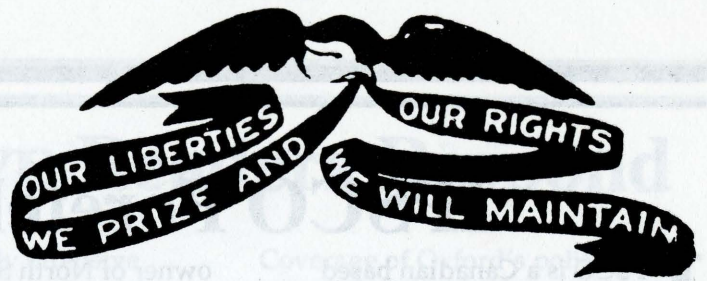


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



Spring 1994

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Aid to Dependent Corporations

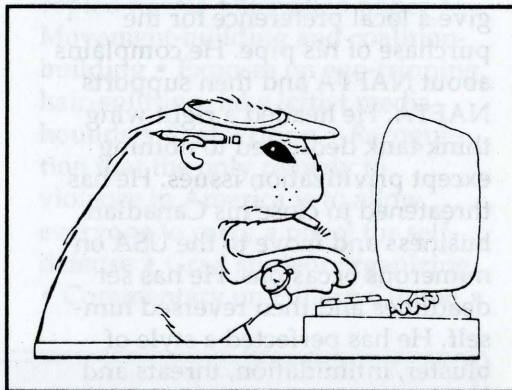
In an unusual confluence of issues, the state of Iowa is grappling with "welfare reform" while it ponders the benefits and consequences of "tax incentives" for businesses. The legislature changed the name of Aid to Families with Dependent Children to the Family Investment Program, just as it was confronting various forms of corporate blackmail by Lennox in Marshalltown, Maytag in Newton, and Millard in Iowa City.

Congressional debate on federal "welfare reform" has emphasized a two-year limit on benefits, which would thrust poor mothers into a labor market increasingly dominated by temporary jobs with no benefits. The Iowa legislature eagerly adopted the arbitrary two-year cut-off, despite acknowledgment by many legislators that the program's success depends on jobs which don't exist.

Scapegoating the poor and the young (over two-thirds of welfare recipients are children) is as American as owning a gun, but the meanspirited rhetoric of recent years has heightened the attacks on the most vulnerable people in our society. Even "liberal" Democrats act as if welfare is an unconscionable drain on the nation's resources, as if they didn't know that AFDC accounts for only 1% of

the federal budget (approximately the same cost to the American people as the bailout of the savings-and-loan industry, and much less than the cost of agriculture subsidies).

Most hypocritical is the attitude of legislators and city council members who object to the "entitlements" of welfare, but who eagerly proffer "tax incentives" to busi-



nesses needing a little assistance to make it in the free market.

Many of these folks take interest deductions on houses valued at hundreds of thousands of dollars. Some have benefited from low or nonexistent inheritance taxes. Almost all will take advantage of Social Security and retirement pension tax deferments. None have tried to raise children on a grant of \$378 a month.

Case in point: The Iowa City City Council recently approved developer Wilfreida "I'm Not Rich" Hieronymus's request for a \$1.3 million tax abatement for an office building project. Hieronymus, president of the local Chamber of Commerce, persuaded a council majority that the city should risk public money on her project, even though local banks would not.

Although the council did not rubber-stamp the request, it still caved in to the notion that a juicy subsidy for a local entrepreneur is sound public policy. Yet it was only last summer that council members Susan Horowitz and Naomi Novick opposed the use of a mere \$45,000 for down-payment loans to low-income first-time homebuyers, on the grounds that such loans were an "entitlement" which the city could not afford to give.

Welfare reform in Iowa? Only when we recognize that "the cycle of dependency" includes corporations and the wealthy, not just women and children receiving AFDC. ☛

—Prairie Dog

IPSCO Foretells Future Folly

IPSCO is a Canadian based company established with a heavy dose of Canadian public monies in the late 50s to provide employment and steel making capabilities for Saskatchewan, our Northern prairie neighbor. Its present CEO, Roger Phillips, arrived at IPSCO in 1982 for a stormy decade which included: creation of a generally fiscally profitable company, steel wars between the USA and Canada, high profile Conservative political involvement, downsizing of the industry, layoffs at the company, subsidiary acquisitions, union busting fights and at least two environmental disasters leading to possible criminal charges by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Branstad, with the help of Republicans and Democrats in the Legislature, used IPSCO to set tax, land use and labor policy through the passage of House File 2180 in less than two months amidst an ill-informed debate.

