

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT



Fall 1989

SUMMER OF '89: SEASON OF LOSS

Happy is the country which requires no heroes, said Berthold Brecht.

If America ever reaches the realm of hero-less happiness, we will have the memories of Dixon Terry, I.F. Stone, Michael Harrington, and Mickey Leland to remind us of how we got there. Some of us will also recall Huey P. Newton.

I was living in Oakland when they let Newton out of jail almost 20 years ago.

A friend of mine had just been on page one of the San Francisco Chronicle for refusing to take the oath of induction. B.B. King sang "Everyday I Have The Blues" at the Showcase Lounge on Telegraph and 30th.

Bobby Seale was shipped to Chicago, bound and gagged in a federal courtroom. The west coast version of Woodstock erupted at Altamont, where the Stones took the Dead's advice to hire Hells' Angels as security guards.

LIFE splashed the twisted stare of Charles Manson across the nation's newsracks. Suburban hippies flocked to Jamaica, returning with dreadlocks, Rasta accents, and visions of apocalypse in the streets and salvation in their hearts.

Richard Nixon promised to withdraw from Vietnam but decided that maybe there was a way to win the war after all.

Oakland went wild when Huey was sprung. A huge crowd gathered around him at an impromptu press conference within an hour of his release. In an inspired gesture, Newton leaped onto the hood of a car and ripped off his shirt. He was in superb shape, unbowed by his long stretch in the California penal system.

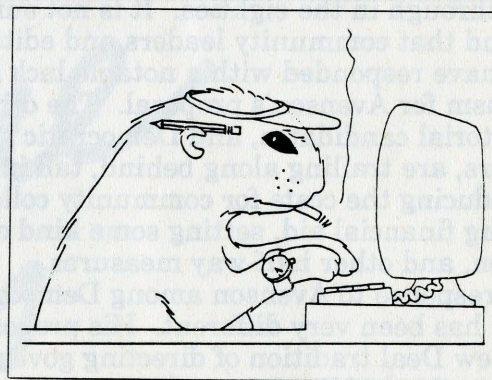
Huey's combination of physical bravery, moral courage, and deft use of symbolism was unsurpassed. With Eldridge Cleaver supplying rhetorical pyrotechnics, Newton and the Black Panthers laid bare the brutal contradictions of Ronald Reagan's California and Nixon's America. They were icons of pride and self-respect during a time of terrible alienation.

Most pundits will now dismiss Newton as a thug, an opportunist, a relic. Abbie Hoffman was similarly shrugged off for his showboating, his seemingly quixotic struggles, his less-than-noble death. That's often the trouble with heroes. Their imperfections tend to grow as their achievements fade, especially when values change.

Commitment, to say the least, is not a value of high priority in the 80's. Newton spoke truth to power. He put his life on the line for what he believed. That kind of commitment is on the verge of extinction in this age of distance, irony, and detachment.

Huey's commitment shouldn't embarrass us, nor should his faults. Add him to the list of heroes our country still requires.

— David Leshtz



Prairie Dog is on vacation...

The Prairie Progressive
encourages you to vote
for **Orville Townsend**
in the Sept. 12
Iowa City School Board Election

AVENSON SETS PROGRESSIVE AGENDA WITH TUITION PROPOSAL

by Jeff Cox

Don Avenson has set the progressive agenda for the Democratic gubernatorial campaign with his proposal to abolish tuition at our state universities. Avenson proposes to use increases in state revenue to phase out tuition entirely, beginning with a 25% cut in his first year as governor. His scheme is entirely dependent upon a continuation of economic growth and a healthy tax base in the state, since he promises no new taxes to fund it and also promises to maintain full state support for university operations.

