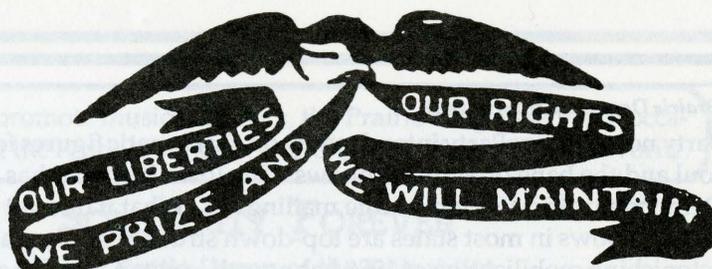


# THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



May 1991

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

## WAKE-UP CALLS RING FOR DEMOCRATS: WILL ANYONE ANSWER? BY PRAIRIE DOG

In the last few months, Iowa liberals, left-wingers, laborers, interest-group activists, and party regulars have been frantically phoning and faxing each other across the state. Ranging from mildly frustrated to totally fed-up, all are voicing variations on the same theme:

The Democratic Party has become cautious to the point of timidity.

The Party no longer stands for fairness and social justice.

Thanks to the PACs and the need for big money, the Democratic and Republican parties are almost indistinguishable.

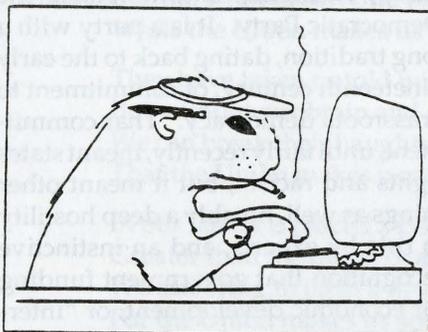
America's two-party system stifles progressive change.

Most of the discontent stems from the perception that an opposition party no longer exists. The Democratic leadership tried to avoid debate on the Persian Gulf crisis. It resisted Tom Harkin's attempt to challenge the Gramm-Rudman budget. Party leaders ran and hid from Patrick Moynihan's plan to cut the Social Security payroll tax. They have grown too meek to demand accountability for the Iran-Contra scandal, perhaps the greatest subversion of democracy in American history.

Dissaffected Democrats as well as non-voters yearn for a way to give their time and energy without feeling powerless and irrelevant. In recent years few have taken seriously the idea of a

viable third party, but intriguing alternatives are now becoming as plentiful as John Sununu's discount airplane trips.

**LABOR PARTY:** "The bosses have two parties. Working people should have at least one," says Tony Mazzocchi, International Secretary-Treasurer of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union. The non-voting 50% of the electorate already constitute a third party, Mazzocchi said in Iowa City last



March, if it can be mobilized to push for a new economic, social, and political agenda. His vision of a Labor Party is initially non-electoral, emphasizing a "bottom-up" coalition centered around the 16 million workers who belong to trade unions. He points to Canada's New Democratic Party as a successful third party model.

Mazzocchi believes that reform efforts within the Democratic Party have failed, leaving the party more conservative than it was 40 years ago. He rejects the Rainbow Coalition's inside-

outside strategy, suggesting that Jesse Jackson's movement of 7 million would have been more powerful on its own.

**NEW PARTY:** Have Americans really become more conservative, as centrist Democrats and neo-liberal think-tanks would have us believe? Absolutely not, says Joel Rogers, co-author of *Right Turn: The Decline of the Democrats and the Future of American Politics*. Rogers makes a convincing case that public opinion is far more progressive than public policy. The cost of conventional politics (the average price-tag for a successful Senate campaign in 1988 was \$3.9 million) has so corrupted the democratic process that non-rich people have few opportunities for meaningful participation.

In a meeting with Iowa progressives in Des Moines early this year, Rogers explored ways to form a third party while maintaining ties to Democrats. One option is based on the Liberal Party in New York, which runs candidates at the local level but endorses Democratic or Republican nominees for state-wide offices so as to maintain ballot status. Similar "fusion" parties were common in the U.S., especially in the midwest, until the turn of the century. Many who attended the Des Moines meeting think the New Party approach can point the way toward more progressive politics within the traditional electoral arena.

