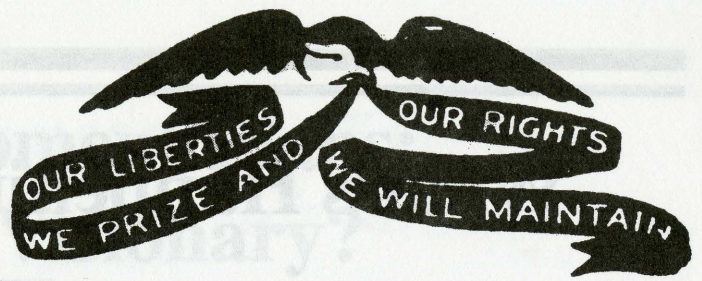


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



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Winter 1997

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Prairie Dog's Honor Roll for 1997

Ken Fuson, the best of the Des Moines Register's home-grown young reporters, couldn't bear the corporate homogenization of his once-great newspaper. Now a hot feature writer at the Baltimore Sun, Fuson "could have stayed if I believed we were serving Iowans...what I believe they care about is [Gannett headquarters] and how much money they put on the armored truck."

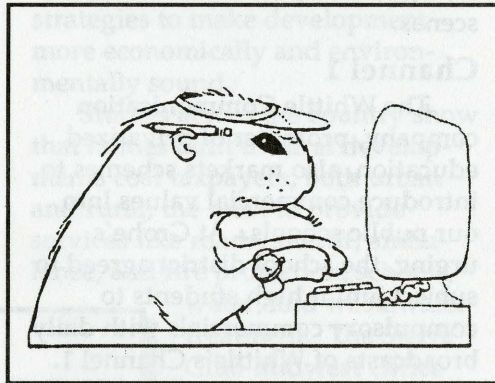
Jim Braun is a pork-producing Republican Farm Bureau member from Latimer. He's also, as the head of Friends of Rural America, an effective enemy of vertically-integrated hog lots.

Iowa Beef Processing got away with recruiting illegal immigrants, paying low wages, and denying public health officials access to their factories, but couldn't escape the rapier wrath of Clara Oleson. Interviewed by Mike Wallace on *60 Minutes*, the Cedar County activist nailed IBP for claiming the state has a worker shortage: "When they say they can't find people in Iowa—at the wage rate they're paying—that's what they always forget to say."

The Iowa Environmental Council's Linda Appelgate successfully lobbied for passage of a bill to close agricultural drainage wells in north central Iowa. Appelgate skillfully demonstrated how to

bring Republicans into the fold without becoming one.

Borders Books employees unionized in Des Moines, and started a magazine to inform and inspire other Borders workers across the country. Write to *Eight*



Ball, 1059 27th St., Des Moines, IA 50311.

Deborah Conger was a political amateur and a relative newcomer when she was appointed Johnson County Recorder. Conger survived a contentious petition drive, a Democratic convention, a primary, a general election, and countless smears and jeers en route to a remarkable upset victory over Supervisor Steve Lacina.

Davenport's City Council and School Board refused to give gays and lesbians the same legal protections extended to people of different races, religions, and gender. On Yom Kippur Eve, Rabbi Henry Karp stunned his

congregation by implicating them in the historical persecution of homosexuals—"ours were the sacred texts that bore the seeds of their undoing." Karp pledged to stand with gays and lesbians in their fight against discrimination, and challenged Quad Cities Jews to "recall how we felt as society's victims, and let those bitter memories inform our present actions."

Lori Bears is a lifetime resident of Iowa City who has served on county advisory committees and local boards, has first-hand knowledge of city housing problems, and is a Governor's appointee to the state Mental Health/ Developmental Disabilities Commission. These qualifications weren't good enough for the Iowa City City Council, which rejected her application for a spot on the Housing and Community Development Commission. Bears filed a discrimination suit after Mayor Naomi Novick said, "I think it would be very difficult for her."

The Des Moines Register, corporate contributors, and a slew of political bigshots in both major parties selected cable-tv CEO Jim Cownie as the man to run Iowa's capitol city, but citizens of "the surprising place" preferred Preston Daniels. The east side councilman ran a solid grassroots campaign to become Des Moines' first African-American mayor.

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What's Happening to Our Schools?

One after another, public officials in Iowa City have come under sustained public criticism: first Police Chief R. J. Winkelhake, then City Manager Steve Atkins, now School Superintendent Barbara Grohe. The immediate occasion for a public outcry against Grohe concerns the recommendations of her handpicked "strategy two" committee. Driven by the perverse theories of strategic planning, this committee has singled out for budget cuts the one program that brings unique recognition to the Iowa City School District, the string orchestra program. Other cuts are predictably short sighted and mean-spirited: cutting back on driver's education at a time when teenagers are killing record numbers on the roads; cutting back on after school care programs at a time when working class families find it necessary for both parents to work. We can only hope that a public outcry will lead to a fairer distribution of the burdens.