Phillips announced as early as September, 1993, that Iowa was one of three sites for a potential "mini steel mill", an operation which cooks scrap metal in an electric arc furnace and then rolls or extrudes the steel into pipe or other products. The operation is heavy on machinery and equipment and less dependent on workers than on cheap electricity and constant sources of scrap. The competitiveness of the equipment is considerably less than 20 years; five might be more accurate and is often leased rather than purchased.

The technological revolution in the making of steel in the last twenty years and the rise of an integrated market between Canada and the USA for steel products is not unknown to Iowa. Cargill,

owner of North Star Steel in Wilton, Iowa, runs a mini steel mill. A visit to the North Star plant is a good way for you and your children to understand the modern technology of making steel.

IPSCO has never built a "greenfield mini-mill," i.e. a mini-mill from the ground up. As steel makers go, Phillips IPSCO is 5th or 6th in Canada; not a major player. They have never invested anywhere near the \$365 million they claimed to want to invest in the States. It is unclear where all their capital will come from.

Yet Phillips is an extremely public CEO and makes the Canadian press frequently with threats and whining. For example, he whines about labor wanting to maintain seniority rights, about the high price of the Canadian dollar, of the failure of the government to give a local preference for the purchase of his pipe. He complains about NAFTA and then supports NAFTA. He headed a right wing think tank dedicated to nothing except privatization issues. He has threatened to close his Canadian business and move to the USA on numerous occasions. He has set deadlines and then reversed himself. He has perfected a style of bluster, intimidation, threats and arrogance.

IPSCO is generally a profitable company. That does not mean it is one which will "create" jobs or maintain the environment.

There is no evidence that anyone from the Iowa Department of Economic Development or the Legislature or the Governor's office visited Ewa Beach, Hawaii where a second level subsidiary of IPSCO, Hawaiian Western Steel (HWS), operated a mini steel mill in an industrial park. IPSCO asserts that

HWS had environmental problems due to the former owner, COMINCO, and that is true. They fail to mention that IPSCO compounded those problems after it assumed ownership in November, 1988 by blowing the roof off the furnace and running the operation at night spewing about 1/4 to 1/2 ton of dust into the air every 8 hours plus storing tons of the lead, cadmium and zinc residue on site. They closed the plant in 1991, days after the EPA executed a search warrant. IPSCO blamed the government for the closing.

IPSCO and HWS are targeted for attention by the Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, House of Representatives, John Dingell, Michigan, Chair. The committee is investigating why the EPA's recommendation for criminal prosecution against HWS was not followed by the Dept. of Justice. In compelling testimony the EPA investigator reports that when the furnace "began operating, a large fireball appeared through the roof of the building." The work of the subcommittee is continuing.

Our legislature and Governor were satisfied with the following language from House File 2180 which sets economic development policy in this area for the future will bring "good" jobs and companies to Iowa:

"If the Department (Department of Economic Development) finds that a business has a record of violations of the law, including but not limited to environmental and worker safety statutes, rules and regulations, over a period of time that tends to show a consistent pattern, the

IPSCO, Continued on Page 6

Who Should be Allowed to Sign a Petition?

On March 11, 1994, a statutory committee met to receive a petition calling for an election to fill the vacancy on the Johnson County Board of Supervisors. Members present were County Auditor Tom Slockett, Treasurer Cletus Redlinger, and Recorder John O'Neill. In the audience were newly appointed Supervisor Don Sehr (who would be required to run for his position if the petition were accepted), Anne Marie Taylor of Concerned Citizens for Democracy (the petitioners), and concerned citizens Steve Kohli and the Rev. Robert Welsh. Below are some excerpts from the minutes. The complete minutes, highly recommended, may be obtained from the Auditor's Office.

Slockett said a petition had been filed with the Auditor's Office requesting an election; another 147 signatures had been filed a few minutes ago, bringing the total to 5,618, which is 344 more than the required 5,274...

Can Students Sign?

Redlinger said he heard a comment that persons gathering signatures had told people that one only needed to live in Johnson County to sign the petition; if you stretched the fact far enough that would be true. Redlinger said he did not think just living in Johnson County made one an eligible elector. Slockett said it did, if one was 18 and not a convicted felon or disqualified for any reason; as long as one resided in the county, could receive mail, and was a US citizen, one was an eligible elector. Redlinger asked if this applied to students paying out of state tuition. Slockett said yes, absolutely, and these persons could also register to vote. Redlinger said he thought one had to be a resident of Iowa in order to vote. Slockett said such people were considered residents of Iowa, even if they were paying out of state tuition. Redlinger said that did not make sense.