**RAINBOW COALITION:** Neither the Labor

(cont. on p. 2)

(Prairie Dog, cont. from page 1)

Party nor the New Party intend to rely on charismatic figures for organization and mobilization. Enter Jesse Jackson, both the soul and the bane of state Rainbows. The Iowa Rainbow has a dedicated core of activists, the respect and support of many Democratic officials, and a large mailing list. What it doesn't have is a grassroots direction independent of Jackson.

Rainbows in most states are top-down structures. They are ill-equipped for political action at the local level. Jackson's astonishing mobilization of 1988 has now dissipated, leaving a husk of an organization which still looks to him for guidance. More and more Rainbow members are wondering, like Mazzocchi, what could have happened if Jackson had steered his huge following toward the formation of a third party. Which leads us to...

**PROJECT NEW TOMORROW:** Ron Daniels is former Director of the National Rainbow Coalition and president of the National Black Political Assembly. He is trying to take the organization Jackson inspired and turn it into a genuine force in electoral politics.

On a recent swing through Iowa, Daniels impressed many activists who are searching for a better vision than what the Democratic Party now offers. He is a seasoned organizer who has put together a thorough program and timetable, with a goal of one million votes for President in 1992. Daniels says he will bow out if Jackson runs as an independent, but he hopes to avoid a replay of 1988, when "African Americans and the progressive movement were left without a viable option in the general election as a vehicle to advance and achieve a referendum on a progressive agenda."

**SOCIALIST PARTY:** The problem with socialism, to paraphrase Oscar Wilde, is that it takes too many evenings. But Bernie Sanders and Karen Kubby have shown that some socialists know how to win elections.

Despite the bumper crop of third-party options to pursue, many progressives will return eventually to the Democratic Party because they continue to view it as "the only game in town." Nevertheless, Democrats who sleep through their wake-up calls will be late for the party come November 1992. ❧

## PARTY TIME I: THE DEMOCRATS

BY JEFF COX

Dissatisfaction with the Democratic Party has surfaced in Johnson County this spring, for some fairly obvious reasons. The groveling behavior of Democratic politicians in the face of public hysteria over Desert Storm, while perhaps understandable, was not a pretty sight. This year's presidential campaign has so far produced only one progressive candidate, George McGovern, whose integrity, clarity, and rhetorical skill deserve a serious response, but have produced only laughs and sighs of resignation on the left. The Branstad veto threat stifles progressive legislation, while the Democratic legislative leaders appear determined to raise taxes on the poor, even over Branstad's objections.

So, why not a new party? If Bernie Sanders can win as an independent socialist, why not an independent progressive political party, or a labor party, or a green party, or a socialist party, or a rainbow coalition party? I take the arguments for new parties very seriously, but before accepting

them it is necessary to look carefully at the case for work in the Democratic Party, and also to understand the Democratic Party. It is a party with a long tradition, dating back to the early nineteenth century, of commitment to grassroots democracy. That commitment, until fairly recently, meant states rights and racism, but it meant other things as well, notably a deep hostility to rule by experts, and an instinctive recognition that government funding for economic development, or "internal improvements" as they used to be called, often benefited the wealthy at the expense of wage-earners. In the north, Democrats defended the rights of Catholic and Jewish immigrants from the self-righteous prohibitionists and 100% Americanizers of the Protestant majority.

This tradition was transformed by the New Deal, a European style Social Democrat political movement cast in such a thoroughly American mold that the American Socialist Party failed to recognize it for what it was, and forced socialists like Walter Reuther to choose between being a socialist or being a

good union supporter. The civil rights revolution of the fifties and sixties turned Black people into the most reliable Democrats of all time, and the feminist movement of the seventies and eighties may yet have a comparable impact on the party.

These are not traditions to be overturned lightly merely because we have to put up with Joseph Biden, Al Gore, Sam Nunn, and Lloyd Bentsen. For practical purposes, the Democratic Party is a giant umbrella over almost all of the progressive political forces in the country. It is the party which forced George Bush to accept a progressive tax increase last fall. It is the party which, in Johnson County and many other parts of the country, has taken a resolute public stand in solidarity with gays and lesbians. It is the party which stands in the way of the death penalty in Iowa. It is the party which voted overwhelmingly against Desert Storm. In the middle of all the praise of Charles Grassley, many have forgotten that he was only Republican in either house to vote against war, while every northern Democratic Senator but two voted no,

(cont. on page 3)

(party time, cont. from page 2)

along with half the Democratic Senators from the trigger-happy South.

