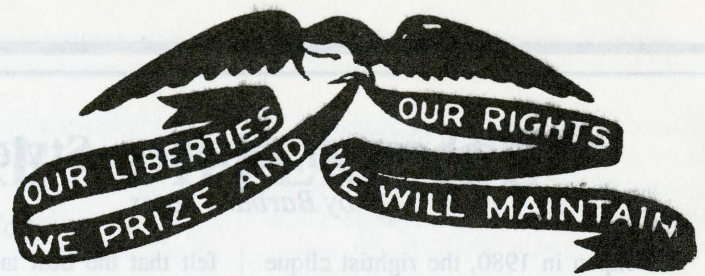


# THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



22

Fall 1991

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

## SILVER LININGS FOR THE LEFT?

A 5th ANNIVERSARY PERSPECTIVE

by *Prairie Dog*

Has anything good happened since the *Prairie Progressive* began publishing a quarterly newsletter in the fall of 1986? (Hint: trips to the Rose Bowl don't count.)

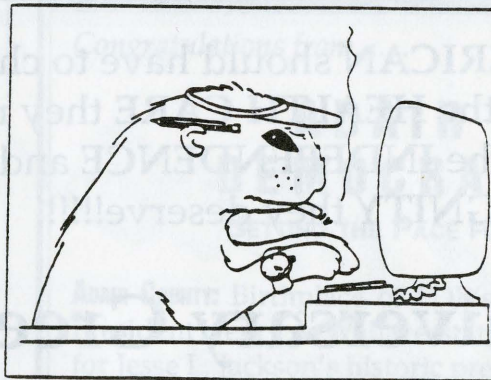
Thanks to excellent night vision, *Prairie Dog* has looked back and found some bright spots amid the darkness of the Reagan-Bush-Branstad years. Optimism may be the last refuge of a coward, but we can take heart from what's been achieved since the *Prairie Progressive* started popping up in your mailbox every three months (or so).

Five years ago, the Iowa legislature was cheerfully instituting and raising every regressive tax it could think of. The Johnson County Democratic Party was a strictly nuts-and-bolts operation whose members cringed in horror whenever a substantive issue slipped into discussion. Karen Kubby was perceived as a fringe radical who could never be elected to the Iowa City City Council.

Since then, most legislators have shied away from user fees and the sales tax, and some have even begun to question Iowa's reliance on lottery money. In Iowa City, a left-wing/business/labor coalition surprised the City Council by defeating a proposed sales tax. Citizens of all classes are coming to recognize the unfairness of these taxes on low- and middle-income people. Even the staid Iowa Democratic Party was galvanized by chants of "TAX THE RICH!" at its annual Jefferson-Jackson Dinner.

Despite the disdain of old-line party hacks, the Johnson County Democratic

Central Committee now routinely discusses and votes on two or three resolutions per meeting. The committee recently recommended support for the Public Library levy, televising the County Supervisors' meetings, and adherence to equal opportunity hiring practices by the County Conservation Board. Also routine is the carrying of the Johnson County Democrats' banner in



the annual Gay/Lesbian Pride Parade—a human-rights gesture that previous party executive boards had resisted fiercely.

After two losses at the polls (the second by only 179 votes), Karen Kubby fought off McCarthyist smears to whip an opponent who was backed by every banker and developer in town. Her victory proved that grass-roots activism works, that progressive candidates can raise money, and that elections can be won by running on issues

that people care about. Because Kubby has proven to be an effective councillor, no serious challenge to her re-election has emerged, but fringe conservatives may yet have something in store for the "Socialist pot-maker." (Editor's note: Don't get complacent! Send contributions to help keep Kubby on the council, c/o the *Prairie Progressive*.)

There's more! Iowa Democratic officials crushed the LaRouchie cult's scheme to infiltrate the Iowa caucus process. Paul Simon and Jesse Jackson dominated the caucuses in Johnson County, with former pro-lifer Dick Gephardt dead last.

Iowa Citians passed a school enrichment tax which included the abolition of book fees. Michael Harrington inspired hundreds of activists in an Iowa City appearance shortly before his death. Environmental issues took center stage across the state.

Wal-Mart came to town, but not until a hard-fought referendum brought to light much of Sam Walton's corporate skullduggery. Rick Graf received 42% of the vote for City Council in Iowa City's first campaign by an openly gay man.

Just this month, the religious fanatics of Operation Rescue learned that their brand of hypocritical self-righteousness won't sell in Iowa.

Perhaps the most astonishing of recent achievements has been the regular publication of the *Prairie Progressive*. Five years is a long time for Rock 'n' Roll bands, relationships, and alternative non-profit newsletters.