Steve Kohli said... the residency issue was tantamount to the petition, as one had to prove residency to vote and could not vote in two places. He said students lived here

nine to ten months of the year and more were staying for the summer; he said he did not believe under law that persons registered to vote in their home areas could sign the petition, and said in order for the petition to have validity, the signatures would certainly have to be verified.

Slockett said Kohli had asked if persons registered to vote elsewhere would still be considered residents, and the answer was yes; ...Kohli said virtually anyone driving down the Interstate could be considered to be a resident ...

Can Drinkers Sign?

Redlinger said there was a rumor that most signatures were obtained in dormitories, fraternities, sororities, or bars...Anne Marie Taylor (of Concerned Citizens for Democracy) said many volunteers went to people in the community; the organizers were not allowed in the dormitories as it was against University policy, and she did not know of anyone who had gone there. She said organizers spent a lot of time downtown, and there were bars downtown, but there were also many people who work downtown and this was the largest concentration of people...

O'Neill said he knew that petitioners had gone through one tavern four times in one night, and people had signed just to get rid of the petitioners. Slockett asked how many signatures and which ones; O'Neill said he did not know...

Can Dormitory Dwellers Sign?

Kohli said a ton of signatures were from Hillcrest and Burge Hall; with 20,000 students, it was not difficult to imagine 6,000 signatures. He said there were many signatures from 111 E. Bloomington Street, as many as 50. Slockett said that did not disqualify the signatures. Redlinger said he was not sure the address was a family residence if 50 people signed. Slockett asked why Redlinger would say the address was a family residence. Redlinger said he had not said that. Slockett said he believed it was a fraternity or sorority, and there were many residences in the county with large numbers of people. Redlinger said if it was a family residence, and 14 people signed out of one address, it would sound kind of strange. ...Kohli said if nothing else, he would like to see what was at 111 E. Burlington; he may come back and apologize for the question...

Sehr said 111 Bloomington Street could very well be a great big apartment house.

Redlinger said it would be on the south side of the street. Slockett said Bloomington is an east/west street, and that 111 would be on the south side. Sehr said it would be on the north side...

Can the Uninformed Sign?

Sehr said he disagreed with Slockett on what a great democratic process this is. He said that if the petitioners had worked the same amount of time, that they could have gotten a petition to hang "you and me" in the middle of the courthouse square...Slockett...felt what Sehr had said was a slap in the face to every person who was exercising a democratic right to sign a petition, and to those who had done the hard work to get them. Sehr said it was not a slap in the face. Slockett said that while it takes less than 3000 signatures to run for governor of the state of Iowa, nearly 6000 signatures were collected in Johnson County for the petition. He felt Sehr should have the decency to give a little respect to the people who signed it, and the people who put in the work to collect them. Redlinger said Slockett was misinterpreting what Sehr was saying.

Taylor said the people of Johnson County are very well informed on the issues. If the petition were for an issue they did not believe in they would not have signed it. She said she felt Sehr overestimated the number of people who were not informed... Sehr said that Slockett turns what he says around. But if Taylor would have worked as hard on anything else, it would be possible to get that many signatures. Taylor said what she is telling Sehr, is that she does not think so...

Can Renters Sign?

Kohli reappeared at the meeting after having left to check out addresses listed on the petition. He said he would have returned earlier, but he had stopped to wipe the egg off his face... He feels that many signers should not be allowed to sign by his personal definition. He feels it takes nothing to sign a petition. The pen and paper is provided, all you have to is put down your beer, answer the door, or get out and sign your name. Unfortunately, the taxpayers then have to pay the bill... The majority who sign are not going to pay a single penny. Most will not be around to see who gets elected when it's all over... Slockett asked if he was saying that students

Minutes, Continued on Page 6

No More Great Escape at the Movies

"I don't think God particularly wants us to be happy."

— Anthony Hopkins (C.S. Lewis), *"Shadowlands"*

Was the Academy thinking that some suffering is not good box office when it nominated *"The Fugitive"* for best picture over *"Philadelphia"*? After finally giving us a mainstream movie on the AIDS crisis, Hollywood turned itself into a fugitive, and once again took flight from the issue. We will see a lot of red ribbons on Oscar night, but you can bet the behind-the-screens, bottom-line power brokers won't be wearing them.

