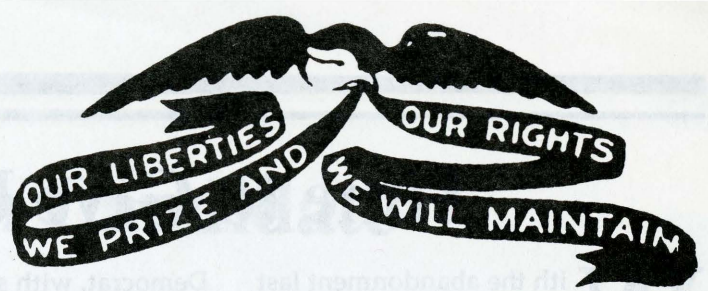


# THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



Fall 1994

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

## The Age of Incarceration

Even before the death penalty issue began to dominate Iowa politics, Bonnie Campbell sounded like she was running not for Governor but for reelection as Attorney-General. "More prisons" has been a constant theme of her campaign, despite her acknowledgment that Iowa is a relatively safe state, and one in which the crime rate has actually decreased in recent years.

Campbell's commitment to more prisons may have muzzled her ability to attack Terry Branstad on the Clarinda scandal. She could be humiliating Branstad daily on the behavior of his friend Doug Gross, who lobbied secretly and shamelessly in favor of a project much coveted by economic-development tycoons in western Iowa (where voters are much coveted by Campbell).

So far, Campbell has resisted pressure to soften her opposition to capital punishment. She faces a predicament similar to those of Ann Richards in Texas and Kathleen Brown in California. All three are women running for Governor against pro-death penalty men.

Richards' situation may be the one for Iowans to watch. Texas LOVES prisons. Construction is booming, the state is contracting more and more with private corrections companies, and in 1993 it had

an incarceration rate of 553 per 100,000 (the total U.S. rate was 519 per 100,000; South Africa's rate is 368).

Richards could never afford to be totally anti-death penalty in Texas, but her record on civil liberties wasn't bad. Now, though,



under attack from candidate George "Shrub" Bush, Richards has called for time limits on death row appeals, and she wants to speed the execution of the nearly 400 inmates on death row (in the state which leads the nation in executions over the last twelve years).

As Iowa's campaign grows uglier, perhaps Campbell should point out that our state already has the death penalty. Just ask the families of the twelve women who were killed by domestic violence in the last year. Why does the Governor grandstand on the tragic death

of one child, Campbell could ask, but when it comes to spouse-abuse and battering, he recommends six-month sentences for three-time offenders?

Meanwhile, back in D.C.: The federal anti-crime bill—much praised by Iowa Democrats—authorizes unprecedented expansion of the death penalty, huge amounts of money for prison construction, mandatory life sentences for "three strikes," treating 13-year-olds as adults in federal court, and stiffer penalties for gang members.

The bill eliminates Pell grants for inmate rehabilitation, limits the safety valve for nonviolent drug offenders, rejects the Racial Justice Act, and includes nonviolent crimes under the first two strikes.

No amount of prison space will be enough to jail the numbers of people this bill slates for incarceration.

Bonnie Campbell's opposition to the death penalty has been sensible and principled. If she can temper her ardor for more jails, she is capable of governing a state which invests in schools and roads and the health of its citizens. If she continues to cheerlead for the prison-building industry, Iowa may become—like Texas—a Place to Do Time. 🐕

— Prairie Dog



# Time to Give Up on Clinton?

**W**ith the abandonment last month of his commitment to universal coverage, Bill Clinton has let a historic opportunity slip away. Support for universal health care is just as strong as ever. The polls show very clearly that the problem is not lack of support for universal health insurance, but Clinton's handling of the issue. Solid majorities support universal coverage and oppose the Clinton plan. Majorities support the specific elements of Clinton's plan, but oppose the overall plan when it is identified as Clinton's. The problem is not merely incompetence, but Clinton's basic political values. The president who is governing the nation operates on a different principles from the candidate who ran for office. The candidate put his campaign in the hands of James Carville, a skilled political operative who managed to put together temporarily an updated version of the New Deal Coalition, based fundamentally on working class votes. Clinton campaigned as a New Deal

