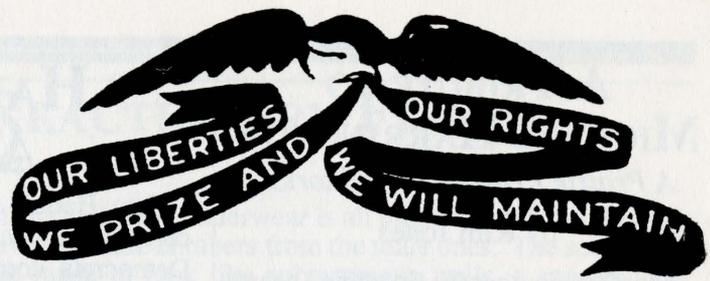


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



Vol. 4, #3 Spring 1989

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

KEEPING HOPE ALIVE: THE RAINBOW IN IOWA

Commentary by Prairie Dog

February 25 was old home day for Jesse Jackson supporters and Rainbow activists across the state. Over 200 Iowans of different colors, classes, creeds, ages, and union affiliations regrouped at a Des Moines high school to reminisce about past glories and to set an agenda for the nineties.

Many scenes that day represented vintage Jackson/Rainbow politics. Jesse Taylor roamed the main entrance, shaking hands like a Vegas casino greeter. Jay Howe & John Norris conferred in a quiet corner. The Mark Curtis Defense Fund set up a table, Democratic regulars bought Socialist buttons, and people who had fought tooth & nail over rules, resolutions, and delegates, now hugged each other with the warmth of old comrades. That the Jackson crowd is no longer viewed as a ragtag bunch of radicals was evidenced by the large number of state officials in attendance.

Jo Ann Zimmerman kept her remarks brief as she visited each district caucus. The Lieutenant-Governor praised everyone's commitment and emphasized the importance of coalitions in politics.

Attorney-General Tom Miller held his smile in place as people peppered him with questions about his stand on reproductive rights. Asked if his position in favor of a constitutional amendment against abortion was firm, Miller replied that he'd have to defer further judgment until the Supreme Court reviewed the Missouri case. Pressed further, Miller stated, "I am opposed to criminalization...for the woman."

Gubernatorial hopeful John Chrystal wasn't sighted in the flesh, but his visage gazed paternally from a full-page ad in the program.

The always cordial State Democratic Chair Bonnie Campbell was even friendlier than usual as she made a brief appearance in the role of candidate for attorney-general.

Campbell is wooing the Rainbow in an effort to overcome past offenses, especially her "let's all get behind Dukakis" letter to delegates just before last year's Democratic district conventions. Campbell's attempts at rapprochement have included lending a hand to Willie Glanton in her unsuccessful Des Moines City Council race (House Speaker Don Avenson also helped out).

Another Attorney-General aspirant strolling the corridors was Kasey Kincaid, a young Des Moines lawyer who campaigned for Gephardt. One Rainbow member, dismayed by Kincaid's weak response to some issue-oriented questions, dubbed him "just another pretty face." But Kincaid has al-



ready won over many of the Iowa Citizen Action Network activists, and he seemed more at ease than Campbell among the convention's varied citizenry.

Flag and family were featured more prominently than at past Rainbow events. Some grumbled that kicking off the proceedings with a prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance was a cave-in to the God-and country scam of the Republican Party. One member defended recitation of the Pledge as long as the final line is adjusted to "with liberty and justice for some."

The general assembly was uneventful, except for a mild rebuke to the 4th District's

perceived primacy within the Rainbow's power structure. A challenge to the district's elected delegation alleged that the absence of "young, elderly, disabled, or gay/lesbian" representatives violated affirmative action rules. "Sounds awfully ominous," deadpanned Tom Mann, the convention chair. The challenge was rebuffed, but the slap on the wrist to the Des Moines faction was duly noted.

