nothing to correct the serious inequalities in Iowa's tax codes. Iowa is still saddled with one of the most unfair tax systems in the nation, where those least able to pay are shouldering the majority of the burden.

1987 does not signify the end of the tax battle. ICAN will continue to work for progressive tax reforms starting with our 1988 legislative agenda that includes working to close loopholes; opposing an increase in sales tax, which is a regressive method of taxation that takes four times more from the income of the poorest Iowans than from wealthy individuals, and providing low-income families with a sales tax credit; improving standard deductions; ensuring that tax money goes towards badly underfunded human services programs instead of more tax cuts for the super rich; and working for a simplified state tax system through a postcard method where Iowans pay state taxes as a percentage of their federal taxes. •

Jay Larson and Mary Bergstrom are staff members of the Iowa Citizen Action Network, a statewide consumer organization representing over 150,000 Iowans and 100 member organizations.

Kubby Comes Close

By Jeff Cox

Following Prairie Dog's advice, I have decided to learn some lessons from Karen Kubby's near miss in last month's city council election. Here is what I have learned:

1. Socialists can compete in electoral politics. Karen's Socialist views were emphasized more than once in the *Daily Iowan*. And why not? It was news. Many people assumed this would lead to an overwhelming victory for her opponent given his other advantages, such as a guaranteed landslide among the 25% or so of the city council voters who are registered Republicans.

Instead Karen got 48.4% of the vote, lost by only 179 votes, and carried one precinct 3-1 and another 2-1. A large majority of registered Democrats voted for Karen. When socialists run on issues that people care about and get the message across, Democratic and Independent voters will respond (and who knows, maybe even some Republicans).

2. Progressive candidates can raise money. Karen raised over \$4600 in donations of \$50 or less, apparently outspending an opponent who had the backing of every property developer and banker in town. Iowa City's \$50 per contribution limit prevents wealthy individuals from dominating local politics with \$500 and \$1000 contributions. Karen's fundraising success shows that candidates for city council need not commit their own small savings (if they have any) to run for city council.

3. Door-to-door politics makes a difference. Two of Karen's best precincts, 8 and 19, were targeted by her campaign for voter registration drives. When compared to 1985, turnout increased 100% in 8 and 50% in 19. If we can build on that success and develop a group of committed grass-roots activists who know how to campaign, we will be able to change the character of the city council in a very few years. •

For Anti-War Messages, *Platoon's* Realism No Match for *Full Metal Jacket's* Irony

By Jae Retz

Is it possible to depict war on film without glorifying it? Of recent attempts, *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket*, and *Hamburger Hill*, only one has succeeded.

Platoon, anti-war but pro-soldier, is the feel-good movie about Vietnam. *Hamburger Hill* ("War at its worst. Men at their best.") is a war movie, not an anti-war movie. Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*, an all-out assault on the notion of men trying to "be all that they can be," attacks both war and the process of making young men into warriors.

However, Kubrick's pervasive irony confuses some moviegoers and reviewers, causing many to dismiss the anti-war statement of the film. The most damning review charges that "The characters remain dehumanized, the audience remains desensitized and Vietnam has never seemed farther away" (*The Nation*). Kubrick's highly stylized treatment poses the question: Must an anti-war film be a straightforward war-is-hell presentation, which invariably enhances the heroism?

In "Notes on 'Camp'" (1964) Susan Sontag sees moral seriousness and irony as the two forces of "modern sensibility." These two forces have merged in Stanley Kubrick's work, often producing a kind of camp with a social conscience. Beneath Kubrick's "coldness" rages a moral fire, and both elements combine to create the Kubrick style that harkens back to Bertolt Brecht's theater of alienation, where viewers are purposely distanced from the drama so that their critical faculties aren't swallowed up in the artistic illusion. Irony then becomes a weapon of the moral conscience.

Music is an important key to the attitude towards war in these three movies. Philip Glass's score for *Hamburger Hill* achieves the maximum heroics that his minimalist music will allow. *Platoon*, "Vietnam As It Really Was," (*Time*) underscores its realism with background music of songs from that era, even integrating the singing of a Motown hit into the story. But then comes Samuel Barber's "Adagio for Strings" accompanying the departure of the soldiers and civilians from the burned-out

**"I know a man who
made an anti-war
movie. A good one.
When it was shown in
his home town, army
enlistment went up
600 percent."
Ely Cross in *The Stuntman***

village. This is a hauntingly beautiful scene to both eyes and ears, but what is the point? War is adagio? The shock of what has just transpired — a harrowing demonstration of how My Lai could have happened — is submerged in the beauty of sound and image. We have left the world of realism and entered the realm of pure aestheticism, but one without irony and therefore without any condemnation of war.