Democrat, with some sops thrown in for right wing southerners. The real Bill Clinton, however, is not a New Deal populist, but an elitist technocrat. Unlike those politicians who admire wealth and power, Clinton admires expertise and celebrity. He never had a better time in his life than watching entertainers perform for his benefit at the inauguration. In his political world, policy makers are the intellectual equivalents of entertainers. When it comes to policy, his approach is to put together an elite group of non-partisan, non-ideological problem solvers who perform by coming up with the "best" program that is political feasible. Then he confronts the problem, not of selling his program to the public, but of getting it through the legislature. That was the way he operated as Governor of Arkansas, and it is the way he operates as President of the United States. Getting legislation through congress requires compromise, as Clinton knows well. He is an expert at compromise. But there

are two flaws in his approach to governing that doomed national health insurance, perhaps for another generation. The first is his inability to mobilize public opinion. Journalists are still suing the President for access to the secret proceedings of Hillary Rodham Clinton's commission on health care. The people on that commission, and Hillary Rodham Clinton herself, have no inkling of the need to mobilize public opinion as a counterweight to powerful special interests. The White House has no partisan instincts, no populist instincts, and no democratic instincts. This turned out to be a terrible political disadvantage. Any conceivable national health program, no matter how friendly to corporate interests, would inevitably mobilize intense and powerful partisan and special interest opposition. It is difficult to see how such opposition could possibly be overcome in the absence of strong, and ideally angry, public opinion. James Carville could have handled such a campaign with ease. The President could simply tour the country, showing up at every fundraiser for a little girl whose hospital bills have bankrupted working class parents. There are hundreds of them going on in this country at any given time. Clinton did recognize that there would be powerful opposition to his national health care proposal, but his attempted solution to that problem reflects the second flaw in his approach to governance. His passion for compromise leads him to compromise too early. By the time Clinton's secretly-crafted bill was presented to a skeptical public, the President had

*Clinton, continued on Page 3*

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### Clinton, continued

already given away everything he could give away in order to make the bill palatable to big corporations and the health insurance industry. He hoped that some of the larger insurance companies would be silent, and some big corporations would weigh in on his side. He was right, but it was far from being enough. Clinton then drew the line at universal coverage. "I will not sign a bill", he claimed, "which does not include universal coverage." No one believed him, because everyone knew he would have to compromise, and the only thing left to give away was universal coverage. He could not mobilize the public, because he has no conception of mobilizing the public for political purposes. Furthermore, the only organized interest groups that he could have mobilized were commit-

ted to single-payer health insurance on the Canadian model. Hillary Rodham Clinton's approach to these potential supporters was first to ignore them, then insult them, then complain that they weren't doing enough to push through a bill that they had never been enthusiastic about.

I suppose those of us who hoped that the election of a Democratic president would usher in national health insurance will have to settle for an invasion of Haiti. The only good news in all of this is the press report that Jesse Jackson may challenge Bill Clinton in the Iowa Caucuses. ☹

— Jeff Cox

### Oliver, continued

around the O.J. Simpson case. The recent killing spree across four states by the two Ohio men no doubt raised ticket sales for "Natural Born Killers" as dramatically as it did the fear level in the country. Front page news here in Iowa has been the spectacle of a pathetic, desperate governor using the murder of a nine-year-old girl to pump life into his campaign. Reinstating the death penalty is his sole issue of the moment, the gallows his only platform.

Murder fattens the media and juices up the politicians. A movie like "Natural Born Killers" is part of the problem when it helps keep the national focus on the rare serial killers on the road and away from the many many Stanley Kowalskis making mayhem at home. ☹

— Jae Retz



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# Oliver in Wonderland

*America ranks with Greece and Rome as one of the great distinct civilizations of history.*

— Max Lerner

**T**he glory that was Greece, the grandeur that was Rome, the mayhem that was America. Will America be remembered more for bullets than ballots? Will this once proud democracy go down in history in a blaze of gunfire?

Here we go again—violence in the movies.

Remember the scene in "Streetcar Named Desire" when Stella tries to break up the card game of her husband Stanley Kowalski and his friends? The enraged and drunken Stanley drags his wife into the shower and starts beating her. The camera, though, shows only Stanley. To show a woman being hit like that would have been too much for the audience at that time (1951).