During a forum on how to win elections, State Senator Elaine Szymoniak announced that "people don't think about issues in a campaign." This was disputed by panel member Karen Kubby, fresh from her issues-oriented election to the Iowa City City Council. Szymoniak proceeded to squirm through several questions and comments about the minimum wage legislation she opposed.

Only three people represented the Rainbow from the 6th District. They enlivened the first meeting of the newly-elected Executive Board by alerting the members to the dangers of homosexuality and the attendant political peril of endorsing gay rights. Such endorsements would "knock off 10%" in any 6th District election, the board was informed. Jaws dropped as the three explained that tolerance is okay, but "what's wrong is wrong," followed by a lengthy list of explicit examples.

When talk like this surfaced at past Rainbow gatherings, it often came from the Black church-going community. This time around, African-Americans were the first and the loudest to defend gay and lesbian members and their right to be free of discrimination based on sexual orientation.

The true impact of the Jackson campaign is only now being fully realized. Look to the horizon: the Rainbow is on its way to becoming a genuine force in Iowa politics.

"Prairie Dog" lives in Johnson County.

A TRIBUTE TO MICHAEL HARRINGTON

A Prairie Progressive Editorial

by Kim Jones

I don't remember the first time I heard of Michael Harrington. It must have been sometime in the early 70s, during my "I'm-just-curious-about-socialism" phase. I remember an interview with him at that time on National Public Radio, when he was still head of the Socialist Party. (I still have the notes to that interview somewhere...).

Then around the '80 election, I had my first chance to hear him speak in person, here in Iowa City (ironically, in the auditorium of the Business College). Now, I don't want to make him seem like a guru, but well, it was something of a revelation for me. Afterward, I was "high", even telling my apolitical friends about this newly-"discovered" political position (& passion) of mine. (I still have the notes from that talk, too).

Michael Harrington has been for me, and I think a good many people, first and foremost, a teacher. (How many dog-eared copies of his book *Socialism* are there in the homes of North American lefties?). In an era when not a few American progressives have decided that life is a bit more convenient for them on the other side of the political spectrum, Michael has not given up. His energy and his commitment in the service of the politics of decency are great gifts to the rest of us. I especially appreciate his being comfortable with the ambiguities of late twentieth-century socialism, for sectarian certainty is a luxury we can't afford if we are to build a mass movement. Though changes and shifts in socialism worldwide have called into question long-held views on the transition away from capitalism, the basic concept of socialism, justice, is sound. Call it "faith", call it political maturity, Michael Harrington has been there everytime.

Sometimes one could feel cheated, being a socialist in America. If Michael were a citizen of any other industrial society, he would be a leader of the loyal opposition, if not head of government. But with Michael Harrington as teacher, we're ready to keep on keepin' on. Keep the faith! And thanks, Michael.

Kim Jones, steward, AFSCME Local 12.

HARKIN CASTS LONELY VOTE AGAINST CONTRA AID . . .

Tom Harkin remained loyal to his constituents once again on April 13, as Democrats compromised all around him on the contra aid issue. 89 Senators voted to give each and every contra \$6000 to live on during the next year. Harkin joined 8 others in voting no.

Tom Harkin is in the fight of his political life in the 1990 Senatorial election. In a state which has never re-elected a Democrat to the U.S. Senate, how do we keep Tom Harkin? There is no magic to it, and no secret: with a competent campaign combined with an outpouring of grassroots support

and local organization. You can help right now by calling Joe Cacciatore at 337-8900 and volunteering to help with the Citizens for Harkin grassroots fundraising campaign on May 23rd.

In keeping with Harkin's populist commitments, his campaign is trying to enroll as many small contributors in Iowa as possible to help counter-balance the influence of the big PACs and wealthy individual contributors. But it will only work if you pick up the phone, and volunteer to help (or send a check, even a small one — 328 S. Clinton • Iowa City, Iowa 52240).

— Jeff Cox

. . . While Nagle falls in with the "bipartisan" majority

In the House, 152 Democrats joined 157 Republicans in agreeing to send \$65 million in non-military aid to the Contras, now based in Honduras.

