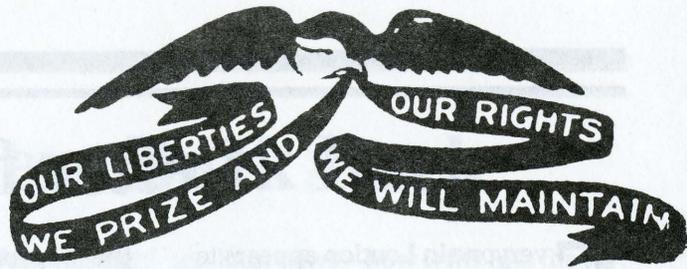


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



22

Spring 1993

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Your Government at Work Commentary by Prairie Dog

Dead on Arrival

The best news out of a dismal legislative session has been the fizzling of Governor Branstad's much-touted initiative to bring back the death penalty. Support for capital punishment proved softer than expected on Capitol Hill, thanks in part to effective public opposition.

Backed by steely-eyed young House members like Charles Larson (R-Cedar Rapids), Branstad tried desperately to salvage a "limited" death penalty bill, thus maintaining his tough-on-crime image. Swallowing their macho pride, Terry and the Pirates offered to execute only criminals 18 or older, up two years from their original offer.

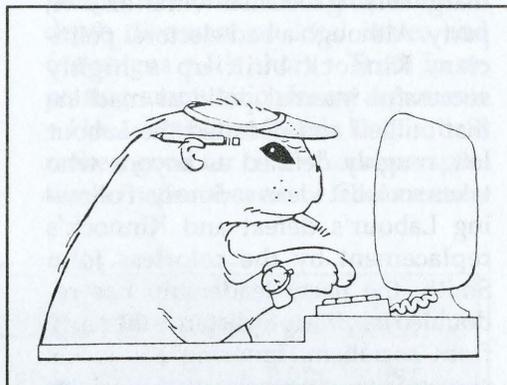
Fence-sitters flailed their arms in bewilderment. Prairie Dog is unable to confirm that one representative wailed, "What good is a death penalty if you can't kill children?"

The wimpy version was put out of its misery in subcommittee by Clark McNeal (R-Iowa Falls), Mary Neuhauser (D-Iowa City), and Michael Peterson (D-Carroll).

A cautionary note: the Texas legislature annually considers—and has so far rejected—a bill to extend the death penalty to those convicted of killing children. A companion bill this year would include killers of persons over 65. Watch for similarly futile but publicity-grabbing tactics in Des Moines next year.

No Questions Asked

Once again, most members of the Iowa City City Council have proven themselves to be free-spending radicals who will plunk tax dollars into any outstretched hand (as long as the hand is attached to a business seeking money from the Iowa Department of Economic Development). Fortunately, fiscally



conservative citizen Clara Oleson blew the whistle on the city's latest hand-out.

The council had applied to the Community Economic Betterment Account to grant a \$300,000 forgivable loan for Millard Refrigeration, a ham-processing company looking to expand in Iowa City. That the company's corporate representative and pitchman had been found to have defrauded a family of \$2 million was irrelevant to the five members of the council who voted to expedite the CEBA application. The council was equally eager to award Millard a tax abatement of

\$74,000. After all, what's a little fraud among friends?

Citizen Oleson researched the company's background and dove into the murky waters of public financing for businesses. She discovered that a federal judge had called the conduct of Millard's corporate rep "beyond any possible pale of decency and ethical responsibility." She also learned that government scrutiny of business grants and loans is considerably less stringent than taxpayers might think.

Galvanized by her findings, a coalition of farm advocates and labor activists pressured IDED to take a closer look at Millard and the entire CEBA process. The cause was joined by citizens who believe that public money for businesses should be examined with at least the same diligence as public money for human services.

The result? IDED denied the grant and chastised Iowa City officials for not doing their homework. Reasons for the denial included Millard's failure to show that their product is under-represented in Iowa, and the likelihood that the Omaha-based company would displace workers at other Iowa pork processing plants. IDED board members said that Iowa City hadn't adequately researched the company or checked CEBA guidelines.

