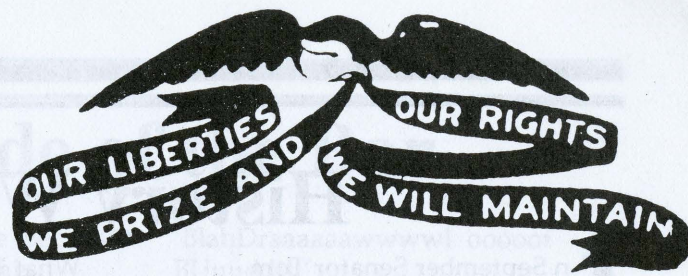


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



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Winter 1995

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Prairie Dog's Honor Roll for 1995

A.V. Krebs The research director of PrairieFire Rural Action provides heavy artillery in the battle against corporate oppression. As editor of *The Agribusiness Examiner*, Krebs tries to forge a path toward what Thomas Jefferson called "an equilibrium of agriculture, manufactures, and commerce... essential to our independence."

Jan Corderman The first woman to become president of a major public sector union in Iowa.

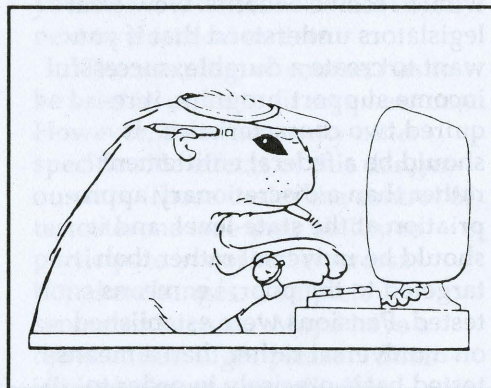
The Cullen Brothers Jim, John, and Art edit, publish, and write for *The Progressive Populist*, a new journal printed in Storm Lake. A promising publication, but not to be confused with the attractive, lively, hard-hitting *PP* you hold in your hand. Subscription info: 800-205-7067.

Dorothy Paul Largely through her efforts, Iowa became one of the first cities in the U.S. to ratify the United Nations Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

The Good Neighbor Project A coalition of farmers, plant-workers, and the Iowa Citizen Action Network continues to battle the corporate excesses and lies of IPSCO in Muscatine County.

Sandy Steinbach Mother, state worker, church-goer, environmentalist—and courageous subject of a

Des Moines Register feature on lesbian parents. Steinbach, her partner, and her 14-year-old son spoke out during the controversy over a proposal to add a gay component to Des Moines' school



curriculum: "It's real important not to be invisible."

John Burns Polk County attorney and president of the Iowa Public Defenders Association, Burns is one of the few high-profile lawyers willing to advocate for legalization of drugs as a means to curtail violence, racial discrimination, prison expansion, and unfair sentencing.

Carl McPherson When the nursing home industry put pressure on the Governor to muzzle him, the long-term care advocate for the Dept. of Elder Affairs refused to go quietly. McPherson managed to

keep his job, embarrass the bureaucrats who tried to bounce him, and continue to blow the whistle on the abuses and violations of corporate care providers.

Karen Kubby Affordable housing, mobile-home relocation, domestic partners insurance, transgender rights, tax breaks for developers: whatever the issue, "the people's mayor" never wavered in her quest for participatory government, her insistence on fairness and openness in city business, and her clear-eyed scrutiny of public spending.

Marty Ryan The Iowa Civil Liberties Union lobbyist helped coordinate churches, legislators, and Iowans Against the Death Penalty in a stunning renunciation of capital punishment. Ryan is so dedicated that he is even willing to have lunch with Republicans if necessary to preserve the Constitution.

Minnette Doderer The longtime crusader for women and children led the greatest fighting retreat the Iowa House of Representatives has ever seen. The House passed a death penalty bill, but only after Doderer's moral passion and political skill cut the margin of votes and turned the tide of public opinion.

—Prairie Dog

History Will Shame Them

In September Senator Tom Harkin joined 34 other Democrats and 52 Republicans in a vote to repeal Title IV-A of the Social Security Act of 1935, the section of the act that provides a federal entitlement to aid for indigent children and their families. Only eleven Democrats, the tattered remnants of the once-proud New Deal coalition, voted no, along with one Republican who thought the measure was not tough enough on poor children.

Senator Kennedy referred to this vote, which was strongly supported by President Clinton, as "legislative child abuse". Senator Moynihan noted that it is the first time that a section of the Social Security Act has been repealed, and asserted that the Clinton Administration will go down in history as "...one that abandoned, eagerly abandoned, the national commitment to dependent children." Of those who support this measure for political reasons—because the White House is for it and Democrats must stand together—he claimed: "They should be ashamed. History will shame them."