Misery was a pervasive movie theme this past year; and the C.S. Lewis quote above could be the motto of the best picture category. Here, in alphabetical order, is a rundown of the year's movie misery. *"The Fugitive"*: the murder of the protagonist's wife propels the action; *"In the Name of the Father"*: four innocent people lose fifteen years of their lives in prison; *"The Piano"*: a woman is brutally mutilated by her husband in the name of family values; *"The Remains of the Day"*: a butler dutifully serves his Nazi-symp master instead of his own heart; and last, but forever first in the annals of humanity's capacity for unthinkable savagery, the Holocaust in *"Schindler's List."*

Adding to the misery quotient is the fact that the two most tragic accounts, *"Schindler's List"* and *"In the Name of the Father,"* came not from the fertile imagination of an artist, but straight out of history.

A more down-to-earth explanation for this unhappy movie season was offered by a Columbia Pictures

executive: "With the state of the world economy and the rise of neo-Nazism, it's a reflective time."

Even politicians don't talk about the American dream like they used to. The observation that children won't do better than their parents has evolved from a cliché into a given. Young people are lowering their expectations (30% of new college graduates will be underutilized between now and 2005); old people no longer look forward to golden years (they have watched the buying power of \$1 in 1967 shrink to 18 cents by 1992); jobs are going the way of happy endings: labor historian Staughton Lynd believes that "American capitalism no longer has any use for 40 percent of the population."

A new mood has taken hold: that people may have lived happily ever after once upon a time, but not in our time. Of the five nominees, only *"The Piano"* could remotely qualify as giving us the familiar "Hollywood" ending, but at what a price! We can't place the full blame for the endangered happy ending on declining jobs and rising hate. The fear of AIDS has done more to cast a de-romanticizing pall over the film industry than any economic indicators.

It is no coincidence that the most celebrated actor of recent years is Anthony Hopkins, who has made his mark playing mainly repressed, romantically uninvolved (not to say non-sexual) characters. Even as the unforgettable Hannibal the Cannibal his appetites were not sexual. One observer quipped that in *"The Remains of the Day"* Hopkins is the first butler who didn't do it.

The year's best movie, Jane Campion's bold and provocative tour de force, shows the opposite side of the repression coin. *"The*

Piano" is the story of the contest between the almost supernatural power of a woman's will and the "natural" power of man.

The movie plays out like some ancient myth of the birth of human passion. The piano emerges from the sea onto the muck of a primeval forest, representing one moment communion with something higher, and the next moment recalling the role of the serpent in the Garden. The piano is both Ada's (Holly Hunter) escape from the stultifying patriarchal world of her home in Scotland and the key that springs the trap door of erotic passion and plunges her into the realm of male sexual domination and physical violence.

Ever present, like the music on the soundtrack, is the minor theme of art versus life. Art is the big loser in *"The Piano."* The question is whether it can "win" in real life. Steven Spielberg has called the art of film "the most powerful weapon in the world." Will the world take home any lessons from these movies—lessons about criminal justice systems; about man's inhumanity to woman; about the right to happiness in spite of it all; about the evil little Nazi at the pit of the human soul that won't go away and feeds on times like this? Can art help reinvent humanity?

At the end of *"The Piano,"* the tap-tap-tap of Ada's metal replacement finger on the ivory of the replacement piano is a gruesome reminder that though we all have passion, look who has the power. ♡

— Jae Retz

PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE Readers Respond

What do you like...

Coverage of local politics • In-depth analysis of political candidates and issues • The graphic of the critter • Clearly the talent and wit of Prairie Dog • Brief and humorous at times • Attitude • Continuing left attacks on pseudo-Democrats and attacks on federal government responsibilities to its citizens (lack of)! • Irreverent tone • WAFT • The writing • It's a valuable learning aid to show why there ought to be limits to the First Amendment • Jae's reviews • All of it • Different point of view, well-stated (in most cases) • Same as last year • That it exists • Cynical humor • It tells the truth • Jae Retz • The Dog's smoking habit • Your continuing message that political campaigns are not inherently evil even when candidates may be, shall we say, a bit sub-optimal • Summer Reading List • Honor Roll • WAFT • It exists, therefore I think...

What do you like least...

