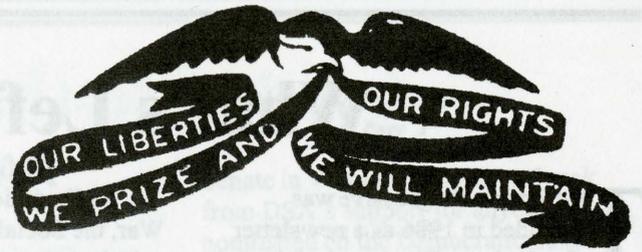


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



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January 2006

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

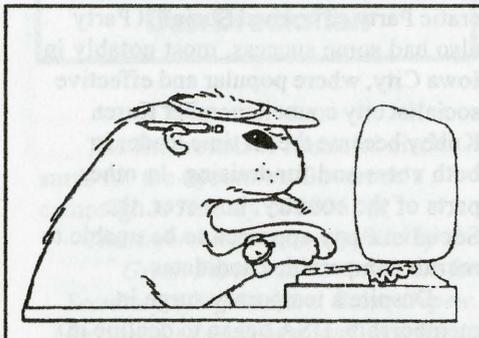
Getting in the Way: Prairie Dog's Honor Roll 2005

Rosa Parks' greatness, said Congressman John Lewis, was that 'she got in the way.' Gary Sanders, peripatetic gadfly from Iowa City, got in the way of the City Council and Board of Adjustment when they bent over backwards to make Wal-Mart feel welcome. Sanders and his intrepid attorney Wally Taylor filed a lawsuit to prevent the city from re-zoning 54 acres of land to accommodate a 22-acre Wal-Mart Super Center, and won a judge's approval to depose city council members on what information – if any – they received outside of city council meetings. Send donations for legal expenses to Iowa City Stop Wal-Mart, 831 Maggard, Iowa City 52240.

F. John Herbert also got in the way. The proprietor of Legion Arts drew attention to Cedar Rapids Mayor Paul Pate's attendance at a prayer breakfast featuring Ken Hutcherson, a notorious opponent of equal rights for gay and lesbian Americans ("God does not condone homosexuality and neither will we"). Herbert publicly chastised the mayor for appearing with someone whose view directly contradicts the Cedar Rapids Municipal Code, which makes it illegal to discriminate against someone on the basis of their sexual orientation.

"Philosophically, I'm pro-union. I just can't see myself in one," said a

University of Iowa librarian. Thus an effort by UI professional and scientific staff to form a union went down swinging, despite widespread concern about hiring and classification inequalities, wages falling



behind inflation, and job security in an environment increasingly hostile to public education, public health, and public employees. But dozens of P & S staff members found their voice, challenged UI administrators and colleagues to face difficult issues, and built considerable support in their first attempt to win the right to bargain collectively.

So maybe Gov. Vilsack, in preparation for a run at the Presidency, wanted to revamp his 'English Only' image as a small-town thinker from a nearly all-white state. Regardless of motive, Vilsack's executive order restoring voting rights to felons who have served their time ended one of

the most restrictive disenfranchisement laws in the country. 19 percent of those denied the vote in Iowa are black, even though the state's population is only 2 percent black.

Dean Wright, professor emeritus of sociology at Drake University, said of legislation to prevent sex offenders from living within 2000 feet of just about everything: "Residency requirements are generally there to placate. These kinds of things make people feel like they've done something. Programs that make people feel good usually don't work." The Iowa Civil Liberties Union was equally outspoken, long before the Des Moines Register and legislators realized the unintended consequences of residency restrictions and their failure to make children safer.

Erin Buzuvis, the adjunct lecturer at the UI College of Law who received death threats for questioning the tradition of pink bathrooms in the visiting teams' locker room at Kinnick Stadium, proved beyond a doubt that the only thing worse than perpetuating a stereotype is pointing it out.

Progressive Action for the Common Good exploded on the eastern Iowa

*Getting in the Way,
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What's Left of Socialism?