I have no idea whether or not Senator Harkin is ashamed of this vote, and it hardly matters. Moralism by itself means almost nothing in politics. I suspect that it is possible to come up with a defensible laundry list of reasons why it is a good idea to turn responsibility for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) over to the states at this particular time according to the hallowed principles of "lesser-evilism". But this sobering vote should lead progressives inside and outside the Democratic party to a reconsideration of the importance of basic principles.

What is it about AFDC that makes it the only vulnerable part of the Social Security Act of 1935, the most repealable section? Why is there a consensus running from Jesse Helms to Tom Harkin that the greatest sacrifices now must be made by the most vulnerable people in our society? A large part of the answer lies in the means-tested character of AFDC, which makes it a very different program from the universal entitlement to a social security pension.

When the Roosevelt Administration crafted the Social Security Act, pensions were designed specifically to be universal; i.e. everyone would pay, and everyone would receive benefits. New Deal legislators understood that if you want to create a durable, successful income support program, it required two characteristics. It should be a federal entitlement rather than a discretionary appropriation at the state-level, and it should be universal rather than targeted to the poor; i.e. means-tested. Pensions were established on a universal rather than a means-tested basis precisely in order to make social security "untouchable," and to guarantee that a powerful interest group like the American Association of Retired Persons would come to its aid.

AFDC was made means-tested instead of universal in part because it was directed to women and children. The New Deal's primary goal was to protect male breadwinners from impoverishment; AFDC was regarded as a temporary bridge for those few women who were temporarily without the support of a man. The number of women eligible has grown, but sexism has not disappeared. Hostility to women is particularly lethal when combined with a spasm

of hostility to the poor that is a recurrent characteristic of capitalist societies. Unlike social security pensioners, AFDC recipients now have no defenders, not even Senator Harkin.

The danger here is that progressives will learn the wrong lesson, and clamor for a general means-testing of all income support programs. Let's free up money for poor children by targeting social security pensions to the poor! But consider what a catastrophe we would face if our public schools, our social security pensions, and Medicare were means-tested. The poor recipients of pensions, education, and medical care would be isolated, stigmatized, and abandoned, leaving only those who could afford to pay their own way with dignity and any economic security at all.

The next time you hear someone say "My aunt has plenty of money, and doesn't need her social security check. We should target social security to those who really need it," think about the consequences. The poor can only be provided with a decent standard of living through government programs that cover everyone, including the wealthy. Sending social security checks to the wealthy is a small price to pay for a system that allows the elderly who were once working poor to live with some degree of dignity. The universality of social security pensions protects them from the legislative wrath of the Helms-to-Harkin coalition that has assaulted the health and dignity of poor children.

— Jeff Cox

T-Shirts, Bridges and Horseshoes

The AFL-CIO held its national convention in New York City, October 23rd through the 26th. I was fortunate to be able to attend, along with over one thousand delegates. These conventions ordinarily have been without many surprises. But everyone agreed, this was no ordinary convention.

This convention was unlike all others in that there was a contested election for the leadership of the AFL-CIO. Tom Donohue and John Sweeney were vying for the top spot. They both had support from different Internationals which were represented by about 500 of the delegates. These International unions had the lion's share of the votes. The other 500+ delegates were from State and Central Labor Bodies. This group represented only 500+ votes; it seemed to be overwhelmingly for Sweeney and helped set the tone for the convention.

A procedural motion on the first day of the convention that resulted in a per capita vote established that Sweeney had the votes to win. This only further bolstered the determination of the Sweeney team to leave nothing to chance. The Sweeney election team was amazing; they had people all over the convention floor. They had cell phones, and walkie-talkies; they were able to dispense information in a moment's notice.

John Sweeney comes from the Service Employees International Union where he was president. SEIU is one of the fastest growing unions in the last decade. The efficiency by which the Sweeney team navigated this convention enables me to see why. If they can organize with the same effectiveness that they coordinated their team's effort at the convention, we're going to see some real changes in the AFL-CIO.

The second day of the convention, red t-shirts bearing the names of Sweeney, Trumka, and Chavez-Thompson were handed out to all delegates supporting that ticket. The Internationals occupied the area directly in front of the very long podium; the Central Labor Bodies and State Federations formed a "horseshoe" around them on both sides and in the back. On this day that horseshoe seemed to be a solid red.

During their candidate debate, Donohue chided Sweeney for blocking bridges (in reference to his "Janitors for Justice" campaigns) instead of building bridges by supporting favorable candidates for office and working through the election process to beget pro-labor, pro-worker policies. Sweeney responded that he was all in favor of building bridges, but if that didn't work he was in favor of blocking them. If it took handcuffing himself to Newt Gingrich's desk, he'd be there and be the first to get arrested.

When the election was held, John Sweeney was victorious. When President Sweeney took the gavel and called the convention to order for the first time, there was electricity in the air. This was especially evident from the horseshoe area, which was predominantly rank and file.