Though 110 members of the House (99 Democrats) voted "no," Dave Nagle was among a group of liberals who voted for this compromise.

The liberals' rationale was: 1.) There is no military aid in the package, 2.) this was a "bipartisan agreement" between the White House and Congressional leaders and therefore George Bush now "owes" the Democrats.

This money, huge amounts per person by Central American standards, will keep the Contras intact. (and, of course, some of this money will wind up as weaponry)

As for George Bush "owing" the

Democrats on other issues — minimum wage, etc. — we shall see.

Neal Smith, Iowa's other Democrat in the House, voted "no". Barney Frank of Massachusetts brilliantly stated the case against the aid during the House debate: "I am opposed to this package, but I think a colleague was a little bit too harsh when he said the President was doing this instead of helping the homeless. The President said he would help the homeless, and he is. I am pleased to see him following through. I had not expected the largest federally funded homeless shelter to be in Honduras. Perhaps the President, having decided to shelter the homeless in Honduras, will think the principle might be extended to the US."

— Gary Sanders

KUBBY BEGINS OFFICE HOURS

Your city council member Karen Kubby is holding regular office hours, as promised during her campaign. She will be in the downstairs lounge of the Senior Center (Washington Str. entrance) from 4-6 pm every Thursday.

Let Karen hear from you. As a lonely voice on a council with a clear right-wing majority, she needs all the suggestions and advice she can get. You can also leave a message for her at 338-1321, or write to her at Box 924, Iowa City, 52242.

R.I.P.

ABBIE HOFFMAN

"The pure products of
America go crazy."

-- William
Carlos
Williams

OSCAR PICKS NIXED AS REACTIONARY FLICKS

by Jae Retz

The Academy Awards Ceremony was a fitting end to a year of inferior movies. The nominees are worth watching, though, for what they reflect about attitudes in our society. What do they have to say about the State of the Nation?

My favorite of the 1988 nominees is *The Accidental Tourist*. For one thing, any movie without a car chase should get an automatic two stars for that alone. But more important, the characters who drive in this movie often can't find where they're going, even though they've lived in the same house in the same city well into four decades. The other nominees — *Mississippi Burning*, *Dangerous Liaisons*, *Working Girl*, & *Rain Man* — had more pretensions about where they were going.

Mississippi Burning, a movie about the Civil Rights Movement that gives blacks a backseat role and glorifies the FBI, makes you hate the right people, but like the wrong ones. Even George Will saw that the movie "panders to conservative appetites."

Running across the top of *Dangerous Liaisons*'s full-page ads in the New York Times is a quote from David Ansen: "Nasty, Decadent Fun." For me the fun stopped when the Vicomte (Malkovich) stole into the bed of the fifteen-year-old virgin. There is no stated reason for the way he is; he is merely the male, the designated hunter in the procreation game. His partner in sexual intrigue, the Marquise (Close), operates from the framework of the oppressed: "I was born to dominate your sex and avenge my own." Her actions are given a cause, his not; yet when he falls victim to love and a dueling sword he gains audience sympathy. She is booed and hissed to the end. The female equivalent to a rakish, swaggering playboy has always been plain and simple a slut. Some things never change.

Mike Nichols, the director of *Working Girl*, chose Melanie Griffith for the role because "you can see into her feelings." He lets us see a lot more. What does the topless vacuuming scene have to do with her climb up the corporate ladder? Previews of the movie highlight the scene of her telling Harrison Ford "I have a head for business, and a bod for sin"; and for vacuuming, she should add.

This "Rocky-like" fable for the pink-collar set" (New York Times) capitalizes on America's fascination with the women's movement. (*Alien* was a landmark movie for such profitfeminism. The powers behind the production — otherwise known as "men" — determined that turning the male lead into a female would produce higher box office numbers. So Sigourney Weaver was hired to conquer the beast, but not before showing off her bikini underwear.)

