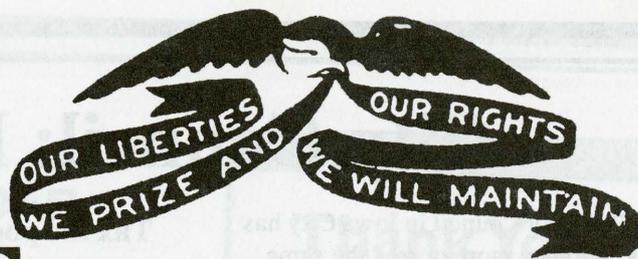


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



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Fall 1997

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

A Choice on the Left

Too early to think about the Iowa caucuses in 2000? Not if you're a Prairie Progressive subscriber.

The presidential race of 1988 is remembered with embarrassment by many Dems, who cringed as Michael Dukakis rode sheepishly in a tank, fizzled in debates, and was outshone by his conservative financier running-mate.

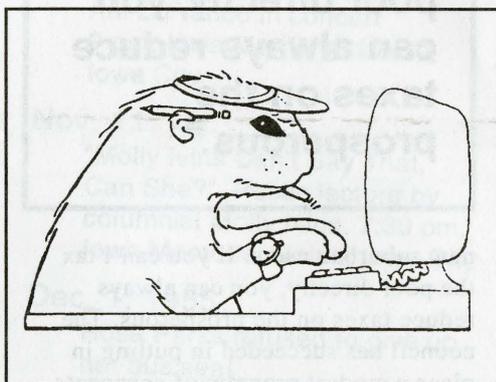
Forgotten by some is the remarkable campaign of Jesse Jackson. After scoring a surprising 10% in the Iowa caucuses, Jackson went on to win 13 states and 1200 delegates nationwide, leaving Gore, Gephardt, & Simon in his wake.

Rallying with UPS workers in Cedar Rapids last month, Jackson made clear his distaste for Gore ("he's to the right of Clinton"). The Reverend has been checking in with his longtime supporters around the state, and has persuaded his ace political consultant, former Iowan Steve Cobble, to work for him full-time in DC.

Progressive Dems love to speculate on Jackson's plans, and many would love to see him invigorate the primary season once again. But this time around, speculation includes Paul Wellstone, Minnesota's professor-turned-Senator who has scheduled two visits to Iowa in September.

Wellstone was the only candidate to beat an incumbent senator in 1990. He was re-elected last year, despite being tagged "Senator Welfare" for his

vote against welfare reform. Wellstone also opposed NAFTA and the balanced budget amendment, saying that the latter had "too much by way of tax cuts for people who least need them."



The coming year might offer a rare luxury: a choice on the left. We'll hear the usual tripe about "electability" and "pragmatism," but don't be fooled. The Iowa caucuses, for all their distraction and hype, are still an opportunity to affect the national debate. And Prairie Dog will bet you a free PP subscription that Jackson and Wellstone campaigns will be a lot more fun than Gore's or Gephardt's.

Magnificent Obsession

UPS and the Teamsters have proven that a unionized company can deliver top-notch service *and* make plenty of

money. The management of New Pioneer Co-op didn't buy it, and is now paying the price for its fierce resistance to unionization last spring. New Pi's corporate-style anti-labor campaign opened a Pandora's box of paternalism, paranoia, and a swarm of questionable business practices.

In the election for new board members, Jim Walters is the class of the field, but Cynthia Kay and Gene Savin deserve a look. The only definite NO is Margaret Hansen, who believes, according to her candidate statement, that one of New Pi's primary challenges is "to counterbalance the undermining efforts of MAC and its obsession with unionization." ☪

"You've got to have fun while fighting for freedom. For one thing, we don't always win, and it might get to be the only fun we'll ever have. And secondly, it does keep you from giving in to either despair or insanity."

—Molly Ivins

City Council: More of the Same?

The City Council in Iowa City has pursued more or less the same policies since the early 1980s. Karen Kubby has often succeeded in providing a challenge to those policies, especially when she had the assistance of Bruno Pigott and Jim Throgmorton on the council. But she has never had enough support to put together a majority for a change of direction. With this fall's election, we have another chance. But first it is important to understand what our current policies are.

Suburban growth no matter what the cost to the city

This policy encompasses both the expansion of arterial roads such as Scott Boulevard and First Avenue, and the massive new Mother of All Water Plants, which is designed to force current consumers to pay the costs of future suburban growth, whether commercial, residential, or industrial.

