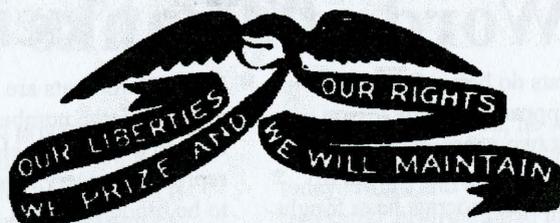


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Published by Iowa City Democratic Socialists of America, 112 S. Dodge, Iowa City IA 52240. Labor donated. Subscriptions \$5.

LABOR DAY 1986

Labor Day Greetings from *The Prairie Progressive*, a new newsletter published by Iowa City DSA. We hope eventually to serve the Democratic Left throughout Iowa by providing a forum for communication between activists who now work separately for women's rights, peace in Central America and around the world, civil rights for working people and their unions, civil liberties for gays and lesbians, a clean environment, a revived left-labor movement in the Democratic Party and other parties, the elimination of racism, and an economy that provides a fair share for working people and a decent standard of living for everyone. We also hope *The Prairie Progressive* will get better with each issue. If you like what you see, please subscribe or volunteer to help. Suggestions and contributions are always welcome. •

LABOR DAY GREETINGS FROM THE FOLLOWING SUPPORTERS OF *THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE*:

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Jeff Cox

A Word of Thanks to Iowa Democrats

Democrats do better in opposition. That appears to be the lesson of the last two years, especially in the widely-reported recall elections in Wisconsin, where Democrats have fought back and regained some of the ground they lost in the last general election. In Ohio, Democrats have succeeded in getting on the ballot a referendum restoring union rights for public employees. In both states, the political battle was initiated by labor unions, who make up the core of the struggle to sustain the Democratic principles of the New Deal and Great Society.

In these struggles President Obama was nowhere to be seen, which is not surprising. He is on the other side. President Obama has relentlessly pursued the Republicans, begging them to agree with him on legislation that would meet his goals of debt reduction at the expense of jobs, means-testing of Medicare, cutting social security benefits, corporate control of health insurance, the stripping of hard-earned collective bargaining rights from public school teachers, and unpopular wars. His disagreements with the Republicans have been over the means to achieve those goals, complicated by an extraordinary level of partisan venom directed at our first African-American President. President Obama's political strategy led to electoral disaster for the Democratic Party: 62 seats lost in the House.

What about Iowa, where the failures of Democratic leadership under the Culver administration led to the loss of sixteen seats in the Iowa House and a Republican Governor? In Iowa, as in Wisconsin and Ohio, Democrats have fought back against the Republican tide, although without the same degree of press coverage. The credit belongs to Senate majority leader Mike Gronstal, but also to two senior Senators from Johnson County who play key leadership roles, Joe Bolkcom and Bob Dvorsky.

Democrats ended up with 26 votes in the Iowa Senate, a one-vote majority, and holding all of those votes together is a difficult exercise in political leadership.

When Democrats are in power, there are always a large number of conservative elected officials, or elected officials who represent conservative districts, who have to be brought around, one way or another, to progressive positions. President Roosevelt had to orchestrate the votes of the entire segregationist southern delegations of the House and Senate in order to pass Social Security, Aid for Dependent Children, the National Labor Relations Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act, and the federal jobs programs known as the WPA and the PWA,

“In Iowa, as in Wisconsin and Ohio, Democrats have fought back against the Republican tide, although without the same degree of press coverage.”

The leadership of the Iowa Senate had to hold together all twenty-six Democratic senators on an issue of dubious popularity, gay marriage, and succeeded. Mike Gronstal deserves our gratitude for his success in blocking a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, one that has earned him the enmity of the entire Republican Party, and made him a target for defeat in the next election. Public opinion is moving our way on this civil liberties issue, but it is moving slowly, and Gronstal is by no means guaranteed re-election in a western Iowa district in the state's Republican electoral heartland.

Gay rights is not the only issue where all 26 Democrats in the Iowa Senate held firm. They succeeded in protecting public pre-school programs from a sustained Republican attempt to (guess what) means-test the program, so that “those who can pay” would have to pay tuition, and “those who can't pay” could

apply for welfare. This would have destroyed pre-school as a program available to all Americans regardless of income. For the time being, it survives.