If the woman had been Mallory, the female natural born killer in Oliver Stone's latest movie, instead of Stella, she would've gotten in the first punch, knocked Stanley to his knees, and pounded, kicked, gouged and stomped him into a bloody mass.

Ah "Streetcar"—what an acting ensemble. Those were the days when movies were made for actors, not for money and the hell of it. Why did Oliver Stone make "Natural Born Killers"? To show that a woman can be as vicious a killer as a man? Is that what's meant by gender equity? If so, Mallory (Juliette Lewis) breaks through the glass ceiling with a crushing right jab to the Adam's apple.

I've never forgiven Oliver Stone for coming out with "Platoon" before Stanley Kubrick's "Full Metal Jacket," which is a true

anti-war movie and vastly superior to "Platoon" as a work of art. On the other hand, I've always admired the way Stone takes on The Power in films like "Born on the Fourth of July," "Wall Street," and "JFK." Even though he goes about it with all the subtlety of a hand grenade. The editing made "JFK" great, but it's the editing that makes "Natural Born Killers" almost unwatchable.

**"...Mallory breaks through the glass ceiling with a crushing right jab to the Adam's apple."**

It took 53 days to shoot "Natural Born Killers" and a year to edit it, and it still has the look of paint tossed on a canvas. The movie plays like a music video without the censors: "MTV Goes to Hell."

What, besides the level of violence of the female lead, is really new about this movie? It's such a psychedelic, jumbled mess that it takes a real effort to try to figure out if the movie really is what Stone claims it is: a satire on the way the American media glorify violence.

In the first place, how do you satirize American television? How could a parody of a talk show be any more damning and absurd than the talk show itself? Some ridiculous things defy ridicule.

And is the male natural born killer Mickey (Woody Harrelson) that much different from Arnold, Sylvester, Clint or Bruce? These guys get away with mass murder because, as Schwarzenegger explains to his wife in "True Lies"—"they were all bad." For Stone's equation to work, Mickey and Mallory should represent evil destroying good. But, except for the Native American shaman, this movie is peopled with vicious creeps. Sweeny Todd, the demon barber of Fleet Street, could be on the soundtrack singing "They all deserve to die."

The critics love "Natural Born Killers". They are really lapping up the blood, praising the onslaught of images and buying the "satire." But there's not much talk about the movie's social impact. Will "Natural Born Killers" make any difference out in society, or does it just shoot itself in the foot?

Juliette Lewis says she cried the first time she fired a gun during rehearsals. "After that, I just practiced shooting until I became trigger-happy." Sounds like she really got into it. Let's hope moviegoers don't.

The title of the movie contradicts its main premise, that Mickey and Mallory are products of abusive parents and a sick culture. Is it nature or nurture? Republicans would prefer the natural born variety of criminal, since they have become firmly entrenched as the party of execution, in contrast to the Democrats' preference for incarceration and ours for prevention.

The release of "Natural Born Killers" couldn't be more timely, thanks mainly to the media frenzy

*Oliver, continued on Page 3*



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# Natural Born Candidate

**V**eronica Butler's political philosophy will surely be vindicated if her campaign for Governor brings harmony to an otherwise rough-and-tumble race.

The 44-year-old Butler is currently the Medical Director of a family practice clinic in Ottumwa. As an African-American, she is already something of a rare bird in Iowa politics, but as the state standard-bearer for the Natural Law Party (NLP), she is probing the unknown territory between political correctness and political obscurity.

The NLP is a Fairfield-based political organization headed by followers of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the Indian guru who popularized the practice of Transcendental Meditation (TM) and created a world-wide movement based on his teachings. The Party was founded by English TM'ers, not by Maharishi himself. In fact, his movement had remained staunchly apolitical for most of its more-than-thirty-year history. Maharishi maintained that any political system could be successful if it developed the full potential of the individual members of its society, and he advocated TM as a means to that end. However, TM's popularity in the US and several other countries peaked in the 70s without generating the kind of government support that TM officials had hoped for.

Although the NLP got good press in England and produced many anecdotes suggesting that it had influenced the electoral process to be less polemical and more issue-oriented, the Party was a virtual no-show at the polls. The recent Canadian elections likewise produced good press and apparent

enthusiasm for NLP candidates and programs, but no political clout. Perhaps it will take time for the novelty to wear off.

