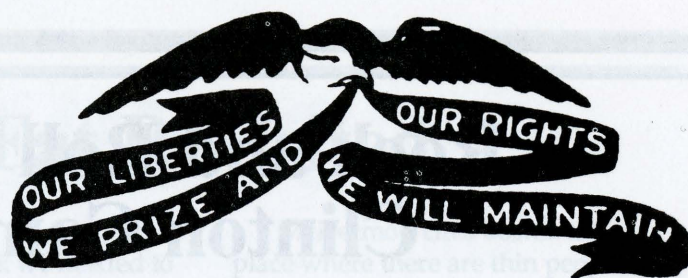


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



22

Fall 1993

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Crash on the Levee City Council Floodgates Open

*There's a City crash on the levee
And mam-Cia you've been refused*
—Bob Dylan

Bruno Pigott, on the day he was elected to the city council in Iowa City, recalled one of his Adventures in Door-Knocking. He had introduced himself to a potential voter and asked for support. The man within peered through the screen door and said, "I'm not votin' for anyone who's got a beard and a dog's name."

Although he had lived in Iowa City less than four years, the bearded man named Bruno captured 52% of the votes in a special summer election triggered by the resignation of Randy Larson. While the reservoir overflowed, voters streamed into early-voting sites in record numbers, handing Pigott a longshot victory against the massed might of the Chamber of Commerce, four incumbent councilors, and the Press-Citizen.

Mayor Darrel Courtney deserves much of the credit for Pigott's upset. The ink on the candidates' petitions was barely dry before the downtown stockbroker announced that die-hard Republicans were running the campaign of Pigott's opponent, Kathy Moyers. Courtney further aided Bruno by carping ceaselessly about the unnecessary cost of the election, long after everyone else had accepted

the fact that the voters, not the council, would choose Larson's successor. Courtney sealed Moyers' fate by adding his signature to a letter of support from six former Iowa City mayors (Mary Neuhauser's name was commendably absent). In a political year which emphasized change, Courtney and the Chamber crowd campaigned for the status quo. Wrong strategy.

Equally helpful to Pigott was councilor Susan Horowitz. Just before election day, she spelled out what Moyers had only implied. Married people with children, Horowitz told the Press-Citizen, make better council members than single non-procreators. This civic requirement dovetailed neatly with home ownership, which Moyers had emphasized as one of her qualifications for the job. By July 13, the Moyers campaign had thoroughly alienated more voters than it could afford to lose.

Horowitz received well-deserved post-election bashing for her divisive and discriminatory rhetoric, but some other inflammatory words, uttered in the same Press-Citizen interview, went nearly unnoticed. Pigott's support for affordable housing subsidies, said Horowitz, "represents a philosophy of entitlement. I don't think we have enough money to give people those things."

Last winter, Horowitz helped block the use of \$45,000 in Commu-

nity Development Block Grant funds for down-payment loans to low-income families trying to become homeowners.

As a married homeowner, Horowitz benefits from numerous subsidies, including a mortgage interest tax deduction; perhaps her husband receives retirement pension tax deferments. Apparently Horowitz thinks that her family is entitled to these subsidies, as if they had earned them, but that low-income, first-time homebuyers are not entitled to down-payment assistance. Homeowners like me are more fit to serve in elective office, Horowitz seemed to say, but as an elected official I'm not interested in helping others become homeowners.

A slew of progressive potential candidates, buoyed by Pigott's triumph, are testing the electoral waters for four seats in November. They may want to heed long-time councilor Bill Ambrisco's recent resignation statement, in which he set a new standard for public office seekers. Not content to be a married, child-bearing homeowner who's lived in Iowa City for decades, Ambrisco proudly announced that he has purchased a burial plot in a local cemetery. Now that's commitment!

— Prairie Dog

Rock and Roll Confessions of a Clinton Campaign Staffer

When the U.S. House of Representatives voted to cut off funding for Selective Service registration this summer, I felt a tremendous sense of vindication, and recalled a lot of old emotions. Many of them had little to do with draft registration itself. It all ties back to one special band and an album I'll never forget.

In February 1981, I was seventeen years old. John Lennon was dead. Ronald Reagan was President. The Soviets were in Afghanistan, and draft registration had been re-established. I was scared.

At that point, my politics were ill-defined. I was a typical, clean-cut kid, more interested in politics than most, perhaps, but without any sense I could make a difference.