This list could go on, and it is not meant to whitewash the party. There are two big problems with the party now which are extremely serious. The first is the dismal lack of progressive leadership at the national level, and it's difficult to see what a third party could do about that. The second is the increasing power of money. Progressive Democratic incumbents, and potential candidates for office, are virtually enslaved to political action committees or their equivalent. There are many very effective progressive political action committees, including labor, but they are simply being outbid.

Any potential third-party must have a strong, clear proposal to remedy this problem. It is only an example of a larger problem, i.e. how do you maintain accountability of elected officials both to the party and to the electorate? Any third party which achieved any electoral success would immediately run up against that problem in some form. A third party which offered a solution would be worth talking about.

Tony Mazzocchi's proposal for a new labor party shows considerable awareness of this difficulty. Mazzocchi proposes to base the party from the first on labor union officials both nationally and locally. This solves one problem, however, by creating another one. What will be the relationship of labor to other progressive political sources in a new labor party? What will happen to the progressive coalition, the umbrella which allows progressive interest groups to fight it out under the banner of a citizen's party? Furthermore, what will be the relationship of popularly elected officials to the party leadership?

A labor party would offer the great advantage of building up a class consciousness among working people, a job which is now left up to the beer companies and country and western composers. A socialist party would put socialism squarely on the agenda for public debate in a way that the invisible socialists in the Democratic Party cannot. But the socialist or labor politicians, when elected, would face exactly the same pressures that progressive Democrats now face, the pressures of electability and money. If the question of accountability is not addressed in the process of party-building, we could end up with a new party which is subverted by wealth as easily as the Democratic Party is today. ♡

## PARTY TIME II: A LABOR PARTY

by Tom Smith

At "progressive" gatherings talk inevitably revolves around resistance strategies against the right. But the give and take of such politicized chit-chat generally has a defensive undercurrent. "Empowerment" rhetoric often suggests whistling pleasing tunes in the face of the apocalypse. The sense of impending doom is not unwarranted. Things are not only bad, they are almost certainly going to be getting worse. In post-Reagan America, the state has no bread, but plenty in the way of bloody circuses, to offer the populace. As any liberal residue is rooted out of the state apparatus, look for the screws to tighten. By decade's

end, the gaps between places like Chicago's South side and Waterloo will be bridged by poverty and repression.

What is often missing in discussion on the left is how to mount coherent counter-attacks. The threat from the Reagan-Bush axis is often framed in terms of an assault on individual, rather than social, rights. But potential constituencies on the left are not, in economic terms, all in the same boat. Bad as things may be for sections of the upper-middle, professional, and academic classes, it has been working people, broadly defined as men and women who earn a wage through blue

collar and lower-echelon clerical and service work, whose living standards have collapsed. Effective resistance to reaction will have to come from those with the most to lose – for such folks struggle will be an act of necessity rather than conscience.

All of which brings me to the recent U.I. talk by Tony Mazzocchi, Secretary-Treasurer of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (AFL-CIO). His points were direct, simple and free of the sort of forced happy talk that stifles so many of our local left forums. The nature of contemporary America's economic and social crisis is such that the Reagan-Bush years may simply be a warm-up for effective fascist appeals, with David Duke as the tip of an iceberg. Political initiatives are desperately needed to talk sense to people, but the Democratic party is exhausted as a reform vehicle. What is needed is a Labor Party to fill the vacuum. A Labor Party can only, at this point, serve to promote a class-based political discourse. An organizational core – Mazzocchi calls them Labor Party Advocates – will build the groundwork for a movement whose steering committee will be made up of all elected union officials who decide to become dues paying party members.

Only the union movement can give the fledgling party a fighting chance to survive. The goal is to bring 100,000 dues paying members together into a party that will serve as a magnet attracting union and unorganized workers. Class will provide the party with its identity and union talent its spine. Class politics will offer both an alternative to the American left's balkanization and, as opposed to fretting over when the next reactionary initiative will hit, a means to attack the right. The Labor Party will not necessarily emerge as an electoral force. Its crucial goal will be to define the terms of conflict in contemporary America and suggest working alternatives to the hole our leaders have dug for their country.

