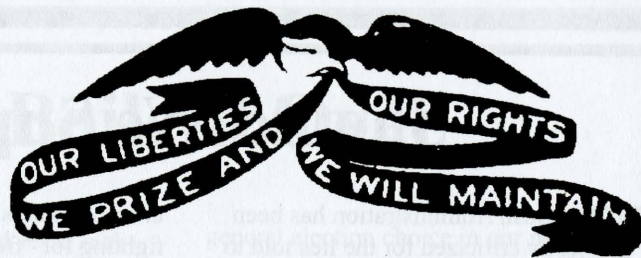


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



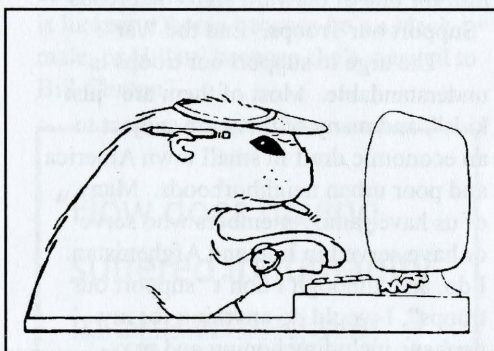
Spring 2008

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Framing the Message, Crossing the Bridge

As a grassroots organizer seeking both to end the war and to broaden the base of people who are willing to stand up for peace and economic justice, I am constantly mindful of how to frame the message of the work that we do in the Quad Cities to build a progressive movement. Over the past three years, the efforts we have made through Progressive Action for the Common Good have included deep and vigorous discussions about how to be both courageous and effective. Often that comes down to questions of tone and wording and to the energy which we bring to the work—whether we are simply against something or for a vision of what we want to create to replace that which we deplore.

This was much on my mind as we planned to participate in the annual March 15th Quad Cities St. Pat's Parade. This is a hugely popular celebration of 20+ years. I have a personal connection in that it was literally the highlight of my Irish Catholic mother's life to march in the parade every year in celebration of her Irish heritage. I did not think that participating in the parade as an anti-war contingent would advance our goal of broadening our base and educating people about the costs of the war. So our group met and discussed and argued and came to agreement to keep our presence a positive pro-peace unit: signs expressing messages of peace and passing out literature as well as the requisite candy and beads.



Our marching unit -- 40-50 people of all ages ---carried signs reading Irish Mom for Peace , Pray for Peace, Peace Works for Ireland, Be the Peace, among others. One member had constructed a frame for an eight-foot tall American Friends Services banner which highlights the costs of the war -- "\$720 Million a Day: How Would You Spend It?" -- that rose up above our group. Candy and necklaces were thrown and 4000 pieces of literature on the economic consequences of the war were passed out

The most amazing thing happened as our marching unit -- part of a miles-long parade -- came off the Centennial Bridge across the Mississippi River and headed up 3rd St. into Davenport where huge crowds gather to watch. The crowds began to cheer, to call out 'peace' to us marchers, to give us the peace sign, to show their support through clapping and shouting and smiling. For us war-weary activists, it was a heartening reception, at a time when we feel great despair over the lack of attention being given the war,

the mounting death toll, the inaction of our leaders. We appreciated this affirmation from regular people that the majority of American people want peace. We are utterly confused by why our elected leaders in Congress are not in step with the wishes of the American people.

On the 5th Anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, Pax Christi and Progressive Action for the Common Good sponsored two events. The first was a press conference held, interestingly enough, at the new Davenport Police Department Community Room. Peace activists talked about how a fraction of the monies being spent in Iraq could be used locally to pay for basic human needs in the Quad Cities and in the state of Iowa. Mayor Bill Gluba and 10 community leaders talked about how such things as affordable housing, mental health funding shortages in Scott County, and infrastructure needs for the city have been adversely affected by the \$500,000 per minute we are spending in Iraq. It was notable that every local news media outlet was present.

The evening of the anniversary brought an historic gathering of Catholics, Muslims, and Christians of various denominations, Unitarians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and peace lovers of all beliefs at the Islamic Community's Mosque in Moline. 250 Quad Citians came together -- one of the larger gatherings anywhere,

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Should We Support Our Troops?