Chain-smoking prairie dog • Too short • Filling out surveys • Letters threatening to deprive me of one of the few joys of life—the

PP • That incredibly offensive article equating fat people with greed. It was petty, ignorant, utterly worthless, and FAR below the PP's usual standard • Iowa City issues. I'm from Moline • The writing • Jae Retz's simpering kow-towing to the radical femi-nazi movement • You lost it on the "fat" mentality • No one will tell me who Prairie Dog is • Sometimes too predictable • It comes so infrequently • It's just right •

What would you like to see more of...

Community events calendar • Columns, local stuff, investigative dirt • Labor problems! Zoning, housing, and building codes not enforced! Capitalist rule of construction in U.S.! Plans for ghetto elimination! • Challenging accepted norms • Recycled paper • Movement-building and coalition-building • Exposes on ego-tripping, hair-splitting, fake leftist media hounds • Real writing • Recognition that the only remedy to violence in America is to allow everyone to carry a pistol for self-defense • Grad student organizing • Commentary on Hillary Clinton •

Coverage of Oxford's political scene. For example, no one was endorsed for Mayor of Oxford by the PP • Comments on local issues (housing, zoning, etc.) • Pictures • Local political analysis and issues • More sports stories...

Are you interested in writing...

No. Everyone who writes for the PP are wild-eyed radicals who are out to destroy this great United States of America • Sorry, not me! • Who wants to know? • Yes, but I don't really have time...

Other comments

Lively and non-doctrinaire • Breath of fresh air • I'm like a Social Security recipient (on the day of SS check delivery) on the day of PP delivery—just can hardly wait • I hypothesize that the demand for the PP is relatively inelastic in the \$5-10 range and that you would have no drop-off in subscribership if you raised the price to, say, \$8. You might actually increase subscribers as certain yups might feel that they're getting something valuable for \$8 • Keep up the good work • I've supported loser candidates so I might as well support the PP • I'll help keep the Prairie Progressive alive, but not Prairie Dog

Readers' Questions

Am I really a member of DSA/IC? Does it exist? I've never received any DSA mailings or info.. • Am I your sole source of support? ☺

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE has been published quarterly since 1986 by members of the Iowa City Local of the Democratic Socialists of America.

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**IPSCO,
Continued from Page 2**

business shall not qualify for economic development assistance under this part, unless the department finds that the violations did not seriously affect public health or safety, or the environment, or if it did that there were mitigating circumstances.."

Do you think the profit motive is a mitigating circumstance? House File 2180 goes on to exempt the Department of Economic Development from the Administrative Procedure Act process of "determination."

This legislation, under the guise of holding corporations accountable to environmental and labor standards, gives away the farm. Literally. Wait until you read the

tax policy this law sets out! Copies available from your legislators.

The IPSCO phenomena is a harbinger of things to come. Quickie deals made by a state agency with no investigative capabilities sold under the guise of job creation and resulting in zero tax liability to mega-corporations, foreign or otherwise. Watch how Cargill, the mother of all agribusiness, reacts to all this. ☹

— Clara Oleson

**Minutes,
Continued from Page 3**

shouldn't be allowed to sign. Kohli said not necessarily, it just makes it very easy to sign. Sehr said that Slockett likes to twist everything around...

Redlinger said he thinks Kohli's point is how many of the signers are actually listed as taxpayers in the records in our offices. He allowed that while they indirectly paid taxes, they don't pay them in the amount that the people on record pay... Taylor said to excuse her, but she thinks

that we did away with the requirement to own land to vote at least a century ago. Redlinger said that the point is, who is paying for it. Taylor said that when she was a student she was paying a higher rent because her landlord was paying property taxes...

Can Landlords Vote Twice?

Kohli said that he owns property in Iowa City, Coralville, and in rural Johnson County. He claims Johnson County as his residence, because that's where he lives. But he has tenants in Coralville who can vote even though he owns the property, he makes the payments, and sometime they don't pay all their rent. But Kohli still has to make his bank note payment. But he doesn't get to vote in Coralville...

Welsh said that Kohli had found that 111 Bloomington was a sorority house after all, and that 55 people do reside there. Sehr said that it is on the north side of the street. Kohli said it is on the south side.

Recessed at 11:17 a.m. ☹

— Edited by Jeff Cox

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

Box 1945
Iowa City, IA 52244

HANG 'EM HIGH?*

...they could have gotten a petition to hang "you and me" in the middle of the courthouse square...

Statement by appointed Supervisor Don Sehr to County Auditor Tom Slockett. More excerpts from official minutes on page 3.

* Rather than resort to violence, be sure to vote on **Tuesday, April 12**. Winner serves three years on the Board of Supervisors.