First matters of business were to expand the number of officers from two to three and to change the number and makeup of the Executive Council. The office of Vice President was created and Linda Chavez Thompson was elected unanimously. The Executive Council, which has been criticized as being a club of various Union presidents, was expanded to 51, with nearly one-third of the positions earmarked for women and minorities. The new Executive Council was selected from support-

ers of both Sweeney and Donohue and still contains many International presidents. It is by far the most diverse Executive Council that the AFL-CIO has ever had.

On the last day, President Sweeney invited rank and file workers who were on strike to parade through the convention hall and address the delegates. A giant figure of Mother Jones and scores of strikers poured onto the convention floor. A representative from each strike was invited to address the delegation.

The most stirring speech of the convention was given by a worker from Decatur who has been on strike against Staley. This man had been fasting for 60 days; he told the delegates that if he could give up food for 60 days, then they could support the boycott of Pepsi products (Pizza Hut, KFC, & Taco Bell) because of their dealings with Staley. The faster ended his fast three days after the convention, after receiving a personal plea from President Sweeney.

My feeling from the whole convention was that there was a real rank and file enthusiasm for change, for standing in solidarity, and for more militance when necessary. John Sweeney seems to be committed to shaking the cobwebs out of the AFL-CIO and again making it a relevant part of working person's lives.

As a Sweeney supporter, I left this convention invigorated and hopeful about what is to come. The AFL-CIO will be hiring over 1000 organizers. President Sweeney, Richard Trumka, and Linda Chavez-Thompson have a firm commitment to organizing. This can only bode well for unorganized workers.

— Patrick Hughes is the president of the Iowa City Federation of Labor

Women: We Can't Live Without Them (Taking Over Soon)

"Empowerment of the female half of the human race is the only chance for this planet to save itself." Bella Abzug

Hey Iowa, did you know that Bella Abzug was in Davenport? She was at the downtown River Center last month, meeting with over 400 other women activists to set about saving our planet.

This conference, held in the wake of the UN's Women's "Conference of Commitments," was titled "Bringing Beijing Back: Local Action and Global Strategies." In the country's heartland women met to turn the promises of Beijing into policies at home.

This was the kind of conference where you could ask directions from somebody who would turn out to be Norma Swenson, co-author of that liberating health bible of the 60's *Our Bodies, Our-Selves*, or where you could chat in an elevator with the head of the Ms. Foundation. And they were saying things you won't hear at your usual political gatherings.

These women speak with urgency, because their voices have to penetrate things like the glass ceiling, the television roar of sports crowds, the din of ignorant armies clashing by night and day.

"It's time to tear down the patriarchal playpens of the past. Our struggle is about creating communities, not markets." Bella Abzug

When 70 percent of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty are women, when 80 percent of the worlds refugees are women and children, when two-thirds of the worlds illiterate are women, and one-third of the worlds households are headed by women, but only 10 percent of national legislative seats

are held by women, there is no time to be timid.

Bella Abzug wasn't asking for much, "only 50% of the political space and 50% of the economic resources, since women make up 50% of the population and its the 50th anniversary of the United Nations."

"Media and religion are the two major forces in the world holding women down." Marsha Weinstein

The day the conference opened, front page news was that yet another Iowan had killed his wife. Except for the *Quad-Cities Times*, the Davenport conference went virtually unmentioned: another parallel to Beijing, where the media focussed on bad weather, excesses of security, and the domestic flap over Hillary's participation. We heard virtually nothing of the 40,000 women who scabbled the money together to attend the 5,000 workshops, celebratory rallies and intensive planning sessions.

As a counter to the media blackout, Anne Walker, of the New York-based International Women's Tribune Center, recommends a chaos strategy--sending out information by every means possible, including electronic networking.

"Treat women who are victims of violence as casualties of war." Loretta Ross

Now that men are turning cities into battlefields the realm of fear for women of the world reaches from their own homes to land mines in their streets. In this country, women are targets of husbands, lovers, stalkers, rapists, congressmen and Christians.

To make this connection, Loretta Ross of the Klan-fighting Center for Democratic Renewal

suggested we treat women victims of violence as war casualties, rather than as injury victims.

"We are young feminists. We hope and expect that you will include us and find strength in our commitment and energy." Stacy VanGorp, UNI

The most moving moment of the three days came in the closing plenary when prominent leaders of our women's movement gave the mike and a large chunk of their time over to the youngest participants. These proud young feminists, most from Iowa, each pledged to carry out a part of the Platform for Action and demanded mentoring from the older leaders. They transformed the cavernous banquet room into an intimate circle of passionate commitment.

