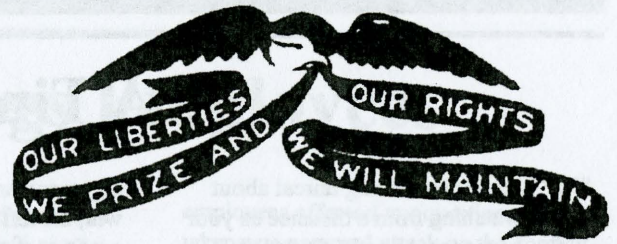
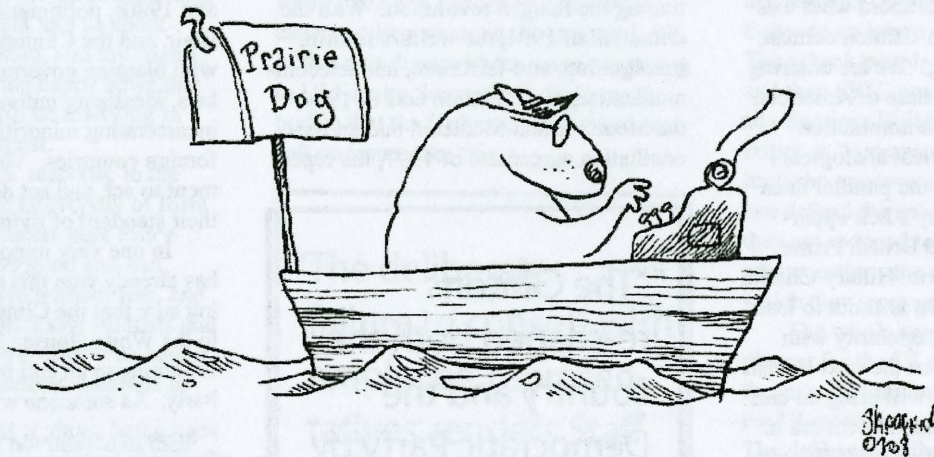


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



Summer 2008

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT



Worst Summer Ever?

Hundreds of friends and neighbors are flooded out of their homes and businesses, making Iowa this year's poster child for natural disasters.

Postville, Iowa, becomes nationally known for its man-made disaster: the largest raid at a work site in American history, tearing apart families and constitutional rights.

George Bush sets foot in Johnson County and escapes unprotested.

One Source Staffing and Labor, a temp agency with offices in Kansas and Texas, pays flood clean-up workers \$7 and charges them \$7 a day for gas in the buses that take them to and from work sites in Cedar Rapids.

'Shared governance' at the University of Iowa rears its hypocritical head

once again, attempting to impose with little warning or input a reduced benefits package for powerless staff members.

Barack Obama goes along with a US Senate sell-out, caving in to the phony premise that national security requires a sacrifice of civil liberties.

The Iowa City Press-Citizen outsources its circulation department to Oklahoma and its printing to Des Moines, thereby cutting customer service, local jobs, and late-night baseball scores.

The Iowa City Planning and Zoning Commission green-lights a new Wal-Mart Super Center, reminding us that some dragons are never permanently slain.

Worst of all, the summer issue of the Prairie Progressive is delayed due to the flooding of its printing house in Cedar

Rapids - the first delay in our 22-year history. Our Prairie hats are off to AdCraft Printing for getting back on dry land so quickly.

At least, at last, you hold in your hands the latest issue of Iowa's longest-running political newsletter. May its pages anger, surprise, and spur you to action as Iowans clean up, campaign, and carry on. ✕

— Prairie Dog

A Time of Hope?

There is something unreal about watching from a distance as your home town floods. Stranded overseas, I kept receiving e-mail requests to come help with sandbagging, and managed to feel guilty about not helping even though it was impossible.