Democrats also held the line on tax reform. Republicans wanted to push through large-scale cuts in commercial property taxes that would have simultaneously raised taxes on residential homeowners, and seriously undermined the tax base of local government and our public schools. The benefits of our current property tax system for residential homeowners are highly progressive, since most homeowners who receive those benefits are either wage-earners or social security recipients rather than investors in businesses, large or small. Senator Joe Bolkcom devised a property tax reform measure that is progressive (not an easy task), giving tax credits to the smallest of small businesses rather than wholesale reductions for Wal-Mart and other corporations with wealthy out-of-state owners. Democrats in the Senate held firm for his proposal rather than caving in to pressure for regressive reform.

Finally, there is the issue of nuclear power, a tricky issue for Democrats, since they are becoming a corporate-funded party just like the Republicans. Mid-American Energy is a major donor to Democrats, including Mike Gronstal. The Iowa nuclear industry wanted to charge electricity consumers for the cost of a study for a new nuclear power plant, one that was rigged to produce a positive result. Thanks to the leadership of Joe Bolkcom and other environmentalists in the Senate Democratic caucus, with some assistance from events in Japan, Gronstal was persuaded to postpone this issue.

There are few permanent victories in politics. We often have to take what we can get, and swallow our disappointments. The record of the Democratic Party in the Iowa Senate this year, though, is an admirable one. They deserve our thanks, and our support in the tough election campaigns they face in 2012. ❧

— Jeff Cox

History isn't neat

“What does labor want? We want more school houses and less jails. More books and less guns. More learning and less vice. More leisure and less greed. More justice and less revenge. We want more... opportunities to cultivate our better natures, to make manhood more noble, womanhood more beautiful, and childhood more happy and bright.”

— Samuel Gompers, Chicago, 1893

My most vivid memory of that speech revisited was in Omaha during a Labor Day Celebration, twenty-five years ago. Lane Kirkland, the President of the AFL-CIO, was the featured speaker. At the time, I didn't know a lot of Labor's history. It was a turning point in my life. History was being made in quiet increments. Just one month earlier, PATCO workers were fired by President Reagan. Two years earlier, I was elected Secretary-Treasurer of Local 440 of the United Food & Commercial Workers Union in Denison, IA, but I had not been a full-time business agent for much more than a few months. Samuel Gompers' philosophy, with better grammar, was mine.

I've been working for increased education, leisure, and justice ever since. Ironically, things appear not to change. One hundred and eighteen years after Gompers' observation, we are still struggling to contain the use of weapons (mostly in Iraq and Afghanistan, and a continuing list of global skirmishes that seem to arise monthly now); cut down on vice (which the government now promotes on riverboats and in landlocked casinos); seeing an enormous increase in corporate greed; and an uprising of injustice fueled by the growing polarization of political parties.

What have we learned or changed in the past 25 years? The average cost per year of educating a K-12 regular student

in Iowa – public and private – is \$5,883. The cost of maintaining a prisoner in Iowa is \$31,500. That means Iowa is spending over 5 times the amount of money on prisons as it is on schools. Gompers would be crying. What's ironic is the architecture of new schools being built. They're building schools now that have pods – like the prisons we're building. Both schools and prisons are top-heavy with management, and I assume the food is comparable, although I recently had some great cookies while visiting the Story County Jail. The transition from school to prison is becoming more adaptable, and unfortunately, more acceptable.

Since the days of Gompers, books have been virtually replaced by computers. “In fall 2008, an estimated 100 percent of public schools had one or more instructional computers with Internet access and the ratio of students to instructional computers with Internet access was 3.1 to 1.” It would be ideal to have a 1:1 ratio, but this country has other priorities. As of November 2010, the United States has spent \$900 billion on the Iraq War alone. This doesn't include Afghanistan, Libya, or other spending within the Pentagon. So much for more books and fewer guns.

In the fiscal year that ended last June, the Iowa Alcoholic Beverages Commission reported record numbers in the “final total of sales revenue, licensing fees and fines turned over to the state. The additional dollars came from people buying more liquor.”