The automobile as the sole form of transportation, regardless of the cost to the people of Iowa City

In the long run, there is little the city can do alone to stop our frustrating dependence on the automobile. But what little the city could do, it has avoided. Huge sums of money have poured into projects such as the widening of Melrose Avenue. Meanwhile, the number of bus passengers has fallen from 2.5 million per year to 1.5 million per year since the early eighties. If the city were to run its bus system like the university runs the Cambus, some of the cost and congestion (not to mention death and illness) of automobile dependency could be avoided. Next time you are backed up on Burlington, or in one of our unpleasant parking garages, just remember that the person ahead of you could have been on a bus.

Tax the poor

The council majority has not been entirely successful on this policy, despite their undoubted commitment. In the late eighties the city failed to get a referendum majority on the pet project of city manager Steve Atkins, a *local option sales tax* on the poor. But they are at it again. Furthermore, the *regressive water rate structure* was a great success for the council majority. Your first gallon of water is the most expensive one. Water customers with modest usage, often on a fixed income, are billed to subsidize large users, and

"If you can't tax the poor directly, you can always reduce taxes on the prosperous."

new suburban users. If you can't tax the poor directly, you can always reduce taxes on the prosperous. The council has succeeded in putting in place a modest program of *corporate welfare* in the form of property tax exemptions for new industry and warehouses. Two firms that received the first installment of corporate welfare in the eighties were Economy Advertising, owned by then Chamber of Commerce President Bill Bywater, and Plumber's Supply, owned by then mayor John Balmer.

Neglect the library

Since the new library opened in the early eighties, it has been ignored by the council with one exception. Councillors quietly lobbied the library board to impose user fees in the eighties, but that policy was slapped down by former director Lolly Eggers.

Now the library is overcrowded, and good faith attempts by the library board to come up with a plan for a new library have been met with indifference from the council and city manager, who may be holding the library hostage to a new sales tax on the poor.

Aggressive Policing

The heavy-handed anti-burglary tactics of the police in the neighborhood where Eric Shaw was killed are only part of a broader get-tough policy by Police Chief Winkelhake and City Manager Steve Atkins. They have attempted to put armed police officers in our schools, and only last summer encouraged vigilante behavior against alleged drug dealers in the Longfellow neighborhood. The City Council added several new police officers last year with federal funds that they knew would disappear within a few years, create a fiscal crisis for the city, and (they hope) make a new sales tax on the poor seem unavoidable.

The list could continue. How can we turn these policies around, and concentrate instead on sustainable growth, buses in addition to cars, a library to meet the needs of the community, taxes based on ability to pay, and a police department that meets the needs and expectations of the community?

There is no reason to expect any fundamental challenge to our city-manager driven policies from candidates Ross Wilburn (at-large) or Connie Champion (District B). But you can vote for **Russ Lovetinsky** (District B), **Derek Maurer** (at-large), and **Gary Sanders** (at-large). They think for themselves, and do not agree on everything, but they agree on the need for change. ☪

— Jeff Cox

New PI - Old Battle: Amateurs Supporting Walters

"Amateurs practicing at democracy." That's how current New Pi Co-op Board President Rick Stewart referred to Members for an Accountable Co-op (MAC) when they raised concerns to him about an unsecured in-store ballot box in the New Pi election now taking place. Stewart's devotion to "professionalism" (read corporation-ism) and his contempt for democratic practice have fueled the MAC's insurgent member movement.

Jim Walters, Co-op member for 25 years, union member and local organic farmer will help restore democratic accountability to the Co-op. Jim's integrity, intelligence and broad understanding of what's going

on in the food industry, plus his thoroughly organic democratic instincts will bolster the current minority of progressive Board members in their efforts to end the irresponsible financial practices, secrecy, and authoritarian management style now in vogue at New Pi.

Cast a valid vote: only the person whose name is on The Catalyst may vote! We advise—vote by mail. ☪

**Vote Jim Walters
for New Pioneer Board!**

— *Roberta Till-Retz,
Members for an
Accountable Co-op*

Fall Classic

Five important white male authors have or will have published new novels this year, and three of them in past works have employed "sport" as a significant metaphor.

While Philip Roth's Portnoy masturbated into a catcher's mitt and Mailer did much the same wearing boxing gloves, Dom DeLillo wrote two novels which were much less heavy-handed playing with the sport metaphor (*End Zone*, football, and *Amazons*, hockey, published under the pseudonym Cleo Birdwell).