The NLP clearly has a TM agenda. It is not, however, a hidden agenda, but is the explicit basis of NLP programs--consistent with the NLP philosophy that greater intelligence and creativity in the populace is the basis of greater governmental success. The NLP view is that stress and ignorance throw people out of harmony with natural law, while meditation restores the balance.

Nevertheless, the NLP platform is not a one-plank deal. It is solution-oriented, as opposed to being a vehicle for traditional partisanship, but does not shy away from controversial issues. For example, the NLP is "committed to increasing both energy efficiency and the use of renewable, safe, and non-polluting energy sources." Sounds pretty bland until you get to specifics, such as "Tax fossil fuels to reflect their real cost to the nation...Remove federal subsidies for fossil fuels and nuclear energy...Minimize the federal government's role as a micro-manager in the energy marketplace." The NLP "will not support further development and construction of nuclear energy plants until a fail-safe technology is found to eliminate nuclear wastes."

A further sampling: the NLP favors crop diversification and sustainable agriculture, along with a return to local farmers' markets; favors education as the best way to reduce abortions, maintaining that "it is not the proper role of government to regulate the lives of its citizens through an ever-expanding sea of legislation;" "recognizes the

sovereignty of each Indian nation and supports their right to self-government, as well as advocating "federal recognition of treaty rights for all tribes represented by descendants of original signers."

Although TM research is controversial, TM programs in prisons have a good enough track record to have at least inspired a Des Moines Register editorial (May 9, 1994) in favor of giving it a try. State officials remain reticent.

Butler is well-liked and highly respected in her community. The NLP is widely--but not universally--supported by TM'ers, some of whom would like to see more distance between the Party and the somewhat autocratic TM movement.

It remains to be seen whether the NLP can buck the two-party system successfully enough to become a real contender. Until it does, its only significant opposition might be the Christian Right, which will probably regard it as an agent of Satan. ☛

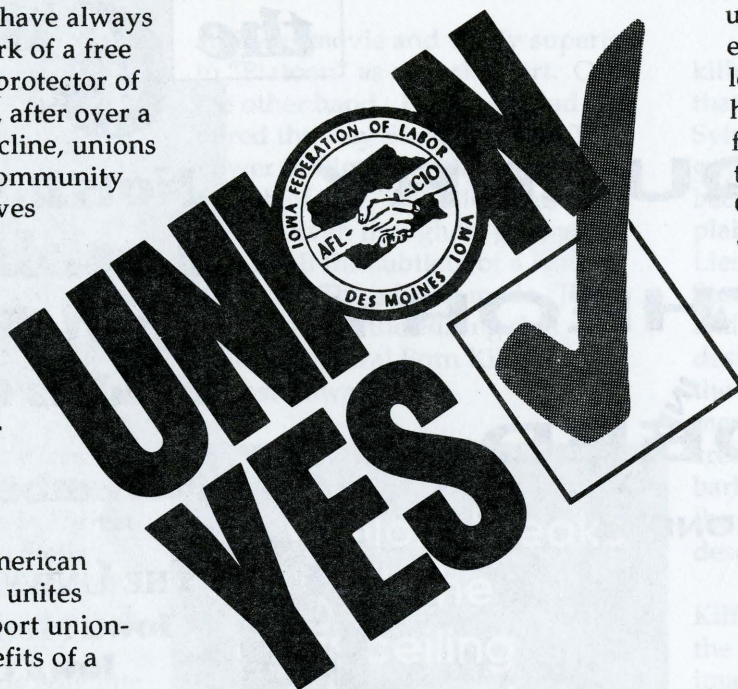
— *L B Shriver is the publisher and editor of Survival in Paradise, an alternative TM publication based in Fairfield.*



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union card to community organizers, labor attorneys, state legislators, adult educators, history researchers, University faculty, P & S staff, and graduate teaching assistants in the Iowa City-Cedar Rapids area and across the state. ☺

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**We are most useful to society when we push the envelope at the left end of the spectrum, so there is more safe space for the center to move in our direction...It is our job to remind elected officials of their campaign promises and impose accountability upon the politics of friendship.**

— Letty Pogrebin