The Prairie Progressive was founded in 1986 as a newsletter for the Iowa City Local of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). Although the Prairie Progressive has flourished, the local that founded it has not. The failure to sustain a local is not unusual for DSA, which has seen the majority of its locals cease to exist and its national membership cut in half. In early November I went to Los Angeles for DSA's national convention, wondering if there was any hope for the largest surviving fragment of the once thriving Socialist Party of America.

The Socialist Party of America was founded in 1900 by democratic socialists committed to using the electoral system in order to create a socialist commonwealth in America. Within a decade there were more than 1200 socialist officeholders. Presidential candidate Eugene Debs received a million votes in the 1912 presidential election, and socialists controlled city governments around the country, including Davenport, Iowa.

The Socialist Party of America began a long term decline after the First World War, and by the 1930s was running symbolic campaigns, determined to keep socialist ideals alive as Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal adopted traditional democratic socialist programs. By the 1950s many party members began to argue that the New Deal represented a social democratic tradition in American politics that deserved the support of socialists. In socialist language, the phrase "social democratic" is used to describe political and social movements that fall short of "socialism", defined as a transformation of the ownership of wealth, but nonetheless move in the direction of socialism because of a commitment to the working class, labor unions, and the welfare state.

Badly divided over the Vietnam War, the Socialist Party of America split into three organizations in the 1970s: (1) The Social Democrats USA supported the Cold War; (2) The Socialist Party continued the traditional electoral strategy of the Socialist Party of America by running independent candidates; (3) the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) led by Michael Harrington adopted a strategy of supporting the New Deal wing of the Democratic Party. DSOC later merged with the New American Movement to form the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).

DSA membership surged to over 10,000 in the eighties because many Socialists welcomed the opportunity to be a socialist and a supporter of "the left of the possible" inside the Democratic Party. The rival Socialist Party also had some success, most notably in Iowa City, where popular and effective socialist city council member Karen Kubby became the all time leader in both votes and fundraising. In other parts of the country, however, the Socialist Party appeared to be unable to recruit comparable candidates

Despite a temporary surge in membership, DSA began to decline in nineties because of the major setbacks experienced by the New Deal tradition within the Democratic Party. The party was taken over at almost every level by corporatist, pro-economic development neo-liberals hostile to working people, and supportive of globalization, free trade, and interventionist militarism. The old majority New Deal tradition (represented in Iowa by Harold Hughes, Dick Clark, and John Culver) became a minority tradition within the party. Shell-shocked by the success of the Republican far right at winning elections against neo-liberal Democrats, DSA lost its focus and became indistinguishable from other liberal organizations fighting the Republicans.

The low point came at the 2003 DSA national convention, when delegates voted to support anyone but Bush. DSA then held aloof from the progressive insurgencies represented by the Dean and Kucinich campaigns, and endorsed John Kerry in the general election.

Just as the Socialist Party of America failed to come to terms with the New Deal, DSA failed to come to terms with the triumph of the right wing of the Democratic Party under the leadership of Bill Clinton and the Democratic Leadership Council (currently headed by Iowa governor Tom Vilsack). With the marginalization of the "McGovernite" peace constituency in the party, and the neutralization of the labor movement by Democratic Party leaders, a democratic socialist movement that works inside the Democratic Party should take its place alongside the insurgent, minority left-wing of the party. However desirable it is to defeat the Republicans, no one will join a socialist organization that gets in line behind an elitist, pro-corporate, pro-war, anti-labor candidate like John Kerry.

The 60-80 delegates who assembled at the 2005 DSA convention faced up to these setbacks with great honesty, recognizing that the organization was in a crisis, and required a new political strategy. Delegates voted to focus on the struggle against Wal-Mart, emphasizing the importance of strong labor unions in Wal-Mart stores in America and in Wal-Mart's supplier factories abroad. This is a classic "social democratic" struggle between workers and the owners of private capital. Delegates also voted to support independent Socialist candidate Bernie Sanders campaign for U. S.

*What's Left of Socialism,
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A Letter from California

There is a tide turning in American electoral politics. It is rolling from both the East and the West, beginning with the election of 2005, and by the 2006 election, it will swamp the country.

Here in California, as in the rest of the country, the turn has less to do with any adroit politics from Democrats, and is more the result of disastrous decisions by Republicans. The voters are angry, really angry, and they want to clean house.