The new DeLillo novel begins with perhaps the best piece of baseball fiction ever written. It was introduced in Harper's a few years ago as "Pafko at the Wall," about the 1951 Dodgers-Giants Bobby Thompson playoff game. In attendance in "Pafko" were memorable characters J. Edgar Hoover, Sinatra, Jackie Gleason, and Toots Shor. It is from this extremely funny and historically significant beginning that DeLillo sets sail on his equally funny and historically significant 850-page opus. Not to be overlooked is that the size of the nuclear core of the Soviet Union's first atomic blast was the exact same as that official National League baseball. ☪

— *James P. Harris*

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A Hardacre of Dreams

Could there be a better name for a festival set in rural Iowa for independent filmmakers who have such a hard row to hoe to get their films before an audience? The Hardacre theater in Tipton, Iowa, site and namesake of this inaugural film festival, actually gets its name from the family who helped build this still stately former opera house.

Tipton local Troy Peters took his idea for the Hardacre Film Festival to theater owner Stuart Clark and "didn't get laughed out of his office." This was not Peters' first involvement with movies in Iowa. I remember meeting him shortly after he worked as a set decorator on *The Bridges of Madison County*, and was intrigued to learn that he owned that magic radio from Francesca's kitchen that played only jazz or opera in Winterset, Iowa. The third key person in the festival's success is Francesca Peters, who might now have the radio in her kitchen.

French filmmaker Claude Lelouch once likened his craft to spermatozoa: "Only one in a million makes it." The odds against *independent* films are even greater. With more movie industry dollars going to ever fewer studio stars and projects, independent films are proliferating, and now make up 75% of American movies. Luckily, film festivals have multiplied across the US as well, doubling from 120 to 240 in the last decade. And I dare say the Hardacre Film Festival is the best deal in the whole country: 9 offerings—7 hours and 47 minutes of movies—for only \$3.

The choices weren't bad either. Only 2 out of the 9 could've been left in the can. You found yourself wishing that some of the shorts were full length and vice versa. But there were plenty of the moments that draw people day or night into a large darkened room.

Tipton's motto, "Where Dreams Happen," is perfect for this daring undertaking. At 10:00 in the morning,

wearing the official lavender t-shirt, Troy took the stage before a gathering of movie addicts that would grow to over 300 to open the festival and introduce *Death By Vertigo*, directed by Okoboji native Becky Smith.

A deft use of flashbacks fleshed out this seriously funny 28 minute story of two women at the funeral of a childhood friend. There was also some raunchy, hard to hear, talk by the casket. The rattle of the theater's air conditioner competed unfairly with

"...there were plenty of the moments that draw people day or night into a large darkened room."

soundtracks during the day, but it only enhanced the funky first-time feel of it all.

The second offering, Marcella Steingart's *Trouble with Louisa*, was a delightful 14 minute tale of a shy Catholic school girl, communion wafers, and a first kiss. She keeps the unchewed wafers in a box in her room: "I like the idea of Jesus under my bed." Peters gave us only a half hour for lunch, but most of us would rather watch a movie than eat anyway.

Best of Festival Award went to Evette Vargas' 29 minute *Thicker Than Water*, whose superior quality was obvious right from the start. It's the story of a daughter reluctantly returning after 12 years to her father's funeral. A dream sequence, of a girl in water, arms held down, tells the viewer the reason for her absence.

Death, the church, and incest—women's films at the festival were in general much shorter but far weightier than the men's. The festival's main attraction was *George B.*, whose star, David Morse, would appear later in the evening on that very same screen playing Jodi Foster's father in *Contact*. Director Eric Lea, on the scene to talk about his movie, based George on a simple, lonely janitor he once knew. Basically a love story without much love, *George B.* will hopefully get a wider viewing.

The movie had one scene of particular interest to an Iowa audience. In the middle of a covered bridge, Angela relieves George with her right hand to show her gratitude for flowers and a soft drink. Take that, Robert Waller.

Credit cards and credits were major themes of the festival. Eric Lea can't get a credit card anymore. Another director told Troy that he cut up all his maxed out credit cards, put them on a pan, melted them in an oven, and mounted it on the wall as "My Financial Picture." Independent filmmakers survive on the kindness of friends and strangers. In the credits, their names dwarf all other categories, sometimes as long as the list of stunt men in a Hollywood summer blockbuster. One ended with "Thanks," "More Thanks," Most Heartfelt Thanks," and "In Case We Forgot Anyone."