The Bush Administration has been justly criticized for the lies told to justify the invasion of Iraq, particularly the link made between Saddam Hussein and the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. As American bombs rained on Iraq, many of them had a picture of the World Trade Center attached.

Sometimes, though, the most damaging lies are not those told by our government, but the untruths we tell ourselves because we want them to be true. When George Bush claimed that the 9/11 attackers were motivated by their hatred of freedom, he was appealing to one of our most deeply held beliefs as Americans, i.e. that our soldiers, wherever they are, fight in order to “defend freedom”. In a recent exchange in the Iowa City Press-Citizen, a soldier serving in Iraq claimed that he was fighting for a critic’s freedom to object to the war. Distraught parents of soldiers who die in Iraq often tell the press that “he died defending freedom.”

The argument that American soldiers are fighting to defend freedom was much easier to make during our twentieth century wars against Nazism and Communism. With the defeat of fascism and the collapse of communism, the “freedom” argument is becoming more difficult to sustain. America created a global military presence under the umbrella of the Cold War that is now exposed to public scrutiny.

The United States does not annex countries, but it conducts military interventions throughout the world to make sure that nations and even entire regions are subservient to America’s geopolitical interests. The Pentagon maintains over 700 overseas bases in 130 countries at a staggering cost, and conducts illegal covert operations to topple governments and foreign leaders who stand in the way of America’s neo-imperial ambitions. From Guantanamo to Diego Garcia to Bagram, these bases have come to symbolize illegal incarceration and torture. Throughout much of the world American

citizen soldiers are no longer seen as fighting for “freedom”, but as sustaining some of the world’s most brutal and repressive regimes as long as they serve America’s global interests.

Opponents of the war in Iraq have been reluctant to do anything that indicates that we don’t support our troops. I have a fading bumper sticker on my car that reads “Support our Troops. Bring Them Home.” It is only laziness that has prevented me from calling up our local anti-war banker Ed Flaherty, and asking him for one of the yard signs that reads “Support our Troops. End the War”.

The urge to support our troops is understandable. Most of them are “just kids”, and many of them are subject to an economic draft in small town America and poor urban neighborhoods. Many of us have family members who serve or have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. I do, and although I don’t “support our troops”, I would do anything for my nephew, including hoping and praying that he remains safe. Furthermore, there is a sense that our troops have been unjustly forgotten by most Americans, including the editors of the Cedar Rapids Gazette, whose early flag-waving front page enthusiasm for our “heroes” in the “war on terrorism” has been replaced by indifference to the one or more Americans who die daily in Iraq.

Are we really, though, serving the interests of our country by using the phrase “support our troops”? War is the greatest evil known to humanity, and should never be supported without the most irrefutable evidence that there is no alternative. The wars that we are fighting now in Iraq and Afghanistan are particularly brutal ones, directed against guerrilla insurgencies that make it impossible to distinguish civilian from military targets, especially with an air war that is barely reported in the American press. Imagine the horror of the people who watched Americans jump from the World Trade Center, and transfer that to the horror of Iraqis who see their children mangled and burned

alive from American bombs, and to the Pushtu speaking people of Afghanistan who discover that their elderly parents, while sleeping peacefully in their bed, have been crushed to death by an American bomb.

That is what is happening daily in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the horror that we are inflicting with these unjust wars is whitewashed by the phrase “support our troops.” Of course soldiers are victims of lies too, and often subject to shameful neglect as veterans. One of the most effective anti-war organizations today is “Iraq Veterans Against the War”. It is important to remember, though, that our soldiers however young, are American citizens in a volunteer army. They deserve our support only when they volunteer to fight wars in cases of extreme necessity, not when they enlist in a drive for American global power and influence. Our support should be reserved for veterans, and war resisters, and conscientious objectors in the military, and local counter-recruitment campaigners. We shouldn’t make it easy for the government to rally “support for our troops” with their lies about fighting for freedom.



—Jeff Cox

Editor’s note: May 15th is International Objectors Day

Our Melting Pot Boileth Over

Not long ago we were celebrating the happy dilemma of Democrats embodied by my next-door neighbors: a teenage son for Hillary, a mother caucusing for Edwards, and a father planting an Obama sign in their front yard. I could identify with them: I caucused for Hillary, would gladly have helped Edwards fight the class war, and my heart is now with Obama.