In *Working Girl*, Melanie Griffith is also shown in her underwear before she triumphs over the beast, played, ironically, by Sigourney Weaver — who again shows off her underwear. This movie has inspired lines like: "With working girls like Tess, America ain't down yet."

(Time) But the underwear is all that distinguishes the coniving female climbers from the male ones. The secretaries are made to look like subterranean trolls, a species unto itself; Tess couldn't have done it without Harrison Ford from the Temple of Dow; and all we really know that she'll do differently in her own little Wall Street office is not make her secretary get her coffee. Hell, even Phyllis Schlafly saw to the reactionary, "post-feminist" heart of this movie.

Don't look to these three films for progress on the racism and sexism fronts. *Rain Man*, though, the winner and crowd favorite, may be, in its way, the most insidious of all.

Dustin Hoffman's performance in *Rain Man* overpowers everything else in the movie, so much so that we leave the theatre believing we have learned something about autism. But what is there to learn about this affliction besides compassion for its victims? Science knows neither the cause nor the cure. Many families suffer the consequences of autism (4,000 in Iowa), but "perhaps no more than 15 alive today" in the United States have the savant powers of the Rain Man figure, even more perplexing to the medical establishment: "The savant syndrome is a mystery within the enigma of autism." (Newsweek)

In the *Rain Man*, the Academy and country have enthusiastically embraced a truly unique character, with a problem that passeth all understanding. So the myth of a compassionate America has been reaffirmed. A movie about an AIDS victim, though, could at least inform us about cause and prevention, if not the cure. Homelessness in America is a problem that doesn't require scientific inquiry. Think what a like outpouring of sympathy and box office dollars could do for the homeless. But two presidents now would have us believe that homelessness is also caused by some unknown mental imbalance.

To an interviewer's criticism of his passive character in *The Accidental Tourist*, William Hurt replied: "What's wrong with the heroism of a man who has traveled 2 inches? That 2 inches is very profound." And at this point in our history maybe that's as much as we can ask of this Ship of State.

Democratic Socialists of America

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Iowa City DSA local dues 1989 (both *PP* and other mailings) (\$10) _____

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Name, address, and phone: _____

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Iowa City Democratic Socialists of America LABOR HISTORY WORKSHOP

May 6, 1989.
Admission Free

Iowa City Recreation Center
220 S. Gilbert

Keynote Speaker

Michael Harrington
National Co-Chair of DSA, Author of *The Other America*

Program

- 1:30 Opening Remarks: Roberta Till-Retz, UI Labor Center
1:30 - 2:00 "Solidarity Forever" - Labor Songs
Lynda Bishop, Pete Fisher, Roberta Till-Retz
2:00 "Packinghouse Workers in the 1930's & 1980's"
Chair: Shel Stromquist, UI Dept. Of History
Speaker: Peter Rachleff, Macalester College, Author of *Black Labor in Richmond, 1865-1890*
3:15 "Iowa City Sesquicentennial Panel" - The History of AFSCME Local 12, Iowa City
Chair: Jean Martin, past secretary, Local 12
Moderator: Kim Jones
Speakers: Milo Palmer, Harold Stager, Frank Person

Keynote Address

- 4:30 "Building Support For Labor" The American Solidarity Movement"
Chair: Anne Corbi Bowman, Davenport DSA
Speaker: Michael Harrington, National Co-Chair of DSA
6:00-7:30 **Reception for Michael Harrington**
proceeds to Iowa City DSA/*Prairie Progressive*
Home of Jae Retz & Roberta Till-Retz,
600 Manor Drive, Iowa City
(off Park Road via Normandy Drive) \$5.00

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Iowa City, IA 52240

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE is edited by members of the Iowa City Local of The Democratic Socialists of America, 112 S. Dodge, Iowa City, IA 52240. Editor for this issue: Jeff Cox. Each article represents the views of the author, and not those of the editors or DSA. We welcome articles and responses to articles written from any point of view whatsoever. Subscription per calendar year: \$5. Contributions of money are always welcome.

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