But what of Superintendent Grohe's long-term record? What innovations has she introduced into a school district known for the quality of its education as well as its regimentation of students? Keeping in mind that education goes on despite the schemes of top administrators, let's take a look at the areas where Grohe has exercised leadership.

The D.A.R.E Program

When Superintendent Grohe arrived, the school district had in place a drug education program, the "Here's Looking At You 2000" curriculum, designed by professional teachers and integrated with the science and health programs already in place. Grohe moved quickly to introduce a new drug

war curriculum that was sweeping the nation, the DARE program. Pioneered by the infamous Los Angeles Police Department, the DARE program was instituted side-by-side with the existing drug education curriculum. The DARE program is taught by unqualified police officers, and is widely recognized as a police public relations program, designed to stir up public hysteria about drugs in order to sustain the war on drugs. Every study of DARE has shown it to be ineffective, and the DARE program has a well-documented record of bullying its critics, and trying to discredit them behind the scenes.

Channel 1

The Whittle Communication company, promoter of privatized education, also markets schemes to introduce commercial values into our public schools. At Grohe's urging, the school district agreed to subject junior high students to compulsory commercials with daily broadcasts of Whittle's Channel 1. In return the students get a daily news program in the classroom (something they can get at home, along with the commercials), and the schools get free audiovisual and communications equipment.

Armed Police in Schools

Two years ago Superintendent Grohe and Police Chief Winkelhake proposed the introduction of an armed police officer into each of our junior high schools. They argued that the very presence of an armed police officer would have a beneficial moral effect on the adjacent students. Only one member of the school board, Betsy Hawtrey, was willing to speak out in public against this proposal, but

the public outcry was so intense that the proposal was quietly dropped.

Fees for Public Education

Grohe pushed hard this year for a new \$300 fee for Driver's Education. There is little doubt that she would like to introduce even more fees into our school system, despite some obstacles put in her way by the state legislature. What used to be free public education is becoming compulsory fee-based education, thanks to a lack of commitment to free public education on the part of administrators, teachers, and state legislators.

What Does This Add Up To?

This appears to be a vision of a school district where students are forced by law to attend school, charged fees for the privilege, subjected in the classroom to drug war propaganda and compulsory Nike commercials, and supervised in the halls by armed police officers. That would be a gross overstatement, of course. The Iowa City Schools are among our finest public institutions. Most students are quite capable of ignoring the DARE program and Channel 1 commercials, and most teachers manage effective classroom teaching despite the multiplication of demands on them. But it pays to monitor closely the quality of leadership in our public institutions, and Barbara Grohe's does not inspire confidence. ☛

— by Jeff Cox

Newton's Prison

(Editor's note: Iowa is facing an immediate expansion of its prison system from the present 6600 prisoners to over 10,000. Democratic state legislators, including those from Johnson County, have voted almost unanimously for new prisons. Here is a sample of what you are getting with your tax money, reprinted with permission from Bars and Stripes, Oct.-Nov. 1997).

I was one of the nearly 100 persons who accepted the invitation of the Newton Jaycees and Jasper County Economic Development Corporation to spend the night at the new medium-security prison outside of Newton. These two groups were instrumental in writing the proposal which brought this prison to their community as the latest step in their economic development plan. This night to "Slumber in the Slammer" was meant to be a celebration of the completion of the project. As it turned out, the experience was more educational than recreational. During the evening a panel composed of prison officials, state legislators, a lobbyist, and a former prisoner shared their thoughts about prisons. A mock trial was held and tours of the facility were conducted.

The tours included the segregation unit where prisoners spend long periods of time in solitary confinement: 23 hours on weekdays and 24 hours on weekends and holidays. Being placed in solitary has nothing to do with the crime which the prisoner committed on the outside. It is punishment for violating the internal rules of the prison.

The leader of the tour on which I was on was Acting Director of Corrections, Jim McKinney. He proudly showed us the cell de-

signed especially for prisoners who are out of control. In the center is a concrete slab to which the prisoner is shackled. When the prisoner decides to be "better" behaved, he is put in a tiny cell. It, too, has a concrete slab, but he will be given a mattress. The window is about six inches by one yard, but the glass has been distorted so he cannot see outside. He has no control of the lights which can be left on or turned off at the will of the correctional officers. A shade on the outside of the observation window on the door can be pulled to isolate the prisoner even more.

When we were shown the "exercise areas," a gasp went up from those on the tour. A wall has been built in a semicircle outside the wall of the segregation unit and is divided into four areas about the size of the closet. You cannot see the sky without stretching your head back as far as possible. McKinney assured us that there would be wire across the top to prevent escape but no shelter from the snow or rain.