Nonetheless, Avenson's proposal represents a major breakthrough in public debate about tuition. Iowa has witnessed a terrible failure of leadership in the 1980's on the issue of accessibility to college education. With the exception of Dr. Percy Harris of the Board of Regents, it is difficult to think of a single person in a position of power and responsibility in Iowa who spoke out against the crushing series of tuition increases which the Regents pushed through in the eighties. It is not surprising to find that community leaders and editorial writers have responded with a notable lack of enthusiasm for Avenson's proposal. The other gubernatorial candidates, and Democratic state legislators, are trailing along behind, talking about reducing the costs for community colleges, increasing financial aid, setting some kind of cap on tuition, and other half-way measures.

The response to Avenson among Democratic activists has been very different. His proposal is in the New Deal tradition of directing government benefits to the middle class and the poor together, avoiding the social, moral, and political disadvantages of means-tested programs which are targeted to the truly needy. Although this approach has been declared obsolete by most of the Democratic leadership, it is still extremely popular at the grass-roots level. At a time when a college degree is becoming a virtual badge of citizenship, many Democratic activists believe that the right to a higher education should be treated as a citizenship right, like a pension or a high school education. This can only be done with a non-means-

tested entitlement.

Democrats in Iowa are hungry for the progressive message embodied in Avenson's tuition proposal. Even liberals who are skeptical of free tuition recognize a progressive proposal when they see it, and they appear to be flocking to Avenson in Johnson County, where support for high tuition is probably more widespread, and deeply felt, than anywhere else in the state.

Don Avenson deserves credit for setting a progressive agenda on education. But what about other issues? What about his record on taxes and civil liberties? Tune in to future issues of The Prairie Progressive for more...

CALENDAR

Sept. 9 Democratic Third District Workshop
Iowa City Recreation Center

10-11 AM

What Should We Do About Crime?

Speakers: John Roehrick, Vice-Chair, Iowa
Democratic party

Mark Lambert, Iowa Civil Liberties Union

11-12 PM

Workshops on Prison, Parole & Probation,
Citizens' Rights, Victims' Rights

2-3 PM

Progressive Taxes: The Democratic Agenda
Speakers: Mark Smith, Iowa Federation of
Labor

State Representative David Osterberg

3-5 PM

Workshops on State Party Programs

Sept. 16 Johnson County Democrats Annual Fall BBQ
featuring The Next Governor of Iowa.

6 PM, Izaak Walton League, Iowa City
\$8 Adults/\$20 Family/\$4 Students & Seniors

Labor Day Greetings

Iowa City Federation of Labor
AFL-CIO

The Iowa City Federation of Labor consists of 17 affiliates to the AFL-CIO. Separate locals serve the needs of their members and elect delegates to the city-fed body.

The Iowa City Federation of Labor participates in community service, labor history commemoration, labor movement advocacy, and political action.

*Prairie
Lights*

15 S. Dubuque St.
Iowa City, Iowa
(319) 337-2681
Open 9 am daily

STOCK MARKET SOARS AS IBP POLLUTES THE IOWA RIVER

by Mark Henderson

Very serious and disturbing evidence has been uncovered showing gross violations of water quality standards at the IBP plant in Columbus Junction, Iowa. In addition, there has been virtually NO enforcement action by the environmental protection division of our Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

The DNR has allowed the IBP plant to dump intolerable amounts of waste into the Iowa and Cedar Rivers since the plant opened in 1986. Ammonia and chlorine levels in excess of allowable limits and above acute toxicity levels have been dumped continually and constantly. All of this has occurred with the full knowledge and approval of top DNR personnel.

Currently, a new permit has been submitted for public review by the agency. The permit sets the allowable limits for pollutants that can be discharged into public waterways. The DNR is not protecting those water resources with the outrageous amounts of ammonia that are allowed to be discharged in the plant's effluent.

Chapter 61, page 7, of the Iowa code states specifically that waterways should be free from narrative criteria, including oil, grease, debris, scum and other floating materials. In public testimony, numerous individuals who use the Iowa River spoke of grease and hoghair collecting on fishing lines and duck decoy lines. Some spoke of floating pig parts in the river.