A year ago, Governor Schwarzenegger's "shit didn't stink," as we used to say in Iowa. His polling numbers were high and his political enemies were low. Every legislative leader was camped outside his tent (he really has one to smoke cigars) hoping to be invited in.

The governor was smart and he had an honest-to-god mandate to shake up Sacramento in the wake of the hapless—and recalled—Governor Gray Davis. There was a deal to be made to fix the state's structural budget crisis and Democratic legislators were ready to make it with him. It would have been painful medicine for a lot of cherished constituencies on both sides, but the crisis was real and nobody wanted a fight with this guy. Well, almost nobody.

And then Arnold made a mistake. He listened to his professional Republican consultants, instead of trusting his own instincts or, as he ruefully put it after the election, listening to his wife.

He declined any compromise with Democratic leaders on the budget and threw down the gauntlet to public employees, especially teachers and nurses, in the form of a series of ballot initiatives whose purpose was to concentrate budget decisions in his hands. Schwarzenegger's consultants assured him they would win, that his popularity would put the measures over the top.

Wrong. The teachers and nurses and cops and social workers picked up the challenge and beat the daylight out of Arnold's minions. He went 0 for 6, and not withstanding one of his best movie lines, come next November, he probably won't be back.

“Last month's victory belongs to an aroused citizenry, who responded to workers they trusted more than politicians.”

What happened? The same thing that happened in New Jersey and Virginia. I think the right wing has finally overreached. Voters in this country still like the center. They thought they were getting the center in 2000 with George W. Bush. They thought they were getting the center in 2003 with Arnold Schwarzenegger. Instead, they got a hard, cynical shift to the right. Schwarzenegger is scrambling back to the center now, replacing his top lieutenants with the best of Gray Davis's former aides. It will make conservatives apoplectic, but may be his only chance to reclaim the support from moderates he once enjoyed.

A turn in American politics is akin to turning around a battleship. Because of its heft and girth, there is often still a lot of forward momentum even after the

rudder has moved. It is inertia. But eventually, the ship course corrects and that is what is happening now.

2006 should be a very good year for Democrats running for Congress. Dismay over this wretched war, terrifying budget deficits, sharply increased interest rates and the bungled handling of Katrina could drive out incumbents in numbers not seen in over a decade—since the last time they did it to us, actually.

But how pathetic will it be if Democrats come back to power only because Republicans govern badly? Certainly in California, at least, there is little evidence that the Democratic Party is leading the way. Last month's victory belongs to an aroused citizenry, who responded to workers they trusted more than politicians. That should not be good enough for the party that brought us The New Deal and The Great Society and a decades long fight for civil rights, equal rights and human rights.

We need candidates who will unambiguously champion an end to the Bush administration's unjlatralist foreign policies, who will fight for universal health coverage and will employ the law and regulation to combat global warming, just for starters. Finally, we need candidates who pledge to restore fiscal sanity by reducing our budget and trade deficits and reign in the corporate abuses which have distorted our markets.

Where will we find them? This kind of coordinated campaign is about more than get out the vote. It is about ideas and values and commitment. Do we possess these qualities in sufficient measure to motivate voters with something like trust? The time draws near. I hope we are not found waiting, and wanting. ✕

— Tom Higgins, a former Davenport state legislator, is now the CEO of a California biotechnology company.

Adding to the Public Burden

Coralville's use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is doing critical damage to the County budget.

TIFs cost Johnson County about \$1,767,000 in FY04. Almost \$1.3 million of that was attributable to Coralville. These numbers are even higher in FY05. This does not include schools—this is the cost to County government alone.

That means less ambulance service, less deputies, less health care for the poor, less services for people with disabilities, less services for seniors... Less of everything, except taxes; those have to go up on everyone else.

I am not against TIFs per se, but I do not believe Coralville has used TIFs as they were intended.

First, TIFs were intended to serve as an incentive to redevelop blighted areas, then plow the money into affordable housing. It is hard to argue that (in the case of Coral Ridge) bare ground is blighted. What's more, Coralville has no new affordable housing as a result of all the TIF activity. As a matter of fact, Coralville has bulldozed much of the affordable housing that once existed there.