Mazzocchi stated repeatedly that a Labor Party was necessary to "raise

(Cont. on page 4)

consciousness" among working Americans. Given Mazzocchi's reception by some section of his audience, elements of the local bourgeoisie (left-wing annex) could also stand to peel a few scales from their eyelids. Mention the word "union" and some "progressives" get squeamish. For those who see politics as an extension of life-style, rather than as a necessary response to the terms of political economy, class talk is fishy talk. In such mind-sets, discrepancies in economic power are ignored or papered over by vulgarized identity politics and the crutch of charismatic leadership figures. But can we really define ourselves as leftists if we displace class as the central focus for analysis and action? I think not. So roll up your sleeves, dear readers, and go to work for Labor. ☛

For more information, write to  
Labor Party Advocates, P.O. Box 1510, Highland Park, NJ 08904-9998.

## The Academy Missed the Big Picture — by Jae Retz

The Academy Awards went on as usual this year, as if nothing had happened since the last ceremony. I was for the feel-bad movie of the year, the one that should make us rue what we did to the people who were already here when Columbus lost his way. *Dances with Wolves* is a long-overdue counterbalance to all those Westerns that left the impression that the Indians were bad and John Wayne good. But will this movie's good intentions translate into actual change? Will a single nickel go to Native American communities as long as there are still golf courses to be built in this country?

If the Academy rated movies on their social impact, then there's one that should have won all the awards. And everybody saw it.

**Best Picture:** *Smart Bombs over Baghdad* — and less violent than the 40's classic *Thief of Baghdad*, which actually showed people getting killed.

**Best Director:** George Bush, who simultaneously kicked the Vietnam syndrome, the wimp factor, and butt.

**Best Actor:** Norman Schwarzkopf, who made a whole nation believe with Barbara Bush that he was a cross between General Patton and Fozzie Bear.

**Best Actress:** *The Lady Vanishes* award goes to April Glaspie, who reappeared before a congressional committee with testimony that mystified us all as to why she ever disappeared. This Hitchcockian twist

"smelled" even to the right wingers on the Sunday morning McLaugh-in Group.

**Best Supporting Actor:** Colin Powell, official proof that not every African-American soldier was on the front line.

**Best Supporting Actress:** Columnist Ellen Goodman, who suggested that the Schwarzkopfian blend of Patton and Fozzie might serve as a model for the new American male, thereby nullifying every observation she has ever made about American men.

**Best Cinematography:** To the man who videotaped L.A. policemen brutalizing a black man, and unwittingly created the perfect logo for all future movies on America in its new role as Third World cop. (Without this tape we would have only Daryl Gates' own words as proof that he's a racist creep.)

**Best Film Editing:** The Pentagon, for leaving on the cutting room floor results of the 20 percent of warheads that, by official accounting, missed their target.

**Best Animation:** The Pentagon again, for making their spokesmen seem almost human.

**Best Costumes:** The fatigues, of course. It took a war to make those duck blind jump suits into the latest fashion statement.

**Best Short Subject:** Popular opposition to war once the bombing started.

**Best Song:** A tossup between "Tie A Yellow Ribbon 'Round Just Any Old Thing" and "America the Surgical."

**Best Sound Effects:** Norman Schwarzkopf shooting off his mouth to David Frost about strategy.

**Best Sound Effects Editing:** The American media, which saw to it that we heard not so much as a scream from the battlefield nor a peep from their reporters.

**Best Line From The Movie:** George Bush telling a Fort Stewart, Georgia audience "...what we say goes." That must be American slang for "New World Order."

**Best Supporting Line:** Des Moines Rabbi Steven Fink: "This is a necessary war to preserve all that we hold dear, to strike down a tyrant who proclaims himself to be God, to preserve our nation's soul."

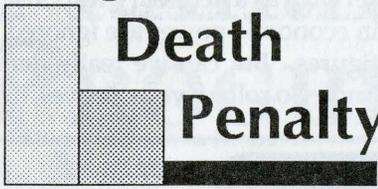
**Best Go-Tell-it-on-Mountain-to-the-Kurds Quote:** Richard Nixon's assurance: "It will be a war about peace."

**Best Producer:** You name them — all those companies from Amoco to Texaco that made this slick movie inevitable.

**The Sequel:** There will be a sequel, and it could star the young son of a helicopter pilot who sat next to his mother and told a CNN reporter: "I think the bombing is cool." Try to imagine what the next one will look like, with the participants thinking it's cool and the moral leaders saying it's good for the soul. Probably a lot like what we just saw. ☛

# Iowans

## Against Death Penalty



*"In my personal experience, as a lawyer and as a judge, I know of two instances where a first degree murder conviction was later overturned. If Iowa had had a death penalty these people might have been wrongfully executed."*

— Judge Anthony Critelli, Des Moines

Like Judge Critelli, the group **Iowans Against the Death Penalty** is concerned about recent calls for a return to the death penalty in Iowa. If you're concerned, too, contact your state legislatures.