Can Democrats survive what has happened since those days of heady and heedless optimism? On caucus morning New York Times columnist Gail Collins likened Iowa's Republican caucus to Athens in the Age of Pericles. Democrats, she said, "are closer to Turkmenistan in the age of Saparmurat Niyazov." Though Iowa Democrats phoned their results in sooner than the Iowa GOP, the subsequent party infighting and the messes in Michigan and Florida have put Democrats back in Turkmenistan territory.

This Democratic race, touted as a historic showcase for diversity, has devolved into an ugly irony. We now see how far away this country is from ever being what the history books once liked to call a "melting pot." Some of us took heart in the belief that America is at least a "tossed salad." But the two campaigns seem bent on un-tossing the salad, as they set about separating the electorate into wanted and unwanted croutons: Blacks, young people, educated latte-sippers, caucus goers and upscale whites over here; Latinos, old white women, older white men, caucus bashers, and working class whites over there.

For many years I have thought that a good outcome of Hillary as President would be all the old white guys who would die of apoplexy. Robert Novak would probably be the first to go. I also wanted Armageddon Now with the necons, and believed that only the Clinton machine could drive them to, well, the Gates of Hell, blasting swift boats out of the water before they hit top speed. But watching the Clintons turn that machine on Obama has been too much to bear.

When Bill Clinton used Jesse Jackson to diminish Barack's victory in South Carolina, it also became too much for the staunchest Hillary supporter I know. When Geraldine Ferraro claimed that Barack is doing so well only because of the "lucky" color of his skin, I recalled a friend's response to any white person complaining too much about their life: "It could be worse, you could be black." For him, being born black in the Land of the Free was anything but a stroke of luck. Makes you wonder which one is luckier: Obama because he's a black male, or Hillary because she's married to Bill Clinton?

"How does having suffered inhumanity in one wrong war qualify somebody to lead a second wrong war?"

Hillary and Bill seem to be writing their own book and calling it *The Audacity of Obama's Hope*. She herself crossed the audacity threshold when she stated that only she and McCain have passed the Commander in Chief test. Is it not unforgivable for one Democratic candidate to say that another is not ready to serve, and to praise the Republican at the expense of your fellow Democrat? ("She has to stop endorsing him," somebody remarked to me.) How does having suffered inhumanly in one wrong war qualify somebody to lead a second wrong war? And Hillary is neither a vet nor has she been properly vetted on what experience qualifies her. But an Obama nomination would set up the clearest

general election choice in our nation's history: a hope monger versus a war monger.

I attended our county convention this past Saturday, fully expecting to come away with a warning that if the fireworks in Johnson County are a preview of what's to come, then the Party had better begin some damage control before Denver. Didn't happen. The only fireworks for the day--eleven hours after the morning sign-in began--erupted over amendments to the Israel/Palestine section of the platform. Only later did I learn that the two campaigns had agreed upon a convention truce.

That evening I got my first glimpse of Barack Obama's pastor shouting "God damn America!" "Damn!" is right. Now Rove won't have to make anything up. Will Obama's speech on race save his candidacy, or will it end up being what the Clintons like to call "just words?"

I'm one of those folks who would vote for a yellow dog before I'd vote for a Republican. And I'm a single issue voter. My issue is the Republican menace. The GOP motto could be: Help those the most who need it least. So I'll have no problem pulling the "Democrat" lever in November. I worry about all my fellow Democrats who might not. In the meantime, Help!--I feel like I'm dying of apoplexy. ✂

—*Jae Retz lives in Iowa City*

We Do Exist

Many times during the debate about “gay marriage” I have found myself asking, would I be happy with a “civil union?” What it honestly comes down to is that, to me, it doesn’t matter what it is called, as long as it is equal and not “less,” and “civil unions” are less equal.