At the two climactic moments of Kubrick's movie he uses electronic sounds that seem to come out of the darkest recesses of human nature. These are juxtaposed to popular

songs from the Vietnam era, whose lyrics contrast ironically with the scenes they accompany. "You've been a messin' where you should'na been a messin'," sings Nancy Sinatra as a Vietnamese prostitute approaches two GIs. Our emotions are repeatedly held at bay; how involved in the fates of these soldiers can we get with the sounds of "Surfin' Bird" and "Wooly Bully" hammering away at us? Kubrick delights in forcing us to deal with clashing contrasts: the fun nonsense of these party songs, and the not-so-fun nonsense of the war. Astonishing that the species that can compose the former could also orchestrate the latter.

If Kubrick's method works, our critical attention is able to focus on what he is saying about war and young warriors with this film. To the strains of "Hello Vietnam," a sappy ode to American involvement in the war, the movie opens with marine volunteers being shorn of their hair: the first step towards loss of humanity. The dehumanization process is left to the obscene tongue of the Drill Instructor. (Kubrick may have been inspired by Oscar Wilde's line: "As long as war is regarded as wicked, it will always have its fascination. When it is looked upon as vulgar, it will cease to be popular.")

[Any reader still hoping to see the movie should skip this next paragraph for I must give away the ending.]

The killer course is too successful. The killing can't wait for the war. The trainee kills the trainer and then himself in boot camp. The killing irony continues in Vietnam, where

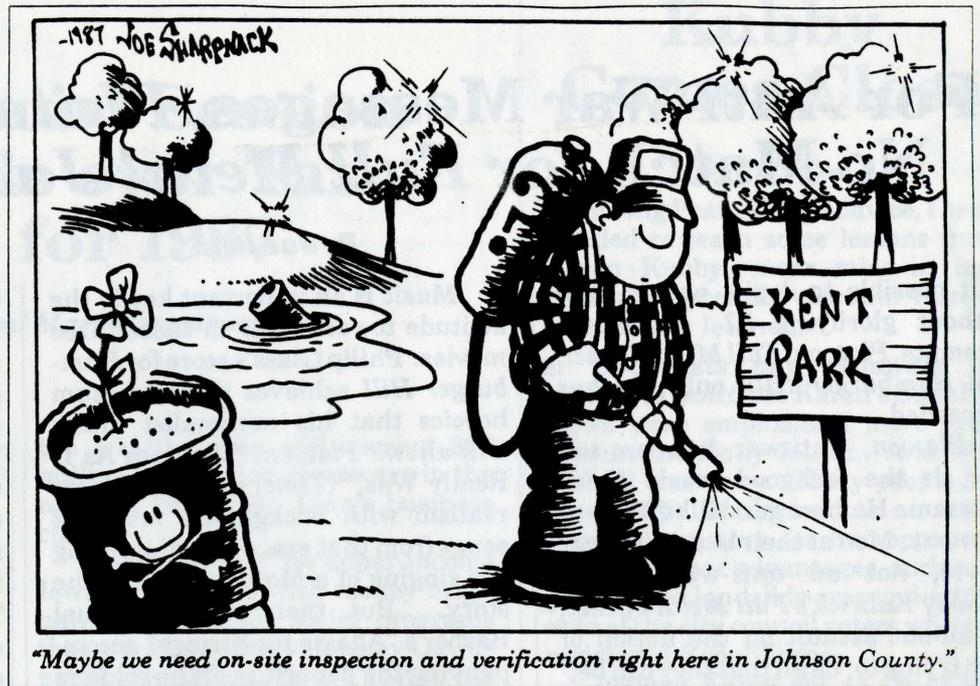
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Anti-War

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the main battle is fought not in the natural jungle, but in an urban jungle of partly demolished, endlessly burning buildings that could have been Detroit or Watts as easily as Hue. It is Kubrick's inferno. War in hell. What happens can be seen as America's involvement in Vietnam in miniature: lost, sniped at by an invisible enemy, sending out one soldier after another to die in a war without fronts that swallows up the entire populace. The invisible enemy turns out to be a girl. The protagonist of the movie, who wears "Born to Kill" on his helmet and a peace insignia on his jacket, fulfills his destiny as a marine with a coup de grace to the mortally wounded girl. The movie ends with the surviving marines returning to camp singing the decidedly unheroic Mouseketeers' song.

One critic of Full Metal Jacket wonders "why a man would devote more than three years of his life to making a war movie in which violent death isn't meant to move us" (*The Nation*). I recently visited the Vietnam memorial in Washington, DC: vets in rag-tag uniforms looking like lost members of a motorcycle gang,



people making name rubbings, taking pictures, or placing solemn reminders at the foot of the wall. The thought was inescapable that while we grieved and remembered, up on the hill the good ol' boys in blue suits, red ties, and white faces could start another war. In Kubrick's vision of war our minds are forced to respond before our hearts; war can move us only to ridicule and revulsion, not to higher enlistments. •

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