### Join the work of Iowans Against the Death Penalty.

Along with educating the Legislature, IADP is taking a long-range approach to organizing which focuses on telling the public about the myths and facts of capital punishment. Through a speaker's bureau, resources, media work, and polling the group intends to get the word out so Iowa will remain "death penalty free."

### Contribute financially.

All this takes financial support and IADP is accepting contributions from concerned Iowans.

If you would like to volunteer resources – time, expertise, speaking skill, or money – write:

**Iowans Against the Death Penalty,**  
P.O. Box 70033,  
Des Moines, IA 50311;  
or call 515-274-4516. ☛

*(Reprinted from CND Newsletter.)*

In an effort to promote musical literacy, the Prairie Progressive will occasionally reprint the lyrics of songs of the left, beginning with our favorite:

## SOLIDARITY FOREVER

*(Tune: Battle Hymn of the Republic)*

When the union's inspiration through the worker's blood shall run,  
There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun.  
Yet what force on earth is weaker than the feeble strength of one?  
But the union makes us strong.

Chorus:

Solidarity forever! Solidarity Forever!  
Solidarity forever, for the union makes us strong.

Is there aught we hold in common with the greedy parasite  
Who would lash us into serfdom and would crush us with his might?  
Is there anything left to us to organize and fight?  
For the Union makes us strong. (chorus)

It is we who plowed the prairies; built the cities where they trade;  
Dug the mines and built the workshops; endless miles of railroad laid.  
Now we stand outcast and starving, 'midst the wonders we  
have made;  
But the Union makes us strong. (chorus)

All the world that's owned by idle drones is ours and ours alone.  
We have laid the wide foundations; built it skyward stone by stone.  
It is ours, not to slave in, but to master and to own;  
While the Union makes us strong. (chorus)

They have taken untold millions that they never toiled to earn,  
But without our brain and muscle not a single wheel can turn.  
We can break their haughty power; gain our freedom when we learn  
That the Union makes us strong. (chorus)

In our hands is placed a power greater than their hoarded gold;  
Greater than the might of armies, magnified a thousand-fold.  
We can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old.  
For the Union makes us strong. ☛ (chorus)

**THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE** is edited by members of the Iowa City Local of The Democratic Socialists of America. Ed. for this issue: Jeff Cox

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# AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

## ONLY A BEGINNING by Loren Schmitt

During the last year, the media has given much attention to the legislation which would ostensibly improve the lives of disabled people, the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Congress might have enacted legislation which would make definite and rapid changes in the social arrangements which affect disabled people. For example, it might have eliminated the residence requirement which restricts the choice of rehabilitation agencies from which a disabled person may seek service. However, most senators and representatives were unwilling to take that kind of decisive action.

Instead, the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed. Eventually, if disabled people continue to organize and if these efforts are led by people who have disabilities rather than pro-

fessionals in the field, then the Disabilities Act may prove to be of some use. Certainly, the act was written broadly enough to admit of progressive interpretation.

Iowa law, as it relates specifically to disabled people, is better than that which exists in many other states. For example, the section of the Iowa Code which is meant to regulate affirmative action regarding employment within state government is remarkably clear and concise. Further, it does include the disabled among the protected categories. Now the task has become one of convincing the executive branch of state government, in general, and the Iowa Department of Personnel, in particular, that an increasing number of Iowans intend for these affirmative action provisions to be implemented.

Some have observed that the

Americans with Disabilities Act was passed both because the Bush Administration wanted to be perceived as doing something and because organizations of professionals in the field would not support anything more extensive. However, even if one disputes this analysis, additional aspects of the experience of disabled Americans deserve attention. As the American empire unravels, the time available for social tinkering, as distinguished from serious problems, is extremely limited. Reverend Jackson was correct and very helpful when, during the '88 campaign, he noted that disabled people constitute part of the American under-class. This status will not be changed quickly. Unless the new legislation is used to challenge the existing system of services for the disabled, this status will not be changed at all. ☛

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