## Abortion Japanese-Style

by Barbara Yates

In Japan in 1980, the rightist clique that controls the Diet tried to change the law under which Japanese women can obtain abortions. This law, the Yu Sei Ho Go Ho or Eugenics Protection Act, was modelled on a 1937 Nazi Germany law and ostensibly was to protect the Japanese from births of potentially mentally retarded or ill children. It included a clause which allowed abortion in cases where a woman would face "economic difficulties" raising the child. This clause is what the R.C. (ruling clique), the Liberal Democratic Party (sic), wanted to remove, because "everyone in today's Japan can afford to raise a child."

The feminist movement split along two different strategies. Some felt it was time to scrap the Eugenics law and push for new, liberal legislation guaranteeing a woman's right to choose. Others felt that this was not possible, given that the R.C. controlled both Diet houses at the time. These people

felt that the best tactic was to fight the repeal of the "economic clause." Most eventually supported this latter way of thinking. After demonstrations, hunger strikes, and letter-writing campaigns, the LDP was forced to drop its proposal.

So in today's Japan, more than 95% of women getting abortions just say "economic difficulties" in this de facto pro-choice situation. It's true that most abortions in Japan are D&C with general anesthetic, which is ridiculous for early terminations, but this is a social issue, not a legal one. The feminist health movement is working on how abortions are done now (giving the woman more power), not whether abortions will be done at all. Of course, if the Japanese Social Democratic Party ever manages to seize power in the lower house, a new liberal law would be most advantageous.

Could this strategy work in America if

Roe v. Wade is repealed? If states pass laws allowing abortions only in cases of rape or when the woman's life is in danger, then clinics could keep operating if they claim abortions are for "health reasons," because to carry a pregnancy to term poses a "threat to the woman's life." Who can dispute that?

Some anti-choicers may think of a way; it'll make another interesting test case. Or we may go back to our pre-1973 scenario: sending women who have money to a state that has a liberal abortion law and continuing basement abortions. But this time we could do abortions ourselves, armed with the knowledge and technology we've received and developed over the "zone of privacy" years.

Since the state appears ready to invade that zone again, women will have to choose the trip out-of-state or the basement.

*(Barbara Yates is a former Iowan who now lives on the left side of Japan's Kanto Plain.)*

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and the **INDEPENDENCE** and  
**DIGNITY** they deserve!!!!!!

## 5th Anniversary Greetings

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## Iowa Citizen Action Network

*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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## Save Mary, Full of Grace and Outrage

by Jae Retz

In these times — when *Newsweek* can equate political correctness (which is just another word for human decency) with McCarthyism; when “liberal” is branded the “L-word” without a fight; when affirmative action is called reverse racism; when labor is fast being turned into an L-word while temples to business-as-usual spring up right under our noses in Iowa City; when all the emotion of racial discourse is channeled into a word like “quotas” so none is left for a word like “genocide”; when the white man is reaching into the uterus for total world domination; when AIDS is treated as an issue of behavior rather than a test of our nation’s soul — yes, in these times it should come as no surprise that the *Des Moines Register* is dropping the columns of Mary McGrory.

This hits you like losing a dear old friend who you know will never let you down. A more human and stubbornly Liberal columnist has never graced an editorial page.

In response to *The Register*’s readers who feel the women columnists “speak too much from the political left,” its editorial pages editor charged that McGrory has too often failed to meet the paper’s “test” of, among others, “originality of thought and currency with the news.”

Current and original? Displaying “that absolute daily outrage” she carried over from the Vietnam years, and what James Reston called her “poet’s gift of analogy,” McGrory has written so far this year on Desert Storm (“the madly popular war”), the aftermath of Desert Storm (“The only thing unarguably improved is Bush’s standing in the polls.”), Schwarzkopf’s interview with David Frost (“the top gun suddenly became a loose cannon”), defense spending (“the military-industrial complex was born again in the skies over Baghdad”), the “October Surprise” of 1980 (“the whatever-is-necessary school of Republican campaign philosophy”), Cambodia (“Granting China most-favored-nation status denies our history and ideals. Our continued

abuse of Cambodia denies our humanity"), the MIA issue ("an unwritten rule that everything to do with Vietnam must be as painful as surgery with a rusty knife"), Star Wars and Sam Nunn ("who hates wars but loves weapons"), and even our own Tom Harkin ("a defiant liberal").

McGrory's gift shines brightest by contrast. While George Will and Cal Thomas were gloating over the Soviet coup leaders refreezing the Cold War and U.S. liberals losing the "peace dividend," McGrory solemnly paid tribute to Gorbachev's great achievements and dared hope that Soviet citizens would "halt this mad dash into the dark past."