Prairie Dog raises a paw to Oleson for demonstrating the power of citizen action. Her presentations at two city

Government at Work, Page 6

Letter from London

Everyone in London appears to be depressed. If George Bush had been re-elected last November, most Americans would be depressed now, and Britain is in precisely that situation.

When Britain held its general election a year ago, the Thatcher Revolution had run out of steam. Margaret Thatcher had become the most unpopular British Prime Minister since the beginning of polling. In a desperate attempt to avoid defeat by the opposition Labour Party, the Conservatives dumped Thatcher and replaced her with a fresh, unknown face, John Major. It worked for long enough to win the election, but now Prime Minister Major is even more unpopular than Margaret Thatcher.

One-half the people of Britain now say they would prefer to leave the country. In the midst of unprecedented unemployment, and with the Royal Family performing like actors on the worst television soap opera, Britons can find little to be proud of unless they have a special fondness for free enterprise and private ownership. The institutions that have made Britain such a decent place to live—free health care, subsidized public transportation, the largest concentration of free public museums and libraries in the world—have all been vandalized by free market fanatics in the Conservative Party. The government's program of selling off state-owned enterprises, including the water, telephone, urban transport, and rail systems, has been extremely unpopular. London now has the most expensive public transportation system in Europe as automobiles choke the streets. The unemployed cannot even educate themselves with their free time, since new and expensive entry fees have led to a disastrous fall in attendance at some of London's most famous museums.

The National Health Service, arguably the most admirable institution created anywhere in the world since

the Second World War, is being privatized piece by piece, with extensive fees introduced for prescriptions, glasses, and dental care. The Conservatives hope ultimately to target government medical care only to those who need it most, creating a means-tested system which, like all programs directed only to the poor, would have little political support.

Looming over this disaster is the political failure of Neil Kinnock, the leader of the Labour Party during the devastating 1987 and 1992 elections. Despite the discrediting of Thatcherism, and the obvious inability of free market capitalism to provide a decent standard of living for everyone in Britain, Kinnock's Labour Party got little over one-third of the vote last spring. It was a display of electoral ineptitude matched only by Michael Dukakis.

Kinnock nonetheless remains a hero to the new Labour Party leadership, who admire his success at marginalizing socialism within his own party. Although a bad electoral politician, Kinnock built up a highly successful internal political machine that bullied and defeated the Labour left, roughly defined as anyone who takes socialist ideas seriously. Following Labour's defeat and Kinnock's replacement by the colorless John Smith, the party leadership has redoubled its efforts to distance the party from socialism. Ignoring Kinnock's success in moving the party to the right, the Labour Party leadership continues to blame their party's socialist past for electoral defeat. Labour leader John Smith has proposed the elimination of the strong links that tie the Labour Party to Britain's trade unions, links designed to prevent the party from being taken over by middle class professionals with no commitment to working people.

Other Labour Party leaders have directly attacked Clause IV of the Labour Party constitution. Printed on the membership card of every party

member, Clause IV is a succinct and eloquent statement of ethical socialism that says nothing about centralized state ownership. But it does challenge the sanctity of the private ownership of capital, and John Smith has declared those who question the ownership of wealth as old-fashioned ideologues who do not belong in a modern political party like Labour.

It is easy to see why Labour Party leaders admire Bill Clinton and envy his ability to make up policy as he governs. Unfortunately for Labour, they do not have his skills at electoral politics, and their war on socialist idealism has left the Labour Party without any identifiable ideas or principles.

It is likely that Labour will be elected at some point because of sheer public disgust with free market capitalism. It will be an enormous relief for the people of Britain. The mood of depression will temporarily disappear with the same euphoria that marks the end of a migraine headache. A Labour government will spend a little more on health, a little more on education, and a little more on job training. They will show considerably more respect than the Conservatives for civil liberties and open government.