I also watched from abroad the end of the race for the Democratic presidential nomination. Everyone I talked to in London was clueless about what was going on in the Obama-Clinton contest, which is not surprising. We are entering a new and uncharted phase of American history with the Obama nomination

Addicted to historical analogies, I couldn't help noticing the parallel fates of the Democratic Party's heir apparent Hillary Clinton and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown. Hillary Clinton lost, and Gordon Brown is about to lose. His unprecedented unpopularity with the electorate means that the next British parliamentary election will bring an end to the Tony Blair/Gordon Brown era in the British Labour Party, just as Hillary Clinton's defeat has brought an end to the Clinton era in the Democratic Party.

The British Labour Party and the American Democratic Party were both transformed by the experiences of the 1930s and 1940s, by the Great Depression and the Second World War. Both emerged from that war with a strong faith in the power of the central government to improve the lives of working class people who periodically suffer from the excesses of capitalism.

Both parties suffered electoral traumas in the 1980s at the hands of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Political geniuses, Thatcher and Reagan managed to blame the economic woes inflicted on the world by free-market capitalism on the very instruments of government that had been created earlier to ameliorate those woes. Government was not the solution, they said. It was the problem.

In both the Labour Party and the Democratic Party there were political leaders who essentially accepted that

argument, and concluded that in order to win, the left-wing party would have to conform to the political logic of Thatcher and Reagan. In America it was Bill and Hillary Clinton who carried out the Reaganite agenda within the major left-wing political party; in Britain it was Tony Blair and his successor, Gordon Brown.

The Clintons re-shaped both the country and the Democratic Party by continuing the Reagan revolution. With the crime bill of 1994, the welfare reform, immigration, anti-terrorism, and telecommunications deregulation acts of 1996, the Medicare and Medicaid budget reconciliation agreement of 1997, the repeal

“The Clintons re-shaped both the country and the Democratic Party by continuing the Reagan revolution.”

of the Glass-Steagall Act of 1999, the passage of NAFTA, China's admission to the WTO, the authorization of government-sanctioned torture in the form of extraordinary rendition, and the illegal pre-emptive bombing of Serbia, the Clintons embraced the very worst forms of Reaganism: unfettered capitalism, incarceration, and militarism. Although winning the White House twice, the Clintons and their allies in the Democratic Leadership Council turned the Democratic Party into a minority party at every level of government.

Hillary Clinton was saddled with this record, one that she reinforced by voting in the Senate for the unwinnable wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Patriot Act. That is ultimately why she lost to Barack Obama, who came out of nowhere to

capitalize on public discontent with the politics of Thatcher, Reagan, Blair, and Clinton.

Capitalism periodically creates global depressions that inflict disproportionate harm on people who work for a living: the 1840s, the 1890s, the 1930s, and the 1970s. We are now heading into another global depression, this one accompanied by global inflation, but unlike the 1970s and 1980s, politicians like Thatcher, Blair, and the Clintons cannot get away with blaming government, praising markets, idealizing individual responsibility, incarcerating minorities, and invading foreign countries. Voters want government to act, and act decisively, to protect their standard of living.

In one very important sense Obama has already won this election by making sure that the Clintons will not return to the White House. The Clinton era is coming to an end in the Democratic Party. As someone who grew up in the segregated south, it is almost impossible for me to imagine an African-American being elected to the White House, especially one who received his party's nomination in the face of an openly racist campaign on the part of the Clintons and their surrogates. If Obama is elected it will be a great day in American history.

The direction in which he will lead his party and his country remains, though, entirely unclear. In his widely read book *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama takes both sides on almost every important issue. Free trade? Well, it's both good and bad. Labor unions? Yes, they can be good, but labor leaders have got to learn to adjust to new realities. Etc.

How much political capital will a President Obama spend to overcome a filibuster of the Employee Free Choice Act? Will he embrace the legislation already prepared to renegotiate NAFTA and other trade bills in the interests of working people? Are we headed for another Clinton-like disaster on national health

A Time of Hope?
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University Sandbags Employees

I did my part. I answered the University of Iowa's call for volunteers to sandbag along the Iowa River before the floodwaters rose. Never mind that we were being paid our regular wage or that the volunteer effort began on work time. I can now tell my grandchildren that I did my bit.