Second, there is little evidence that TIFs can be effective in attracting new investment. The practice is now so common that no one can claim any competitive advantage. There is "little to no evidence of overall public benefit," as economists at Iowa State concluded recently, "or meaningful discussion of the mean costs of the practice." I know some folks in Coralville feel Coral Ridge has been an economic catalyst, but statistics do not bear that out. Very little basic sector employment has come to Johnson County due to Coral Ridge. Most of the new employment has been retail. What's more, most of the larger businesses and some of the smaller businesses in the TIF area already

existed elsewhere. (Penney's, Target, Sears, Best Buy, Goodwill, Hawkeye Harley, theaters, etc.) The TIFs simply convinced several businesses to move from one area to another. This is not growth. The University, as usual, is the real economic engine in Johnson County.

"Some local officials are more committed to being polite to each other than to raising the issues that really affect constituents."

Third, even if one could prove that TIFs worked in the current environment, it is hard to fathom needing them to build the mall. Were incentives really necessary to convince General Growth to build at this prime location?

Fourth, the Coral Ridge TIFs directly subsidized low-wage, low-benefit, never-union retail employment. This adds to the public burden (Medicaid, reduced-fee school lunches, subsidized day care, etc.) of mopping up after low-wage employment. (Much of the social safety net is County funded, incidentally. Coralville contributes very modest amounts to local human service agencies in comparison to Iowa City.) As mentioned earlier, there is little affordable housing in Coralville, so these low wage employees become someone else's problem. Few of the businesses are locally owned; the big profits flow out of our county. If TIF must be used, use it as

incentives for basic sector employers like ACT and P&G, not retail. (Some of the County's smaller cities are even using TIF strictly for housing developments. This is an even worse idea, in my opinion!)

Finally, the TIF boundaries, length of time, and terms have changed repeatedly. None of this has been found to be illegal, but that does not make it right.

Coralville has spoken of offering to give the County some money to help pay for essential services. Allow me to make an analogy. If someone took money out of your paycheck every year—\$1100, then \$1300, then \$1700—and money was getting tight, you would begin to get antsy, wouldn't you? If this person started to feel bad, then offered you \$50, do you feel as though everything is fine? This is exactly the situation Coralville has presented to the rest of the County's taxpayers. The only difference is the decimal point.

There has been discussion of a "Metro Agenda" here in Johnson County. Unfortunately, some local officials are more committed to being polite to each other than to raising the issues that really affect constituents. We must be able to speak freely, and to challenge each other. It is difficult to imagine much progress unless we can have open and honest discussion.

As a County Supervisor, I am charged with looking out for the best interests of the taxpayers of Johnson County. I cannot, in good conscience, sit back and say nothing as this practice continues. ✕

—Rod Sullivan is in his first term on the Johnson County Board of Supervisors

Who's Supporting Patty Judge?

In her first statewide race in 1998, Secretary of Agriculture Patty Judge's list of contributors included a number of corporate executives of the biggest hog producing firms in Iowa, all committed to the large-scale factory farming of hogs. The list included Bruce Rastetter, CEO of Heartland Pork, Daniel Ochylski, President of Iowa Packing Company and a board member of the American Meat Institute, and Randall Stoecker, owner of the Iowa division of Murphy Family Farms. Stoecker was subsequently charged by Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller with conspiring with Smithfield to establish a sham company to circumvent the state ban on packer ownership of pigs.

Judge also received support from the Committee for Rural Development, the political action committee for giant hog producer Iowa Select Farms.

When Judge ran for reelection in 2002 many of her contributors from 1998 showed up on the roles again. In 2002 she also accepted money from the Iowa Agribusiness PAC, the Iowa Farm Bureau PAC, and a PAC for Monsanto Inc. Iowa Select Farms also sponsored a joint fundraiser for Judge and a Republican—Senate Majority Leader, Stewart Iverson in 2002.