But the Labour Party is unlikely to create new public institutions which can rekindle a sense of pride in being British. Public institutions that truly serve the public must work against market forces, not with them, and must be accessible to everyone as a citizenship right. The will to create the kind of open, accessible, non-means-tested public institutions that characterized the British welfare state depends upon a revival of socialist ideals within the Labour Party. In that sense, socialists in the Labour Party are in the same position as socialists in the Democratic Party, outsiders looking in while hoping to influence public debate. ☛

— Jeff Cox

Surviving a Holy War: Health Care Providers Cope With Anti-Abortion Harassment

Following the political assassination of Dr. David Gunn, a Florida gynecologist who performed abortions, women's clinics across the country responded with shock and horror. What no one expressed was surprise at the escalation of violence resulting in cold-blooded murder. Why the lack of surprise? The climate of violence, fear, and hatred the anti-abortion movement has created toward doctors, clinic staff, and women is pervasive.

The medical director of the Emma Goldman Clinic, Dr. Robert Kretschmar, has been physically assaulted, had his private home picketed and his neighborhood covered with leaflets calling him a childkiller. Dr. Kretschmar, a long-time volunteer and past state president of the American Cancer Society, was denied a lifetime honor from that organization due to pressure that originated from members of the Dubuque County Right to Life.

The Emma Goldman Clinic staff provides health services with a constant awareness of potential violence. The anti-abortion groups carry signs showing fetuses 3 feet high, yelling "babykiller," "lesbian," and "don't kill babies today." They rifle our dumpster, break windows, trespass, blockade our doors, graffiti the building, and leave death threats on our answering machine. They pose as clients to check the layout of the building, they videotape staff and clients, they write down license numbers of cars in the parking lot and stalk staff outside of the clinic.

I am followed home, receive hate mail at least once a week, have been stalked at rallies, and am called the anti-Christ.

How do we cope? We hold stress management workshops for staff, along with support meetings when the antis are especially violent. Our staff has a remarkable sense of humor (we have pet names for our regular protesters). We have a shredder for security purposes, along with a hired security



service. We have electronic locks on Clinic doors. Our children regularly check in with us on their whereabouts.

Staff who have a supportive network of family and friends cope the best.

But many times we internalize the violence. Today there was a memo at the Clinic asking us to bring in rags, in case we have a butyric acid attack. Chemical warfare at health clinics! Clinic staff recognize this is not about abortion, but about the role of women in this society. We are bearing the brunt of the war against women the religious right is waging.

How can you help clinics continue to serve women who need abortion services? Letters or calls of support are highly valued and provide nurturing when under attack. If you know a staff member, offer to be vigilant of her family and home. Take a public stand to share this continuous attack against civil rights. Show support for reproductive rights in the form of letters to

the editor, to legislators, opinion pieces, wearing of buttons, t-shirts, and bumper stickers. Most clinics are not-for-profits operating on a shoestring. Contribute money or donate products, time or skills. Confront anti-abortion lies.

The anti-abortion strategy is to stop abortions through intimidation of doctors and staff. Providers are the key element in accessing safe abortions. Recognize what the antis know so well, and treasure your abortion providers. There aren't many of us left. ☹

— Gayle Sand, Associate Director,
Emma Goldman Clinic

Send contributions to:

**Emma Goldman Clinic
227 N. Dubuque St.
Iowa City, IA 52245**

A Crying Shame that Oscar Chooses Clint over Spike

Remember Denzel Washington as Malcolm X telling a crowd of supporters that they had been hoodwinked, bamboozled, and hornswoggled by the white man? Well, that's what the Academy did this year to everybody who cares about quality movies and their power to shape thought and behavior, when it failed to nominate *Malcolm X* as best picture or Spike Lee as best director.

Scent of a Woman stunk next to *Malcolm X*, and *A Few Good Men* didn't add up to half the man Malcolm was, and *Unforgiven*... We'll get to that one later.

Last year's cast of demented characters in the Best Actor category offered an interesting perspective on the American male (Remember Hannibal the Cannibal, Bugsy, and DeNiro in *Cape Fear*?). I was hoping this year's Best Actress group might yield some insights on the American woman, but only one of the five movies in that category made it to this one-reel town.

Personal favorites out of this year's nominees:

Best Actor: Denzel Washington—You have to go to England to find a better actor.