Then I bought *Sandinista!* by the Clash.

In retrospect, it's not the Clash's greatest work—I usually play the first album or *London Calling* instead. But in 1981, it seemed so perfect that someone had released an album called *Sandinista!* just as Reagan was inaugurated, just when I needed to hear it.

For some reason it was very cheap for a triple (!) album, so I could afford it on after-school wages. It took me a while to become familiar with all six sides. But over the weeks, the message in the grooves made me think about my world in ways I hadn't before. I had to look things up: I'd never heard of Chilean rebel singer Victor Jara until I heard "Washington Bullets." This record was so far ahead of its time it's just now beginning to catch up: who would imagine attacking Star Wars in 1981? It made me ask questions without easy answers.

The song which really hit me was "The Call-Up:"

It's up to you not to heed the call-up
and you must not act the way you
were brought up
It's up to you not to heed the call-up
I don't wanna die
It's up to you not to hear the call-up
I don't wanna kill
For he who will die is he who will kill

I thought about that song for ten months, while my eighteenth birthday approached.

I got bad advice from my dorm "buddies" and registered for the draft. Maybe I wanted to preserve my viability within the system, but this was around the same time I inhaled, so I guess that's out. As a practical matter, registration was a pretty big hammer hanging over my student loans. But I'd taken the critical step: I'd considered it. Never again would I just accept the world in the way I had been taught without some serious thought.

Eleven years later, my fellow Iowa Democratic Party staffers didn't understand why I was so furious at Bill Clinton's choice of a running mate, why Tipper's warning labels so infuriated me. They accused me of sexism, of defending sexist/racist/various politically incorrect music, of making a big deal out of nothing.

They didn't understand that without the music, I wouldn't have been there. *Sandinista!* was my first tentative step down the road of political activism—a route which has brought me struggles, victories, defeats, and a sense of self-respect in my belief that I can do something about my world. And all this was supposed to be "a big deal over nothing."

Clinton was a hell of a compromise, and I came close to quitting over Gore, but I stayed with it. I registered, with my volunteers, over 2500 new voters in Linn County. I also worked hard to help some wonderful state and local candidates. Electing Bill Clinton hasn't made as big a difference as we let ourselves hope, but sometimes the biggest differences are local.

Was it worth it? A tough call. I see Tipper and Al on TV and can only think of those farcical 1985 record labeling hearings (you know, Big Brother meets Twisted Sister). But then I see the only local candidate I worked for who won a contested race, David Osterberg, stand up in the Legislature and fight the leadership of his own party to keep our most regressive tax, gambling, from expanding. That makes it feel like it was worth it.

During the whole campaign, I kept a postcard in my desk: a picture of the *London Calling* album cover. "To keep me honest," I told myself. I remember *London Calling* had a "language advisory" label on it: one "fuck" on one song. Today, that means a 17-year-old kid probably couldn't buy it and Wal-Mart wouldn't carry it.

I don't want some kid today to be denied the opportunity I had. Somewhere, someone is listening to Public Enemy or Living Colour or Billy Bragg and feeling just what I felt when I heard the Clash. I hate to imagine how differently my life would have turned out without that music.

— John Deeth

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum

I love the Washington Mall. I especially love the museums lining the Mall, those colossal collections of art, history, science and other manifestations of human culture and creativity.

This summer, however, I arrived at the Mall filled with dread. The newly opened U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum does not, like the others, focus on celebrating the wonders of the earth and the human spirit.

Its sorrows, horrors, and outrages defy description. The "how-to" of the Nazis' state-sponsored genocide is all there, complete with photographs, original documents, films, a railway car that carried victims to the camps, and thousands of their shoes.