In addition, known violations have not been reported or filed by

the DNR when they should have been. Every test sample of fecal coliform taken during the September 1988 water quality study showed that the company was in violation, yet no administrative action was taken, even though I personally reported this fact to DNR officials and asked that action be taken.

The "IBP-Columbus Junction Study" of September 1988 was an excellent collection of data and information and the study's authors should be commended. This document can and should be used in setting new waste load allocation levels. The chemistry data shows quite clearly that IBP is in violation of Iowa and Federal law in regards to ammonia discharges.

This study also shows that severe degradation has already occurred because of IBP's discharges. Effluent toxicity tests showed complete mortality for test species. Virtually all mayflies disappeared downstream of IBP's effluent as evidenced by benthic macroinvertebrate studies collected with kicknets and artificial substrates. In addition, the biotic index noted in the study showed significant impact on aquatic life with water quality being seriously degraded.

I believe it is imperative that this new permit be challenged at the public hearing to be held on September 26th at Columbus Junction High School, 7:30 p.m.. If you would like more information, please write to me at 4 Manor Dr. C-6, Eldridge, IA 52748, or call at (319) 285-4275.

— Mark Henderson is active in CARP (Citizens Against River Pollution).

POISON AIR IN IOWA CITY MAKES SHELLER GLOBE A STOCK TO WATCH

by Joe Bolkcom

Iowa City recently captured the distinguished honor of being home to a company that is 89th in the country for the release of a single toxic chemical into the environment. In 1987, Sheller-Globe Co. emitted into the air, 535,000 pounds of methylene chloride (a probable human carcinogen).

At a July 31 meeting on Community Right to Know and toxic chemical emissions, attended by more than 100 people, Iowa Department of Natural Resources Administrator Allan Stokes explained that we don't know what the impact of methylene chloride is on human health or the environment. Stokes said more study was needed, and that the state was presently undertaking such study.

Meanwhile, Sheller-Globe decided not to come and take responsibility for the poison it is spewing out. Many questions remain unanswered. However, a local public meeting has been requested to review Sheller-Globe expansion plans. No date has been set for this meeting. For more info contact Environmental Advocates 337-9109/338-8017.

— Joe Bolkcom works with Environmental Advocates.

SPIKE LEE'S RIOT THING — WAKE UP AMERICA!

by Jae Retz

"Whoever controls the language, the images, controls the race." Allen Ginsberg

"To Hollywood, black is death at the box office." — Spike Lee

Gotham City is a fictitious setting, Batman a comic book hero, and the time of action decades ago. Bedford-Stuyvesant is real, the time is this summer, and the unheroic people in *Do The Right Thing* are acting out America's most pressing problem — racism. Visually, *Do The Right Thing* is even more exciting than *Batman*, the music is every bit as good, the humor is better, it's much less violent (kids under 12 can't see *Batman* in Britain), and, last but not most, it's relevant. But *Batman* is breaking box office records, and if you didn't see *Do The Right Thing* the few weeks it was in Des Moines, you'll have to go to Chicago. You won't see it in this one reel town.

"Someone has to force America to come to grips with the problem of racism." — Spike Lee

Do The Right Thing has come under attack for failing to show realistically black inner-city life, and for inciting to violence.

The movie's ending quotes are the main reason for the latter charge; in this movie words really do matter. The story's action begins with a severe stutterer holding a photograph of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, and straining mightily but in vain to tell us something very important about these men. The scene is a powerful nonverbal statement on where the legacy of our splendid black orators stands today after a quarter century of empty white rhetoric and eight years under a nattering nabob of positivism.

Quotes from these two black leaders roll on the screen just before the final credit, and are, even more than the climactic violence, the chief cause for the controversy raging around this movie. While the quote from King rejects violence as "impractical" and "immoral," the one from Malcolm X asserts that violence as self-defense is "intelligence." Since the quotes appear in this order, many moviegoers assume that Lee has given Malcolm X the final word figuratively as well. Merely reversing the quotes would have lessened the controversy.