Best Actress: Emma Thompson—The success of *Howards End* rests on her shoulders, and she carries it beautifully. She's even better than her Wunderkind husband, Kenneth Branagh.

Supporting Actor: Jaye Davidson in *The Crying Game*—This is one of those once-in-a-Halley's-Comet performances from a non-actor, without a single false note.

Supporting Actress: Judy Davis in *Husbands and Wives*—It takes a rare talent to break through the wooden schtick of Allen's characters.

Best Picture: Since *Malcolm X* isn't up, I'd be happy to see *Howards End* or *The Crying Game* win.

A filmmaker from the post-modern destructionist school of independent film violence was recently quoted as saying that people who are disturbed by violence can always go to *Howards End*. He should see it too. The pervasive class consciousness of *Howards End* might teach him something about America's obsession with violence and how it tends to grow right along with the gulf between poor and rich. The producer/director/writer team of Merchant/Ivory/Jhabvala does for the novels of E.M. Forster what Schubert did for German poetry with his music, giving them new life in a new medium. And it's the theme of class hostility that elevates this movie to the level of their earlier masterpiece, *Room With a View*.

The Crying Game, the movie that Jesse Helms could never watch, probes the opposite ends of the spectrum of human nature and experience. The movie opens at a carnival and closes in a prison, revolves around the allegory of a killer scorpion and an altruistic frog, and sets a bloody political conflict against a touching love story. At the center, as a synthesis of at least one set of opposites, is Jaye Davidson's character Dil.

Unforgiven, with 9 nominations in all, is sure to sweep most of the awards. In the light of the neighboring fires from the LA uprising it should surprise no one that Hollywood would choose *Dirty Harry* over *Malcolm X*.

The ending of *Unforgiven* looks a lot like the finale to Eastwood's earlier *Sudden Impact*. Each time, first as *Dirty Harry* and later as Will Munny, Eastwood appears suddenly out of the dark with that long slender rod of steel

poised strategically at the hip. Like some latter day Messiah, Jesus of Boot Hill, he comes to give life through death. Only it's always others who are sacrificed.

Clint is currently the darling of the Academy and the cover boy of choice, appearing on everything from "Premiere" to "GQ". What he's saying should win him the Hypocrisy Oscar, if there were such a category. While delivering the standard cant that *Unforgiven* de-romanticizes gunslinging, Eastwood has the gall to liken the sadistic sheriff in the movie (Gene Hackman) to Daryl Gates. This from the creator of *Dirty Harry*, the probable role model for the four LA cops who savaged Rodney King. If King's memory had survived the clubbing, he might be able to testify hearing *Dirty Harry*'s "Make my day." There too the man at the receiving end of Clint's gun barrel and immortal line was an African-American.

Hollywood may have eliminated Spike Lee, but the LA problem can only get worse with movies like the one already called an Oscar favorite for 1993. *Falling Down* is the violent odyssey of an over-the-edge looney through the desolate Los Angeles landscape of Reagan's California. His license plate says D-FENS, but he's all offense. We can only hope that this out-of-job defense worker (played by Michael Douglas) doesn't catch on as a role model during the hoped-for massive conversion to a peacetime economy.

There's a line in *Falling Down* that might be the next "Make my day": "I'm an American and you're a sick asshole." Coming from this trigger happy lunatic, it kind of shows how confused we've become after twelve years of elephantine rule. ☹

—Jae Retz



CALENDAR

- April 21 ICARE benefit performance of La Bête at Riverside Theatre, IC.
•(319) 338-7672
- April 24 Farm-Aid, Cyclone Stadium, Ames.
•(515) 244-5671
- April 25 Gay/Lesbian March, Washington, D.C.
•(202) 628-4160
- May 1 Iowa Civil Liberties Union Annual Dinner, 10 S. Gilbert St., IC.
•(515) 243-3988
- June 12 Freedom of Speech Dinner, Taste of Thailand, Des Moines.
•(515) 282-0044
- June 15 Deadline for articles for next Prairie Progressive.
•(319) 338-4551

Readers Bark Back

The "Soak the Rich" fundraising letter was a success. The Prairie Progressive received \$1065 in contributions from 79 readers.