She never will, or can, hide her outrage behind her language; she never lets a precious or Will-full turn of phrase blur her point; her style is always subservient to her indignation. The recent war has provided good examples. She could be compellingly simple ("Tom Harkin ... insisted that the Senate had to talk about what everyone in America was talking about"), scathingly sarcastic ("the military budget was pro-

tected from raids by the poor, the hungry, the homeless and little children with measles") or take-my-word-for-it blunt ("although when the present fever subsides, people might reflect that war is the greatest failure mankind can commit"). The person is always present in the prose.

In his white-male wisdom *The Register's* editor is replacing McGrory with a "conservative Ellen Goodman." (Sound familiar, Clarence Thomas watchers?) No other woman on its pages handles the hard inside-Washington topics of the "cigar-to-cigar" good ol' columnist network. When asked once how she dealt with discrimination from her largely male colleagues, McGrory said she took an attitude of "Be my guest. I'll show you," and saved confrontation for the typewriter. In the meantime, at the risk of sounding too PC and making someone PO'd, I'll charge *The Register* with sexism, ageism, and going out with a conservative tide. At a time when the body politic is fast losing its heart, *The Register* should think twice about silencing our purest, most unwavering voice.

## PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE GETS AROUND

The Prairie Progressive has been quoted, reprinted, or written about in the following publications:

IOWA CITY PRESS-CITIZEN  
CEDAR RAPIDS GAZETTE  
CITY HIGH LITTLE HAWK  
AFSCME LOCAL 183 NEWSLETTER  
CASCADE INTERPRETER  
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# FIVE WAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

by Jeff Cox

Iowa progressives can't do very much about George Bush's packing of the Supreme Court with ultra-rightists, or about Terry Branstad's vendetta against higher education in Iowa. But thanks to our democratic, decentralized political system, we can use the ballot box to help maintain islands of progressive sanity in Iowa. Here is a list of things you can do in the near future to push Iowa City and the country in a progressive direction.

**VOTE FOR THE SCHOOL BOND ISSUE ON OCTOBER 15.** For all of its weaknesses, our public school system is one thing about America that we can be proud of. Neither the school administration, mired in bureaucratic language, nor the business and professional types on the school board are very good at electoral politics, but this bond issue is worth supporting. It is about the fundamentals of education: having enough classroom space to teach a growing population of students.

**KUBBY FOR COUNCIL ON NOVEMBER 5.** Readers of the *Prairie Progressive* already know what Karen Kubby has contributed to the city council: grace, conviction, and hard work. She has gained the respect of many people who disagree with her, and deserves to be returned for another term.

**JIM ST. JOHN FOR CITY COUNCIL.** The council has been dragging its feet on both recycling and support for the public library, and Jim St. John has made those issues central themes of his campaign. He has a long record of support for environmental issues, dating from his term as student body president at City High.

His opponent, Susan Horowitz, has been one of the major foot-draggers on recycling. Even worse, she is an open enemy of Iowa City's free public library. At every opportunity, she advocates user fees for the library, including one for a library card. If she has her way, Iowa City's century old tradition of free access to information will be destroyed altogether.

**VOTE YES FOR THE LIBRARY.** Also on the city council ballot will be an opportunity to strike a blow against Republicanism and vote for the books. Iowa City's Public Library is one of the best in the nation, and Iowa City has a higher percentage of library card holders than any other comparable community. But our library is under threat from a hostile city council majority. In a crucial city council vote last spring only Karen Kubby and Randy Larson voted to give the library the staff needed to keep up with soaring circulation. You can set that right, and help keep the library open, by voting for the library levy on November 5.

**HARKIN FOR PRESIDENT.** During the last presidential election the progressive vote was divided between Paul Simon, who came in first in Johnson County, and Jesse Jackson, who came in second. Both recog-

nized clearly the need to put together a broad progressive coalition. But in later primaries, Simon was unable to overcome his good-government, suburban liberal image and appeal to working people, and Jackson was unable to persuade primary voters that he was more than a black ethnic group politician.

Now it's Tom Harkin's turn to put together a progressive coalition, based on an open, unembarrassed embrace of New Deal principles. Harkin's great strength is his recognition that paternalistic, means-tested welfare programs are not the progressive way to deal with social problems. There is a lot of pent-up demand in the electorate for a New Deal approach to the problems of education, jobs, and health care, and Harkin may be the one who can appeal to that sentiment. He deserves a chance, and our support.

*Congratulations from.....*

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**— Herman Goering, 1945**

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**— Martin Luther King in 1965 speech  
to Negro American Council**