By day's end, the Hardacre Theater looked like the scene of a mass slumber party. Thank you, Troy, for bringing in these independent fruits of individual dreams. It was a long, wonderful day at the movies. ☪

— Jae Retz

Vote Gary Sanders

*He went toe-to-toe with
political talkshow host
Robert Novak***

*He will go toe-to-toe
with burger king
Dean Thornberry*

Iowa City Council At-Large
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Sept. 28

Johnson County Democrats'
Fall Fundraiser. Guest speaker:
U.S. Senator Paul Wellstone
4-8 pm, Izaak Walton League,
Iowa City

Oct. 7

Last day to vote in City Council
primary, 7 am-8 pm, Iowa City

Oct. 18

Iowans Against the Death
Penalty conference,
all day, Little Amana

Oct. 21

Ani DiFranco in concert
9 pm, Iowa Memorial Union,
Iowa City

Nov. 11

"Molly Ivins Can't Say That,
Can She?" Public lecture by
columnist Molly Ivins, 7:30 pm,
Iowa Memorial Union, Iowa City

Dec. 1, 1955

Rosa Parks refused to give up
her bus seat

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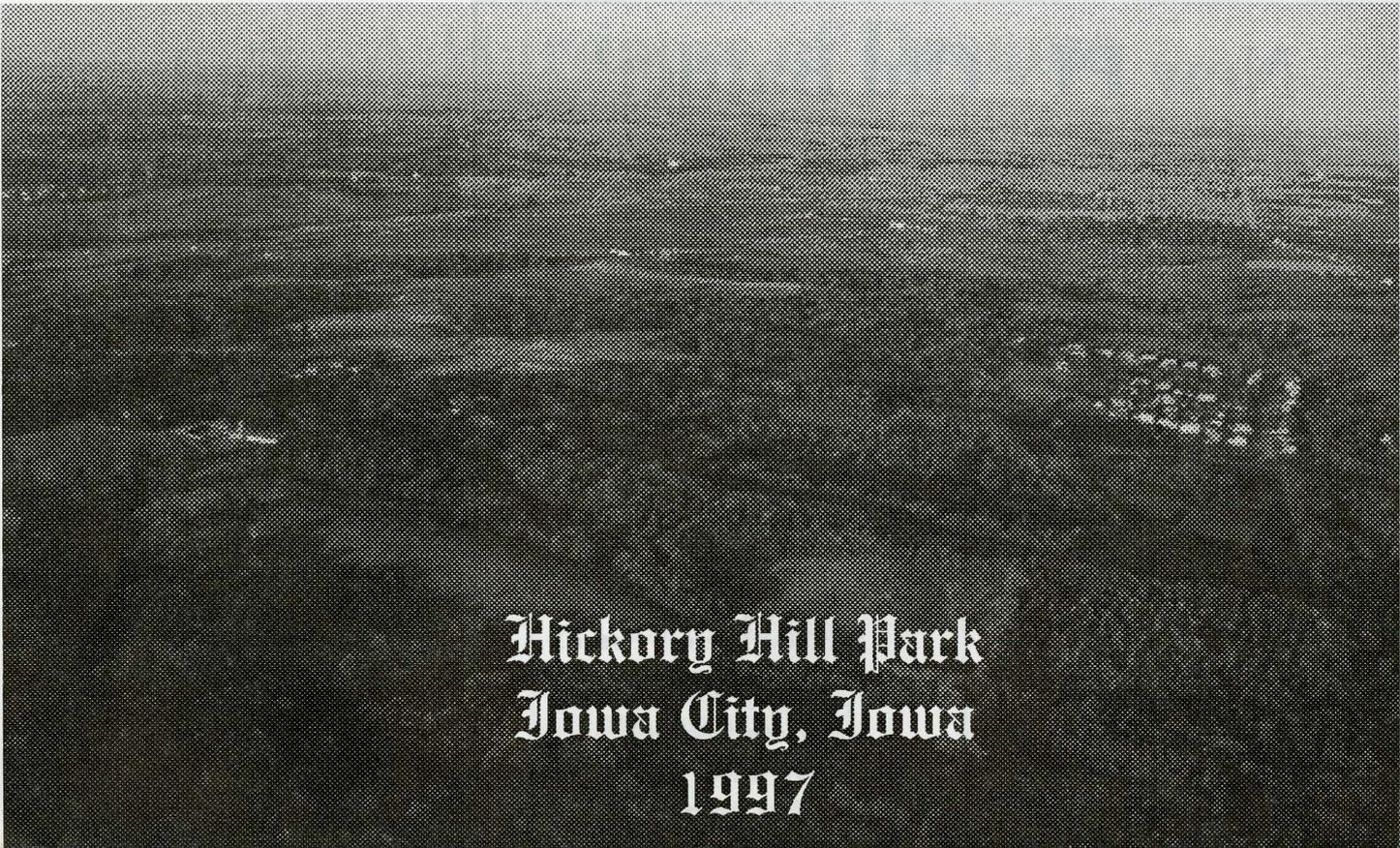
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“The form of government I envision
and want to work in allows the
opportunity for the public to teach
me, to challenge me, to change my
mind, to influence me before I
reach the point of conclusion.”

—Karen Kubby