I worked with my colleagues from the UI Main Library. We filled sandbags, the dude from Georgia told us about genuine canned possum, and my friend the Archivist broke the happy news that he and his partner will be marrying in San Francisco in August.

The UI Libraries' response to the flood exemplifies the University of Iowa at its best. Library leaders kept everyone informed of news good and bad, staff took the initiative without fear, and nobody stood on rank. I saw students and retirees working side by side with senior librarians to save precious materials in the basement.

Librarians were not unique in their hard work and long hours trying to protect the University of Iowa from the water. UI employees, from work study students to maintenance staff, from professors to nurses—union and unorganized—demonstrated their dedication and concern for the University.

While I filled sandbags and removed boxes from the library basement I pondered the glaring contrast between the rapid and selfless response of UI employees and the machinations of the University administration. Even as we worked to protect the Arts campus and the building housing University data storage, the University administration was moving ahead with its plan to savagely cut the benefits of professional, academic, and healthcare staff. What a kick in the teeth!

Now, after staff has proven its loyalty and commitment to the University of Iowa as an institution and a community of learning, UI leaders plan to reward them with a handsome reduction in benefits. The University wants to take

hundreds, even thousands, of dollars in "flex" money now paid to staff to purchase their benefits from a cafeteria plan.

These "reallocations" were instigated by Interim President Fethke, who hated the fact that employees have decent benefits. Human Resources planned the cuts and the majority of faculty and staff members of the FRIC (Funded Retirement and Insurance Committee) eagerly rubberstamped the proposal. All of this was done without saying anything to UI Faculty Senate or Staff Council, bodies that the University claims to consult on issues like this.

"The deliberate failure to consult with employee 'representatives' renders Staff Council and Faculty Senate obsolete."

I had just been crowned the new president of UI Staff Council, representing 5500 unorganized professional and scientific employees, when I found out about the intended cuts. I was stunned. Though FRIC members are appointed by Staff Council and Faculty Senate, despite Staff Council leaders meeting monthly with the UI President, and regardless of the vaunted system of UI consultation with staff, faculty and student representatives, we had heard nothing about huge reductions in our benefits.

My reaction as Staff Council president was that any change in benefits could not even be considered without broad involvement by the supposed representatives of staff and faculty. When I asked how FRIC, with only 14 members, could represent the interests of all

employees affected my question was taken as a personal attack on the committee. So, instead of discussing why such drastic benefit changes had been planned in silence, I was dismissed as an angry crank.

The University has held a number of meetings to talk about the planned cuts. Members of HR and FRIC take questions and patiently explain how these reductions are an improvement in the system. They thank people for their comments, and then FRIC goes back to the University Services Building and denounces critics as "screamers" while praising the few who approve as "singers." Nobody can defend the substance of the cuts, so they are reduced to slamming anyone who questions the cuts or the way in which they were arrived at.

The whole process has nothing but pluses for the UI administration. When the cuts are implemented it will "save" the UI money at some time in the future. The deliberate failure to consult with employee "representatives" renders Staff Council and Faculty Senate obsolete. While neither body ever had any power, they did have the illusion of being consulted. Now even that chimera is gone. The process and substance of the cuts paves the way for any other unilateral changes that the UI wants to make in retirement, insurance, or work conditions. By including SEIU covered employees in the cuts, the UI demonstrates that even a union cannot protect employees.

The muck left behind by the flood isn't the only thing on campus that stinks. ✕

—Duncan "the Librarian" Stewart

Workers Take Heat from ICE

Subcommittee meetings on bills during the session of Iowa's General Assembly can result in the emergence of some very fascinating information, and a bit of entertainment now and then. During a subcommittee meeting on Senate Study Bill 3286, a bill relating to wage payment collection and employment classification, an interesting exchange took place between John Gilliland, lobbyist and senior vice president of the Iowa Association of Business and Industry (ABI), and Senator Joe Bolkcom (D-Iowa City).