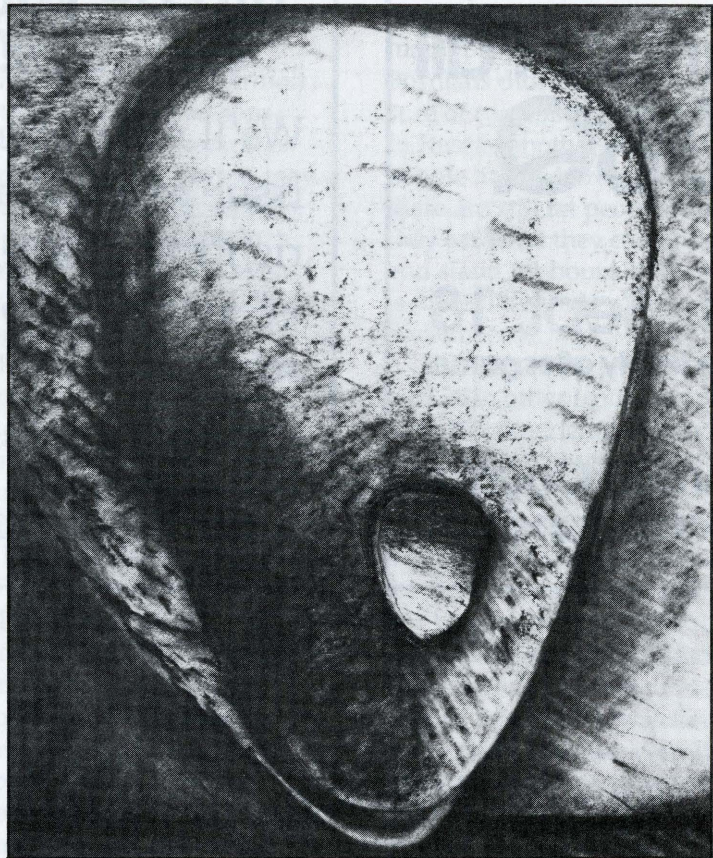
The opening of the Holocaust museum has permanently changed the Mall, at least for me. I've always looked forward to taking my son to Washington. The museums, the Capitol, the monuments all proclaim the great things people can accomplish when we work together. Everywhere you turn are beautiful buildings covered with visionary statements of what Man can/will/should do.

Later, when he's older, there will be plenty of time for the inevitable disillusionment.

But it will be years before I will consider taking my six-year-old innocent to the Holocaust museum. I want him to learn of our human shortcomings a little at a time. I want him to dream first. He has the rest of his life to learn to settle for less, not to mention the frightful reality embodied by the Mall's newest museum.

I don't know how the Holocaust museum can ever fit in with its neighbors. It is a never-ending scream, warning us to beware of the evil governments do in our name.

It's too late for the Holocaust museum to prevent the United States from committing genocide. Our



"Untitled" by Iowa City artist Nancy Footner

hands, like everyone else's, are unclean.

But that grim truth is not reason enough to give up on government and on the hopes that make Washington a special place. Change it, redefine it, protest it, join it, disarm it, localize it, internationalize it, feminize it, democratize it, televise it—do everything except give up on government.

Each one of us has dreams that inspire us to get involved. The U.S.

Holocaust Memorial Museum contains nightmares that will scare you into never dropping out.

— Rusty Martin

DINOSAURS

and Other Summer Bodybusters

Dinosaurs stole the show at the movies this summer. Legendary filmmaker Steven Spielberg's **Jurassic Park** is projected to surpass his **E.T.** as the all-time top money maker. But Spielberg's weren't the only dinosaurs at work this summer. Some of the aging matinee idols who have maimed and massacred more of their own kind than any *Tyrannosaurus rex* were also busy.

The awareness that we could go the way of the dinosaur is finally manifesting itself in the extinction empathy of our children. How else do we explain the obsession of young Americans with dinosaurs? Spielberg tapped into this obsession and made a movie too violent for them to watch. I thought I was watching **Alien 4**. The movie reminded me of Gertrude Stein's crack about Oakland: "There's no there there." There was no movie there. It can be summed up in: Man sees dinosaur; dinosaur eats man; dinosaur eats dinosaur.

Of the *Testosteronis maximus* variety of dinosaur, only Clint Eastwood is having real success. The closest Chuck Norris has come to a role recently is a deodorant commercial. (Doesn't Right Guard know his acting stinks?) And Bruce Willis was last seen stumping for George Bush. (Old Die Hard got charred by the Bonfire of the Vanities.)

I didn't see the Schwarzenegger movie this summer. I took his smart-ass farewell to his victims in **Terminator II** to heart and hoped I'd never see him again. Besides, **Last Action Hero** didn't last. After failing in America it will test the Mexican market. I suspect it's being used as a trial balloon for the NAFTA treaty—if they'll buy Arnold they'll buy

anything. So he's off to Mexico to promote the movie. Hasta la vista, baby.