There are over 1000 federal benefits when a couple gets married, and over 500 Iowa state codes that mention “spouse.” Just posing the question raises countless other questions and my mind feels like it is performing a circus feat juggling it all. Why do my partner and I have to anticipate the absolute worst possible scenarios and pay a lawyer to tie up every potential loose end to attempt to protect each other when we had our commitment ceremony (10 years ago on May 23rd of this year)? Are we not competent and consenting adults who responsibly made vows to each other? How many times will I have to explain to our kids that we are married, but not legally? To tell the truth, I haven’t even told them about the decision of the judge last fall that may change Iowa’s law and allow their moms to finally legally marry. I don’t want to get their hopes up.

“My children are aware of so many non-traditional families that they do not experience their own family as abnormal.”

I probably can handle the disappointment. They shouldn’t have to. I didn’t choose to bring kids into this world just to play out this battle. Simply

put, I wanted to be a mom and share my life with children.

Should we change Iowa’s state constitution? Writing discrimination into a constitution isn’t a pretty thing. Constitutions should be about expanding rights. Should we put it to a vote and let the people decide? It is nice for the people to “speak for themselves,” but I believe that it would come down to money and who can run a campaign to get their message to the

public. I can just hear the hateful words and fear tactics they would use. And I don’t want my kids or their friends to see it or hear it.

Why can’t Iowans have a little faith in the judicial branch? Must we always question their decisions and attempt to side-step or take away that branch’s power? Why even proclaim that we have a balance of power in the first place?

The arguments against this so far have focused heavily on families like my own with children. I’ve been called “selfish” for knowingly parenting children without a male partner to be “daddy.” Don’t worry about me, I can take it, knowing that my kids are just fine. We’ve also asked friends and family to participate actively in their rearing. We know so many families with single moms, widowed parents raising their children alone, grandparents raising their grandchildren and foster families. My children are aware of so many non-traditional families that they do not experience their own family as abnormal.

Need I mention that this is another fear tactic as well as a distraction! Gay couples aren’t waiting for legal rec-

ognition to become parents. There is no possible way that family make-up can be regulated. There will be single moms. There will be divorced couples raising their children with split living arrangements. Withholding gay marriage

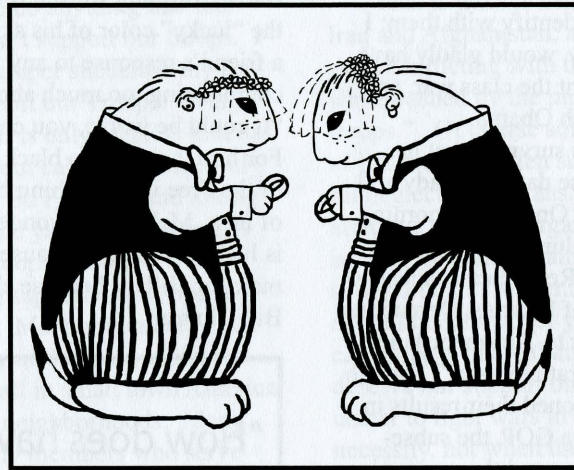
because, in some opinions, my family should not exist, is ridiculous. We do exist.

I keep finding my way back to their argument of needing two parents together to raise a child. My kids have that. If we rank families,

apparently mine is supposed to rank at the bottom. There’s another message I’d prefer my kids not receive. I do not want to use them as pawns. My feelings prove that I may not be as selfish as their fear-mongering claims I am. Their existence does not provide argument enough for marriage equality. They exist. Period.

Marriage equality comes down to two consenting adults who want to care for each other and prepare for those instances ahead of time. Marriage is between two people. Let’s completely take the children out of this debate; and focus solely on the protections that the committed couples deserve and are willing to affirm and vow to each other under the law. Once these protections are in place, I do not see anything bad happening to the children of gay couples. I simply see equality under the law for their parents, which only increases the strength of the family itself. ✨

— Sara Baird lives in Iowa City





April 12

ACLU of Iowa Annual Dinner
IMU, Iowa City, 7 PM
Keynote: Caroline Fredrickson,
ACLU DC Legislative Director
www.aclu-ia.org

May 3

Iowa Citizen Action Network
Annual Convention
Hilton Garden Inn, Johnston
www.iowacan.org

May 13

Interfaith Alliance of Iowa
Dinner
Hotel Fort Des Moines, 7 PM
www.iowatia.org

June 8

ICARE Pancake Breakfast
Pedestrian Mall, Iowa City
8 AM - 1 PM
www.icareiowa.org

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according to national new coverage of such events across the country -- on the 5th Anniversary of this pointless war. Prayers and verses were said in several languages, including Muslim and Hebrew prayers, chanting in Sanskrit, and prayers and verses from the Catholic and Christian communities. Seeds of hope were planted in flower pots to sprout through the spring just as our connections among people of different faiths and beliefs grow and flourish in the Quad Cities. Again, our local media provided very thorough coverage of this event.