What troubled me even more than the physical surroundings was the sardonic grin which played around the corners of Director McKinney's mouth and the excitement in his voice when he described the way in which those who break the rules will be treated. In spite of its state-of-the-art, high tech trappings, seeing this unit gave me a feeling of *deja vu* and I remembered Good Friday in 1987 when I toured the concentration camp in Traizen, Czechoslovakia. ☹

— by Jean Basinger

CRIMINAL JUSTICE MINISTRIES is the only organization in Iowa dedicated to the welfare of prisoners. Please send a check to PO Box 4718, Des Moines IA 50306.

More News from Newton

There is a preacher in Carlisle, Iowa, proclaiming that God has wrought a miracle. Well, I want to tell you something. The birth of those seven babies was no miracle, it was a tragedy. And it is men who create tragedies, not God. Oh, I'm glad that as of the time of this writing the babies and their mother seem to be doing fine. Call me a sour puss if you want to, but I believe that if the Creator wanted women to have a litter of children, then He, She or It would surely have given women more than two breasts. But He didn't. I can only conclude that the Creator intended for women to have just one or two babies at a time. I feel so very sorry for those seven children (seven if they all survive). For they will live in a fish bowl, and you can use all the nice adjectives you want to describe them, but society will view them the same way they view the elephant boy or the bearded lady at the circus sideshow. And now on to another subject that is causing me heartburn. I'm talking about the way organized labor is getting the blame for the defeat of "Fast Track." The Republicans are blaming them and so are a lot of so-called journalists. While it is true that U.S. labor people didn't like Fast Track — and they have damn good reasons not to like it — they simply did not have the power to defeat it. I'm going to tell you something, friends: Fast track got defeated because a hell of a lot of Democrats in Congress have come to the same conclusion that I have. Bill Clinton cannot be trusted. And that's another tragedy. ☹

— by Olie Lambert

Close Encounter with an Icon

"Film business? I enjoy film--but the business is shit."

—*Oliver Stone*

Dear Oliver,

Remember me? We met when you came to speak here in Iowa City. A member of the University of Iowa lecture committee invited me to your talk and the post-talk dinner. You mistook me for Robert Bly, unaware that my crowning moment as a *Prairie Progressive* contributor was hearing that an east coast subscriber assumed me to be a Black lesbian. I may look like Bly, but we come from very different places.

I thought I knew where you were coming from. That's why it was so disconcerting to see you behind a podium with a gold brocaded curtain as backdrop. Your topic was "Making Movies Matter"--and who has a higher claim to that title than you--but you also had a book and a new movie to promote. Were you here for film or business? Or was this an example of the artist's right to "provocative ambiguity," a right you evoke to defend your movies?

I was thankful for the reserved seat. I hadn't seen Hancher that packed in a long time. I was amazed that so many college students would turn out for a voice from the 60's. Your fee of \$22,000 is a lot, but I can't believe you did it just for the money. You're one of the few public figures who will say a discouraging word about capitalism.

I enjoyed your rambling stream of conscience on social ills, personal emotions, and historical events. It was fun watching you lay out your well-documented obsessions.

More fun came later at the restaurant. I'm still not sure how it

happened, but in the midst of 50 people packed into a small space, there I was one on one, forehead to forehead with you. It was a to-die-for moment for a movie mainliner like myself. I got to tell you that I love the way you shake up the System, and that I hope you'll keep making those kinds of movies, because there are so few big filmmakers out there with a social conscience.

I really struck a chord. You started pouring your heart out about how hard it is to make political movies. (A friend said you still thought I was Bly.) Especially hard, you said, when you're "spotlit," and word gets out about your project, and all hell starts breaking loose. You said that happened with your attempt to make a movie about the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

I know you've been promoting a softer image, and I can attest to that side of you. As we shook hands goodbye I said I was looking forward to seeing your new movie. You smiled and said simply: "I hope you like it." You make them, and I watch them, but in that moment we were just two movie lovers.

I wanted to ask you a couple of things about your talk. Do you realize you ended it with the line "Go out there and light a candle in the darkness."? From someone the *LA Times* dubbed "the most dangerous man in America," I would expect rather to be told to go throw figurative bombs.

Did it bother you that 19 men and only 2 women lined up to ask questions? And were you, one of the country's leading iconoclasts, embarrassed at being called an icon by one of them? But it's true.

You're bigger than your movies, precisely because of your willingness to swan dive into raging controversy.

You recently criticized a couple of blockbusters, *Forrest Gump* and *Apollo 13*, for not being critical of America's past: "We have to move beyond that to a higher consciousness to save this planet." I would expect you to make the lecture circuit with that message, even without a book or movie to promote. Because I believe it when you said that you are preserving for young audiences the memory of America's most corrupt episodes: Vietnam and the assassinations of JFK and MLK.