A spokesperson for the Commission said “they saw around 7.5% increase in vodka sales, and pre-mixed cocktails were up about 7.25%.” Gambling hit record highs, also. Iowa's gaming industry realized more than \$15 million more this fiscal year than last year. How's that for less vice? And the learning? Well, you have to be patient. “We don't have the money.”

When Gompers envisioned more

leisure and less greed, he surely didn't have in mind the interpretations of today. More and more people are finding unwanted leisure time in unemployment lines (oops, I guess we don't have those anymore, unless you mean the lines that will form at the kiosks at public libraries), while the greedy bankers, corporate CEOs and investors leave their mini-castles to fly off to check on their off-shore businesses, bank accounts, and mistresses.

Like Gompers, most of us want justice. However, with corporations being persons, radical wing nuts running campaigns to remove justices that don't agree with their beliefs, and governors truly believing they can fire employees in the course of creating jobs, how can we ever define justice again? And who receives blame for the mess we're in? The poor. They don't pay taxes, they look to the government for assistance, and they won't get jobs. Has no one come to the conclusion that the poor can only make as much as an employer will pay, if the employer will even hire a person living in America?

History isn't neat. We know that the Challenger explosion of January 28, or the confirmation of William Rehnquist as the 16th Chief Justice on September 17, or the birth of Prairie Dog, all occurrences of 1986, are exact moments in history. But the gradual transition of an era is barely noticeable while we experience it. Maybe it's because things haven't really changed.

On the other hand, some things do change – for the better. The average lifespan of a prairie dog is three to five years in the wild; eight years in captivity. Rats live for about 2 to 3 years. Prairie Dog has gone beyond the life-span of an average prairie dog and outlived Howard Stern's radio program, which began a month before the Prairie Progressive back in 1986. Long live Prairie Dog! ❧

— Marty Ryan

Letter from Japan

After 25 years of struggle and success we may ask
Has the prairie progressed? and
Have the fault lines of the Kanto plain caused a shift to the
Left?
In Tokyo, the Rainbow Talks unite queers who
Take care of brothers and sisters and everything in between up in the north
whose livelihoods were washed away in the
Careless planning of crony capitalists in the
Construction Ministry who built nuclear power plants on the very edge
of a raging
Ocean that cracked open those deadly generators to reveal their greed.
People cut back on Power and are in the streets protesting atomic myths,
Calling for a new age of quieter energy, support for workers who
nickel and dime and
Redefine the family.
While on the other side of the globe,
Iowa turned blue, helping elevate our multiculturalism to a national
debate in which
All our diversities can only, ultimately win.
Iowa and its support of gay marriage (well, marriage, whatever)
Stands out in the cornfields, overshadowing the Ames circus....

Yes we can
Say that the PP has helped this all along and
Even inspired Iowans abroad so that we don't lose our faith to fundamentalists,
lets us listen to the voices in the margins as we work our way to the
mainstream, and, as always,
Progress. ✨

— *Barbara Summerhawk Yates*



September 1986

The Prairie Progressive debuts with a print run of 300

December 1987

First movie review by Jae Retz appears (Full Metal Jacket)

Spring 1989

Prairie Dog logo created by Iowa City artist Loretta Popp

Spontaneous anti-smoking protests erupt statewide

Prairie Progressive announces cigarette will remain, but agrees to delete smoke

December 1989

Sundy Smith's first Testosterone Update appears (Hayden Fry Wins Golden Testy)

Summer 1990

Prairie Dog's first Summer Reading List appears ("designed to help you stay cool, no matter how heated the rhetoric gets")

Summer 1992

Prairie Dog's Honor Roll includes University of Iowa Labor Center, Louise Noun, and Roseanne Arnold

Fall 1994

Jeff Cox's first "Time to Give Up On ___?" appears

Spring 1996

Subscription price doubles from \$5/year to \$10/year

Massive subscription cancellations fail to materialize

December 2001

Subscription price sneaks up to \$12; no one seems to notice

December 2002

Honor Roll includes Jill June, Rich Eychaner, Peg Mullen, Clara Oleson, CSPS art gallery and theatre, and Judge Robert Pratt

Spring 2003

Jeff Cox calls for abolishing the Iowa caucuses

December 2006

Honor Roll includes Jack Hatch, Peter Fisher, Rod Sullivan, Denise O'Brien, Dave Loeb sack, and Trish Nelson

Fall 2007

Prairie Dog calls for holding the Iowa caucuses on Christmas Day

Fall 2011

Subscription rate remains at \$12/year

Congratulations to Prairie Dog and all the great contributors to the PP! Over 25 years of progressive writing, thoughts, and entertainment. Onward!