John: "Uh, yeah, I have this problem with Section 11 of the bill; the part that holds the top ten largest shareholders personally liable for wages."

Joe, rubbing his chin: [after pausing for a while to read the section] "Yeah, I see what you mean, John. Ten is probably too many. What do you suggest? Five?"

John: "No, no, that's not what I meant."

Joe: "Well, then, what are you saying, John? No one individual should be responsible for paying wages due to an employee?"

SSB 3286 passed out of subcommittee and out of the Senate Ways and Means Committee and became Senate File 2416. It was never brought up for consideration (debate) in the Senate and died when the Legislature adjourned sine die for the session.

The bill had flaws, but it's too bad that some provisions were not enacted prior to May 12 when federal agents stormed a meat packing plant in Postville to eventually take away over 300 of its employees in handcuffs. Why? The employees didn't have proper documentation.

The owner and corporate shareholders shrugged their shoulders. They had no idea (wink, wink) that some of their employees were undocumented workers. Well, now that that federal government has whisked them away from the area, the problem is all over. Or, is it? Were

these workers paid? Were they paid fairly? Legally?

Slavery is a constitutional violation. "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." That's the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. It brings to

"The rich always live by different rules, mainly because they pay to make the rules."

mind words rarely used anymore: peonage, serfdom, Russian chattel, military draftee.

Iowa Labor Commissioner Dave Neil has confirmed that, prior to the May 12 show of intimidation in northeast Iowa, a state investigation was underway, possibly leading to labor law violations against the Agriprocessors plant in Postville. Speculation has it that many of the potential allegations include violations of child labor laws. "It is an ongoing investigation, and I can't really get into the specifics," Neil said. As many as eighteen juveniles were detained in the raid.

The United Food & Commercial Workers International Union had been conducting an effort to organize the workers within the plant. Mark Lauritzen, UFCW international vice president, had urged Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials in a May 2 letter to delay a raid at the plant so that possible OSHA investigations could be completed. It's almost as if reporting problems to the right hand of the government gets the left hand of the government involved. Yin and Yang, so to speak.

All of this came down as though Agriprocessors requested the raid. The

UFCW has to start almost from scratch; witnesses in workplace violations may have vanished, either on their own accord, or by governmental intervention; and workers who were hauled away in handcuffs - over 300 of them - most likely will not see what would be their last paychecks, accrued vacation pay (if it even exists), and any other benefits, that at a minimum, might be owed to the former loyal employees.

So much for business ethics. With employers like Agriprocessors, why are unions often considered the bad guys?

I doubt very much that Agriprocessors is a member of ABI, but sitting in that subcommittee meeting last spring I couldn't help but wonder what businesses John Gilliland was representing when he fought to keep top executives and shareholders from being personally liable for paying employees the just wages they deserve.

As always, it's the worker who takes the heat. If the law put the corporate board of directors in jail for a day or two the 'problem' would cease to exist. The rich always live by different rules, mainly because they pay to make the rules, or in this case, the laws. SF 2416 should have been given some consideration.

I'm looking forward to the day when photojournalists take snapshots of the CEO and nine other shareholders being led from a plant in handcuffs. Or, I'll compromise, John. Five is a nice number. But don't tell me that individual shareholders are oblivious to the conduct of the corporation, or that they shouldn't be held responsible. If wealthy shareholders call the shots, they should take the shots. ✕

— Marty Ryan is Legislative Director of the ACLU of Iowa.