More recently I happened to catch you on "Jeopardy," as one of the "DC Power Players" alongside Wolf Blitzer and Arriana Huffington. I hope this doesn't mean you're trying to preserve the memory of Camp as well.

And, on CNN's "Talk Back Live," I saw a young woman ask if you planned to make a movie on the death of Lady Di and the possible involvement of the royal family. That's a long way from the days when you defended *JFK* against panels of historians.

I take hope in your parting words at Hancher: "Change from within--you have no other choice, except revolution."

You are so deep within, you're at the point of jeopardy. But I'm confident, Oliver, that you'll eventually make a U-turn back to provocative movies--maybe the one on King--before you get swallowed up by the shit.

Expectantly,

Jae Retz

Rural Development Plans: Muddled or Visionary?

Each of the 125 homes constructed each year in rural Johnson County amidst our rolling hills and remaining corn fields needs to have its lot design approved by the county Board of Supervisors. It is easy for citizens with more mundane needs on their minds to think that the approval of these lots and the establishment of these homes (many costing at least \$200,000) has little consequence for them.

Yet it is increasingly clear that these monthly zoning and platting approvals here and across the state do have financial, environmental, and sense of community consequences for all citizens—urban, suburban, and rural. "In the past 5 years alone," Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Dale Cochran said, "more than 300,000 acres (of farmland) have succumbed to development. The pace is beginning to pick up, all without proper

planning." Between 1974 and 1992, Johnson County lost over 30,000 acres of farmland—a 9.6% loss, according to the Rural-Urban Stewardship Project, a Polk County group, with whom State Representative Ed Fallon is looking at urban sprawl concerns.

Rep. Fallon helped establish a state legislative commission (that will give its final report in December 1998) to confront the issues raised by urban sprawl: loss of farmland, higher property taxes, and environmental losses. The commission will examine public and private land-use planning strategies to make development more economically and environmentally sound.

Studies across the country show that homes built in rural developments cost taxpayers, both urban and rural, the most to provide services like roads, sheriff, ambulance, and fire protection, schools, water, and wastewater treatment. The Sierra Club Midwest Office has compiled a Midwest average that shows rural residential homes cost \$1,165 in government services for every \$1,000 they generate in taxes. Farm land costs only \$365 in services for the same \$1,000 of tax revenue.

There are no local property tax impact studies to show if rural residential development pays for itself in Johnson County, but there is now an opportunity to start one. The

county Board of Supervisors is updating its 1979 Comprehensive Land-Use Plan and is seeking further public input.

The 4-page 1979 Plan has clear goals that were visionary for its time: protecting agricultural land and environmentally sensitive areas from residential development; discouraging non-farm development on agricultural land, and encouraging residential growth in cities. When public input has been sought for the updated Plan these same ideas continued to be voiced. But in the 80 pages of the proposed update these good ideas are lost and it presents a muddled hodgepodge of ideas without priorities to guide our future growth.

The Supervisors and the state legislators need to hear progressive voices from the towns and the remaining prairies favoring public and private strategies to preserve farmland and environmentally sensitive areas from residential development. Rural development drains tax revenues that could be spent on social needs that are being ignored. Lawmakers need to be encouraged to give local government tools they can use to minimize urban sprawl in Johnson County and across Iowa. ☛

— Tom Carsner is on the Board of Environmental Advocates and is a past chair of the Johnson County Democrats.

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Continued from Page 1

Iowa City Human Rights Coordinator **Heather Shank** pressured the state Civil Rights Commission to extend protection to gays and lesbians, produced a public education video on gender identity, and hosted a record 170 citizens at the city's annual human rights breakfast.

2,800 UPS workers in Iowa taught us all a lesson in solidarity.

Educator of the Year

Appearing on NewsHour to discuss criticism of America's public school system, Terry Branstad announced his commitment to giving every child a chance to learn: "All special ed children do have a right to an education, but to spend tens of thousands of dollars on kids that

really are not going to be able to support themselves or be able to really learn a great deal at the expense of the general education of the rest of the students is not fair."

Civil Libertarian and Creative Thinker of the Year

Iowa City City Council member Dean Thornberry suggested that police walk the neighborhoods with drug-sniffing German Shepherds, smelling people at random.

Discrimination Expert of the Year

Dean Thornberry, upon hearing of Lori Bears' discrimination complaint, strengthened her claim by saying, "I doubt very seriously that this was Lori's idea. I think it's something that somebody wanted to do to try to disgrace the rest of us on council." Dean, you don't need any help in disgracing yourself. ☹



CALENDAR

December 25, 1997

Federal Holiday

January 21, 1998

Martin Luther King, Jr. address by Michael Dyson, author of *Race Rules*, 7:30 PM, Iowa Memorial Union, Iowa City

February 2, 1998

Precinct Caucuses

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

Box 1945

Iowa City, IA 52244

**"Every government
needs a Minister
of Irritance."
—John Dewey**