"The United Nations is the bridge between the global and the local." Ellen Dorsey

American women returned from Beijing determined to put that old progressive dictum Think globally, act locally into practice. They came armed with the Platform, designed to plant on the local level the seeds of insurrection that would force the issue: women's rights are human rights.

Instead of waiting for the Senate to ratify CEDAW, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, activists across the country are charging ahead with a grassroots Implementation before Ratification strategy.

Iowa City is well-represented for the post-Beijing phase. Dorothy Paul, of the Iowa United Nations Association, and Jael Silliman, from

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From the Other Side of the Bar

I've survived another semester behind the bar. There was much yelling and slobbering—random sweeps of the place by the ICPD, scouring for evil 19 and 20-year olds with beer in their hands, and some pretty good live music.

I had many interesting visitors: A middle aged man who asked me if I was a member of the FBI before telling me that he was going to go on the Oprah Winfrey show to divulge to the nation that our minds are being secretly controlled by electromagnetic fields, a cabbie who believes he was visited by aliens as a young boy and is in the process of building some sort of communication box so he can talk to other life forms, a middle-aged man who brings in a Walkman so he can listen to Rush Limbaugh instead of the music, two City Council members who were getting signatures for something, a 45-year old delivery man who has never voted in any election and one angry college kid disturbed by the outcome of the Iowa-UNI game who

slapped me across the face because he didn't want to pay for his merchandise.

Five years of this has changed my general view of humanity forever. I have also come to a momentous scientific conclusion: alcohol and testosterone do not mix. My plan is to draft a proposal to the surgeon-general in the hopes of getting warning labels put on alcoholic beverage containers, in addition to the existing warnings to pregnant women. Warning: If testosterone is your dominant hormone, consuming this could cause you to think you are being visited by aliens, become violent or regress to earlier stages of development. Drooling and wetting yourself could occur. Do not drink next to electrical outlets.

The warning, of course, has to be brief in order to fit on a beer can. However, there are many other specific side effects of this dangerous mix. Those under the control of testosterone lose their ability to participate in normal conversational exchanges. Complete sentences such as 'May I have a draw of Bud Light please?' diminish into almost unintelligible sentence fragments such as

'BlahDraaaaaawwwwl ooooo BUuud lit!'

I'm sure Freud would support my hypothesis on the testosterone-alcohol mix leading to developmental regression. Loss of control of bodily functions is perhaps the most graphic example of this. Childlike pranks are played out in the men's bathrooms of drinking establishments, the most popular being the old kick-the-pipe-out-from-under-the-urinal-so-the-next-guy-pees-on-his-shoes trick.

Any remnants of the Oedipal Complex are restructured into a bartender-as-mother complex wherein the bartender is not only responsible for the ills of the world, but also for cleaning up after you, and listening to you whine about how your girlfriend keeps the remote control in her purse.

While the long-term effects of this seemingly dangerous mix are undocumented, the oldest subjects in my study group—the Rush Limbaugh fan and the friend of the aliens—are prime examples of what can happen when these two chemicals are present together in the body over many years.

In addition to the proposed warning label, I recommend testosterone breathalyzer testing, and the requirement that all liquor establishments be equipped with tanks of estrogen for emergencies.

As I move from behind the bar into another profession, I will continue to monitor the situation in the grand tradition of my predecessor, the eminent Sundry Smith.

—Rachel Zimmermann is the new hormone correspondent for the *Prairie Progressive*

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*Women,
Continued from Page 4*

the UI Center for International and Comparative Studies, both of whom were in Beijing, are presently working on a January 29 Town Meeting to bring the Beijing commitments to Johnson County.

"The world is having a global nervous breakdown. Only half of the human race is making decisions." Bella Abzug

During the Gulf War a false rumor spread through Baghdad that fighting had ended. While women wept for joy, men shot off their guns. How much longer can we afford to let the testosterone-positive half of the human race run the show? As one participant told her sisters: We have to push governments until we are in there running them. Because--one final time, Bella: "That's our job."

— Jae Retz



CALENDAR

December 25 Federal Holiday

January 10, 1966 Georgia House of Representatives refused to seat Julian Bond because he opposed U.S. involvement in Viet Nam War

January 15 **Civil Rights Then and Now**, lecture by **Julian Bond**, 7:30 P.M., Iowa Memorial Union, Iowa City

January 29 **Beijing Platform for Action**, a town meeting sponsored by participants in the 4th World Conference on Women, 7:00 P.M., Iowa City Public Library

Des Moines Register Headlines of the Year

Few barriers to reinstating death penalty

December 4, 1994

Fervor for death penalty remains high

January 22, 1995

Death penalty opponents step up lobbying efforts

January 25, 1995

Death penalty fails

Iowa Senate soundly defeats bill

March 3, 1995

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**"Do we want to
codify a policy of
national child
abandonment?"**

**— Marian Wright Edelman
November 1995
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