CALENDAR

Aug 1-2
Hardacre Film Fest
Hardacre Theatre in Tipton

Aug. 10, 1993
The Mississippi and its tributaries
overflow, driving 70,000 from their
homes

Aug 19, 1953
Iranian Premier Mohammed
Mossadegh ousted by CIA

Aug 20, 1988
Cesar Chavez ends 36-day fast
protesting dangerous pesticides

Aug 23, 1933
Vigilantes assault 200 migrant
workers in Yakima, WA

Aug 28, 1968
Hundreds beaten and arrested
in Chicago at Democratic
National Convention

Aug 29, 1758
First Indian reservation established

Sept 1
Iowa City Federation of Labor
Annual picnic in Iowa City

Sept 6, 1978
President Carter meets with
Egyptian President Sadat and
Israeli Prime Minister Begin

Sept 11, 1973
Chilean President Salvador Allende
overthrown by CIA

Oct 4
Johnson County Democratic
Fall Barbeque, Johnson County
Fairgrounds in Iowa City

Oct 10-11
Annual Latino/a Conference
Grandview College in Des Moines

Oct 23, 1983
241 US soldiers killed by suicide
bomber in Beirut

Oct 25, 1983
US invades the island of Grenada to
protect US medical students

Nov 4
Last day to vote

A Time of Hope? *Continued from Page 2*

insurance because Obama stubbornly refuses to embrace the only approach that will work, i.e. a government-run single payer entitlement based on the Canadian model? Will he carry out his promise to shut down all American bases in Iraq? Will he continue in his delusional belief that American military might can defeat the guerrilla militia of the Pushtu-speaking people of Afghanistan and Pakistan, known to us as the Taliban?

We live in an interesting time. Whether we are also living in a hopeful time remains to be seen. Much depends on Obama. Much depends also on the willingness of his supporters to hold him accountable instead of cheering him on, whatever he does, merely because he is a Democrat. ✕

—Jeff Cox

*If it keep on rainin',
the levee gonna break
Some people still sleepin',
some people wide awake*

— Bob Dylan

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Progressives for More Prairies?

On November 4, voters in Johnson County will have the opportunity to make a difference for generations to come. On the ballot will be a conservation bond initiative. This could be the most important local environmental, conservation, recreation, and trails measure of our lifetimes.

The conservation bond initiative will invest \$20 million over the next 20 years in Johnson County for conservation, recreation, and trails, and will be administered by the County Conservation Board. For a home owner in Johnson County, this will be an investment of about \$2.20 a month—or about the cost of a large coffee. According to the County Assessor, an owner of a \$200,000 house would pay an additional \$26.36 a year. Farmland owners would pay approximately an additional 21 cents per acre.

This local effort will be leveraged with grants, donations, and other investments for a likely multiplying effect of 2.5 to 3 times. That's a \$50 to \$60 million investment in our quality of life and the environment. With urban growth, the opportunities to preserve unique and vital lands decrease with each year, so time is of the essence. No land with be condemned; only willing sellers will be considered. The plan will be flexible and developed with much citizen input, and the spending will receive annual audits.

This year's terrible flood is precisely the reason we need additional investments in conservation. When we drain the wetlands, tear up the prairies, and pour lots of concrete, where do we think the snow melt and rains go? If there is anything we should learn from this flood and the one 15 years ago, it is that we need more wetlands, green belts around waterways and creeks, and more prairies

and woodlands. If Iowans would have taken this action after the floods of 1993, we certainly would have had less destruction this year.

If you think it is time for something so bold and important, we could use your support. All the usual things that happen in a campaign will be needed—yard sign locations, volunteers, letters to the editor, supporter mailings, donations. One of the most important things you can do is to allow us to list your name, your business, and your organization as supporters. If you want to be involved, please contact us at www.landwaterfuture.org, landwaterfuture@gmail.com, or 319-330-5587. Together, we can help preserve our land, our water, and our future. ✕

— *Janelle Rettig is Co-chair of
Citizens for Our Land, Water, and
Future*

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

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**"They didn't get me for robbing or
murdering. They got me for working."**

— *Irma Hernandez, Postville resident
and Agriprocessors employee*