Stallone is still hanging in there, thanks mainly to the glorious mountain scenery of **Cliffhanger**. What good is watching Stallone pull himself up a sheer cliff if you can't see his biceps? So the movie's greatest plot challenge was coming up with ways to motivate Stallone to take his shirt off in subzero temperatures. The most inspired bit of dialogue was the exchange between the villain and the hero: "You're a real piece of work." "You're a real piece of shit." An alternate title

"While the aging bodybusters fared pretty poorly this summer, women didn't fare at all."

could've been **Sylvester's Excellent Adventure**. The best part of the movie was the man in the back of the theater who couldn't help laughing out loud during the moments fraught with the most peril and implausibility.

Clint Eastwood has made his age the theme of his last two movies and it worked, as an extinct gunfighter in **Unforgiven** and a fossilized secret service agent in **In the Line of Fire**. In the latter he may have been put out to pasture as an agent, but he can still put women down with the skill of a much younger man, to the great delight of the audience. But maybe you enjoy that sort of thing. Hey—less power to you.

The main weakness of the movie is that the plot is carried forward by phone conversations between Eastwood and John Malkovich. Clint should not be given more than one line at a time to speak. Especially since he seems to be losing his voice, while Malkovich, an accomplished stage actor, has total mastery over every vocal nuance.

Even though it's not a comedy, **In the Line of Fire** has the most hilarious gag of any summer movie: Clint is supposed to be a Kennedy liberal.

While the aging bodybusters fared pretty poorly this summer; women didn't fare at all. In only two of the big summer movies did women play pivotal roles, **Rising Sun** and **The Fugitive**, and both were corpses before the action began. A whole treatise on the role of women in movies could be done on **Rising Sun** alone. Much has been written about the movie's Japan-bashing, but not a peep about the snuff movie within a movie, the end-product of the grand East-West synthesis of technology and male chauvinism.

Amidst all the thrills and mayhem of the summer action movies, **Sleepless in Seattle** was a radical change of pace that scored big at the box office. Its premise was: if you're a SWF or SWM and have a cute butt you can find love no matter how far the distance or far-fetched the plot. Is that any less believable, though, than dinosaurs stalking the planet again or Clint Eastwood playing a Kennedy liberal?

— Jae Retz

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Fat Revisited

To the editor:

Why did you think we needed to see that McDermott diatribe (*A Larger Look at Fat*, Summer 1993) against fat people?

Regardless of what McDermott believes, there are many reasons, besides overeating and medical or mental problems, that a person may be fat. Here's one of those reasons, which your newsletter ought to recognize and acknowledge, even if you can't spare the sympathy: People eat as long as they need to, if the food is there. Rich people can afford to buy and prepare, or have prepared for them, food that nourishes and satisfies in smaller amounts. (Rich people can go to France and eat Camembert and pâté with their friends.) Poor people eat what they can get. Poor people may feel despair. Despairing people may eat more or longer, if they can, hoping to feel better. What place does McDermott's insensitive ranting deserve in a newsletter for people who supposedly care about the difference between what poor people can get and what rich people can get?

McDermott cites Bosnia as a place where there are thin people. If fat people are immoral, then Bosnia ought to be heaven, full as it is of moral people; but instead it is hell. Bosnians didn't choose war to make sure of controlling their food intake. In Russia, another place where many people have a hard time getting food, there are still fat people—quite a few: they eat what they can find, afford, and stand for hours in line for, which is more likely to be potatoes than Swiss cheese.

No doubt the poor in America, as well as in other lands, would love to have the experience of "savoring food, not satiating hunger." But what comes first?

I have relatives and friends who are fat, and I know other people who are fat, and all these people I'm thinking of are good, moral, decent Americans; many are Democrats; and some even have viewpoints and take actions that your newsletter would commend. Why use your limited space to print an article that singles out people like them, based on a physical feature, as weak in character and therefore not good enough for "us?" Not only that: a lot of these people work on small farms or live in small towns—two situations for which McDermott implies she has some concern. Does she think these places are full of thin people eating fresh seafood?

The progressive movement needs to remain hopefully inclusive, not spitefully exclusive. Nobody's joining for the great hors d'oeuvres.

— Judith Pendleton

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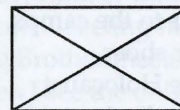
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