Dec. 25
Federal Holiday

Jan. 16, 1991
The Persian Gulf War is
televised on CNN

Feb. 21
Governor's Conference on LGBT
Youth, Drake University, Des
Moines. 515-243-1221 or
brad.clark@iowasafeschools.org

R.I.P.
Iowa City Police Officer
Dan Dreckman

The first round of financial disclosures for the upcoming Governor's campaign is January of 2006. ✕

—This information was supplied by the
*Green Party's 2002 candidate for
Secretary of Agriculture, Brian Depew.*
More on our candidates for Governor in
the next issue of the *Prairie Progressive!*

What's Left of Socialism, *Continued from Page 2*

Senate in Vermont, a welcome break from DSA's support for anyone nominated on the Democratic ticket.

What was notable at the convention, however, was not only the new sense of political realism but the solid socialist commitment of the delegates. DSA's survival matters to DSA members because the future of democratic socialism matters. Economic inequality is not the only form of injustice that undermines the promise of democracy, but it is a fundamental injustice, rooted in the unequal relationship between people who work for a living only to see their standards of living fall, and the people who own large amounts of capital and grow rich in their sleep. Wal-Mart does not behave the way it does because the people who run Wal-Mart are bad people, but because Wal-Mart is maximizing its return on capital to pay its investors at the expense of workers at home and abroad.

Capitalism is widely recognized as an unjust economic system, but injustice will remain as long as those committed to social justice are limited to the vocabulary of liberal moralism. We need a new economic system based on equality and fairness if we are to make the promise of democracy a reality, and only democratic socialism provides an analysis of the fundamental changes needed to make that happen. DSA's 2005 convention showed that democratic socialists are ready to regroup, and try again. ✕

—Jeff Cox

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Prairie Pop Quiz Winner!

Congratulations to Marty Ryan of Des Moines, the only reader to identify Carolyn Pendray as the first woman to serve in the Iowa House. Pendray, from Maquoketa in Jackson County, was also the first woman in the Iowa Senate.

Getting in the Way,
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A Vote for O'Brien

scene, taking less than a year to enlist 1000 members actively engaged in a dozen social justice issues, from predatory lending to the Iraq occupation to workers' rights. Two of them, **Cathy Bolkcom** and **Karl Rhomberg**, take to the airwaves (1270 AM) every Saturday morning to announce events and to banter about Quad Cities politics.

Eddie Moore, Jr., finally packed his bags for Seattle, but not before establishing the annual White Privilege conference at Central College as a major national event on race, gender, and class issues. Iowa will miss the Black Tulip of Pella.

The Prairie Progressive Iowan of the Year award goes to UI professor of pediatrics **Jeff Murray** for changing his mind after accepting a high-dollar job at Harvard: "I didn't think the fun quotient was going to be as high there." ❧

—*Prairie Dog*

Denise O'Brien has been a farmer and a farm activist for nearly 30 years. A Kellogg fellow, the founder of Women, Food, and Agriculture, and recipient of numerous honors, Denise has traveled and spoken at conferences nationally and internationally, not only to represent the views of Iowans, women, and farmers, but to also learn about other approaches to agriculture. Now she is working to bring her vision and experience to a broader audience as she runs for Iowa's Secretary of Agriculture.

For many of us, the office of Secretary of Agriculture doesn't get much attention. Yes, we all see the Secretary's signature on the fuel pump license at the gas pump, but it's not an office most of us think about. Yet, the issues facing agriculture in Iowa—water quality, food security and quality, and rural economic development—affect all of us.

Denise will address these and other issues, from a perspective of economic and agricultural sustainability. She will bring a progressive voice to an office that has too often been dominated by the voices and unbalanced influences of commodity agriculture groups and the Farm Bureau. As a long-time activist who worked with farmers and other groups during the Farm Crisis, Denise is not afraid to seek out innovative solutions.

I'm eager to bring Denise O'Brien's vision and thirty years of experience to the office of Secretary of Agriculture. Iowa deserves no less. ❧

—*Regenia Bailey is an Iowa City resident whose interest in agriculture started 40 years ago on her grandparents' farm in Marion County, Iowa. However, she still can't tell a combine from a cultivator.*

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

Box 1945

Iowa City, IA 52244

"The best patriots all around the world are those who carry on a lover's quarrel with their country. This kind of patriotic person can be seen as a reflection of God's eternal lover's quarrel with the world."

—William Sloane Coffin