All said, it was sad and solemn and at the same time a very good week for the peace movement in the Quad Cities. One woman with tears in her eyes left the Peace Service saying, "I feel like there is a star shining brighter in the darkness tonight." ✨

— *Cathy Bolkcom is a co-founder of Progressive Action for the Common Good, www.qcprogressiveaction.org*

My Night with Karl Rove
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to ask, "Are you having fun with this?" "Oh, yeh!" he shot back.

From my perch in a wing-backed chair next to him on the stage, I could see friends, neighbors, and students throughout the crowd of 1,200. The hall was huge, with mock medieval chandeliers hanging thirty feet over the crowd. I was surprised to see several of my friends down front, joining dozens of others in screaming at Rove. It looked medieval. And it certainly felt medieval from where I sat there above the police barricades. Maybe it was so striking, because it was the first passionate moment on campus in years that was not a defense of drinking.

By the time we got to the question-and-answer period, the need for the armed policemen posted at stage left and right seemed moot. The campus police had already confiscated "the pie" at the door. (As it turned out, the terrorist threat was limited to just one pie in a backpack.)

Although I found the experience a little wearing, the crowd was as tireless as Rove was. We could have stayed all night. As the Q&A hour wore on, the line at the mic never got below about 40 questioners, each with a barb or attack.

Whatever sense you make of it—and Rove showed that we do not all know the same things the same way at the same time — three cheers for free speech at Iowa. That's something that everyone there seemed ready to agree on. At least, that. ✨

— *Frank Durham is an Associate Professor in the University of Iowa School of Journalism & Mass Communication.*

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My Night with Karl Rove

The evening I spent on stage at the Iowa Memorial Union with Karl Rove in March brought hundreds of Iowans together to see this figure, to hear him, and—in many cases—just to yell at him. A lot. All night.

As his liberal host, I was supposed to represent a counter-point in an effort to balance the discussion. It didn't really work like that, but that was the idea. During the 30-minute interview period, I opted for a set of pointed questions about Iraq, Katrina, lost civil liberties, and other White House favorites, all of which he disregarded and reframed.

The boisterous crowd of 1,200 included about 200-300 loud protesters, as well as about that many Republican partisans down front. Things got hot at the start when a grandmother and several students were escorted out by the police for trying to serve Rove with papers for a citizens arrest. She screamed out her warrant until they nabbed her at stage

left. In all, ten people were taken out for trying to disrupt the event. But no one was arrested and the event carried on to its conclusion. We had a safe night, which was my only true goal, given the build-up to the event.

In my 30-minute interview with Rove, I wanted to raise a range of points. When this got frustrated, I said to him, "The fundamental differences we're talking about tonight have more to do with beliefs about reality than any shared reality. I mean, this is not a persuasive exchange." I then asked him about the partisan split that he and the president's administration had worked to cultivate in the country. That went nowhere. In fact, he did not answer any of my questions directly, choosing instead to deny the premises or to deflect them altogether.

When he found a question problematic (he found them all problematic) — about my published research on Bush's press relations or Ambassador

Joseph Wilson's report on WMD or Rove's role in outing Valerie Plame or even Bush's poll numbers — he simply declared the source invalid or called the author a liar. He did the same thing in response to a question from the floor about a quote in a Ron Suskind NY Times article about the "reality-based community." This is a very well-known quote, but he called Suskind a fraud, too. After Suskind went down, I knew it was just another slow night for me and the rest of the "Community."

I did, however, hope to help him to get through the evening by facilitating the broader discussion. People were yelling at him about the "blood on his hands" and his being a "war criminal." He seemed braced by the attacks. I mean, he really liked the fight. At one point, I leaned over

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THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

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"Don't dismiss me that easily."

*— Dorothy Day, when
referred to as a saint*