Formatting, printing, and mailing a 6-page issue costs \$355. Your generosity ensures at least 3 more issues!

As could be expected, Prairie Progressive readers had plenty of opinions. Here are just a few:

What do you like most about the Prairie Progressive?

Getting a clearer picture of issues that are happening instead of the usual media crap • Information on state politics, especially the "Democratic" Party • Its principles, its style, its independence from advertisers • I feel better just knowing it's there • Creative, intelligent, and fun • It's cheap • Pretty good writing • Irreverent potshots and broad analyses • Corn-fed progressive perspective • Frank and frequently in-depth discourse on local issues and campaigns • It's short • Truth in reporting; ammunition for my arguments • How exotic that Prairie Dog is; he'd make a good fur coat • Local perspective on national events • Commentary

on local news—how it fits into the rest of what's going on nationally and internationally • Jae Retz's movie reviews.

What do you like least?

Maybe sometimes a bit too liberal • Not on recycled paper • Not long enough, not often enough. Yeah, I know it's work and costs money • Too many big words • No dirty pictures • You're too provincial; Iowa City isn't the center of the universe. Try some articles about other parts of Iowa • The summer reading list is way too broad. Besides, only the editor goes to the beach. The rest of us have to sweat it out and those books last summer were boring and in hardcover which POOR people cannot read • Laborious movie reviews.

What would you like to see more of?

Articles about real working class people, not just middle class Democrats • Issues concerning gays • Maybe some environmental articles • Guest columnists • Rush Limbaugh quotes and articles on or by cats • Recipes from the Bolshevik kitchen • Fundraising letters! • Recommendations for individual action • Color glossies • A gossip column and a loveletters column • Foreign reporting • Opposition research • WAFT.

Are you interested in writing for the Prairie Progressive?

I get \$1000 per page, cash in advance. Take what you get • Good heavens no! • I hate commitments • I'd rather someone do it for me • Probably not. I am a Humanist. ☺

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE has been published quarterly in Iowa City since 1986. Editor for this issue is Jeff Cox.

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Your Government, continued

council meetings were models of civic responsibility and public education. Free-spenders on the Iowa City council will probably ask a few questions the next time a business comes looking for a hand-out.

**Open Government,
Johnson County Style**

Rural residents petitioned the Board of Supervisors to hold a public hearing after 5 PM so that citizens who wanted to discuss a zoning issue wouldn't have to take time off work.

Defending the board's 4-1 vote against the evening meeting, supervisor Betty Ockenfels said, "I think if we do it this time, we have to be fair to everybody."

The board's logic (using the word loosely) seems to be that only a few people want night meetings, but if an exception is made to allow one night

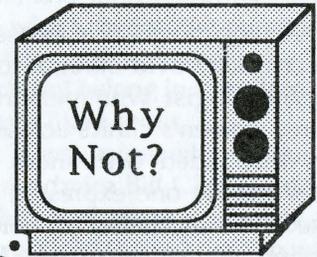
meeting, then everyone will want them! The kindest thing that can be said about this bunch of supervisors is that they've abandoned any pretense of being public servants. Their comments have become shrill and downright rude as they rail against those unruly citizens who have the gall to want meetings at times convenient for them.

The same 4-1 majority also opposes televising board meetings, even though two of them—Pat Meade and Steve Lacina—said during their election campaigns that they had no insurmountable objections. Public endorsements of cable TV coverage of county government have come from the left, the right, and the nonpartisan, but Joe Bolkcom is the only supervisor to advocate and vote for greater citizen access and public exposure.

Bolkcom understands what the others refuse to acknowledge. He voted in favor of the evening meeting, he said, because "we're here to listen to the

concerns of the public and directly take the heat on controversial issues."

Last we heard, all five supervisors still take phone calls from the people who pay their salaries. Feel free to call them at 356-6000 between 8 AM and 4 PM. If you work during those hours, try them at home. ☺



Joe Bolkcom	337-6280
Charlie Duffy	351-8854
Steve Lacina	351-4980
Pat Meade	351-6920
Betty Ockenfels	679-2533

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