"They're gonna talk about it. It's thought provoking, and it's entertaining." — Spike Lee.

Do The Right Thing presents the hottest day of the year in the life of a Black and Hispanic section of Brooklyn. At the center is a pizzeria owned by Sal, who refuses to join the white flight from the neighborhood. By the end of the day a young black man is killed by a white cop and Sal's pizzeria is burned to the ground. (Blame Central States that I have to give away the ending before you've seen it).

Spike Lee — writer, director, and star of this work of art — plays the pivotal role of Mookie, the pizza delivery man. From Martin to Malcolm to Mookie — that alone should give you a clue as to how menacing the tone of this movie is.

"Nature is; art means." — Goethe

No, it is not a gritty, depressing picture of inner-city life. The colors are too rich and vibrant. The young black characters all seem to be sporting the latest aerobic fashions. This is a very upbeat movie about a grave issue. And there are no drugs. But this movie is about racism, an affliction fatal to more young black Americans than drugs. Nor are there any clear cut villains. Even Pino, Sal's older son, and the most vocally racist figure in the movie, is given a human touch when he confesses that his cultural heroes are all black. Lee reserves his most sympathetic portrayal for Sal, the white boss, and the very perpetrator of the violence.

Underneath this highly entertaining and very human surface, though, lurk unstated the very real products of racism in our society — unemployment and the loss of family. Sal and his sons are a family, and a Korean family owns the flourishing corner grocery store, but the black family unit is missing. There is also every indication that Mookie is the only male African-American in the movie with a job.

"That's racism — economic and political power behind bigotry." — Spike Lee

Mookie is trapped in America's rapidly growing, grossly underpaid, and mainly non-white service sector. So when he throws the trash can

through the pizzeria window he symbolically destroys the institution of dead-end employment (Sal had just promised him "a job here for life."). But Mookie also destroys his very livelihood. The tragedy in *Do The Right Thing* goes well beyond the death of Radio Raheem and the destruction of Sal's pride and property. The last vestige of black/white integration in the neighborhood is lost, and with it the possibility of community, in a futile, suicidal act. "Fight the power" is the movie's theme song, but Sal and his pizzeria were not the power. The true power is nowhere near the brownstone flats; it's up-town in the glass towers.

"I just want people to think." — Spike Lee

Do The Right Thing is now a sinister polemic whipping its audience into a frenzy. We feel the futility and the tragedy more strongly than we feel the violence. Lee repeatedly breaks the tension with consummate skill: for example, a tilted close-up camera gives a serious nose-to-nose confrontation a comical touch, and at one point representatives of all the local ethnic groups step in turn before the camera to rattle off the going ethnic slurs used against each other. Lee wants us to think about racism in America, and once you see this movie, you will.

"I've been blessed the the opportunity to express the views of Black people who otherwise don't have access to power and the media." — Spike Lee

"Accountability" and "responsibility" are two of the favorite words being tossed at Lee in the wake of this movie's controversy. Where is the outcry that all those movies with monosyllabic heroes and rapid fire weapons are inciting to murder and car chases? And who is ultimately accountable for the fact that this movie had to be made? Who is letting America's black inner cities die?

Since graduating from film school in 1983, Spike Lee has made astounding progress as a filmmaker in this his third movie. He is that rare artist who can at once provoke and delight his audience. In *Do The Right Thing* he uses the medium for his message to the very hilt.



MICHAEL HARRINGTON 1928-1989

Mike
HUKVE
Huk-Kawpaki

Socialism is the full meaning of democracy. If you follow democracy to its logical conclusion, you become a socialist.

— Michael Harrington
May 6, 1989, Iowa City

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

112 S. Dodge
Iowa City, IA 52240

BULK RATE
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 006
IOWA CITY, IA

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.