— Joe Bolkom

25 years ago I was watching Halley's Comet in my backyard, wondering how much in the world we do not understand. Feeling kind of the same 25 years later, only now I am glad to know the Prairie Progressive.

— Paul Deaton

**Sustainable Foods
and Climate Change:
Fixing a Broken System**

Lecture by Francis Moore Lappe,
author of Diet for a Small Planet.
November 1, 7:00 PM, Iowa
Memorial Union, Iowa City.

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE is Iowa's oldest progressive newsletter. It is funded entirely by subscriptions from our readers. Editors for this issue: Jeff Cox and Dave Leshtz. We appreciate your support.

- \$12 1-year subscription
- \$ ___ 2011 sustaining fund gift
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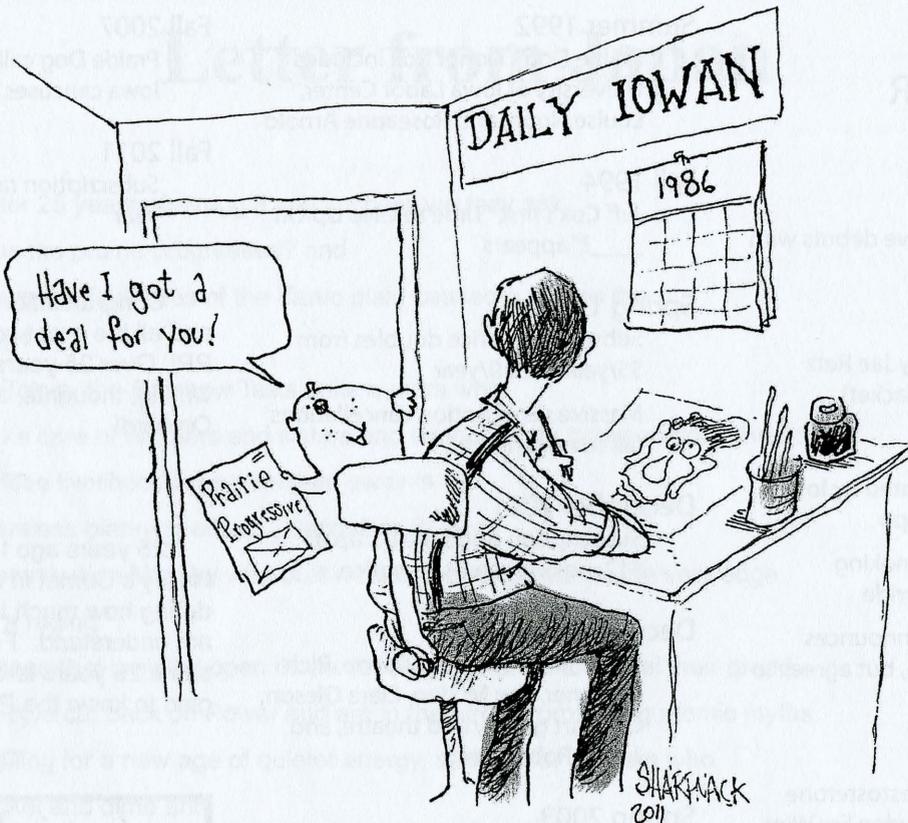
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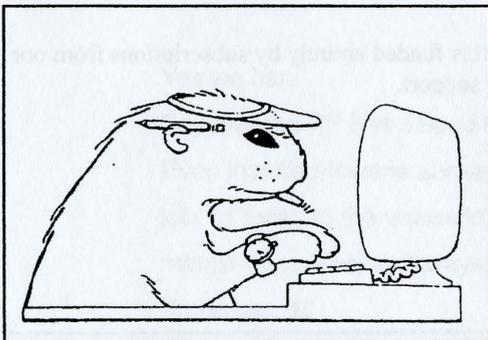
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