

PERSPECTIVES

Liberals must choose: Serve the corporations or serve the people

THIS COLUMN IS ADDRESSED TO MINNESOTA LIBERALS, but applies to liberals throughout the U.S. I write as a radical activist, one of your illegitimate sons and daughters of the 1960s. We have been as unwelcome at family gatherings as our grandparents, the Farmer-Laborites, whom you banished from the homestead in 1948. A family reunion of the democratic left in Minnesota is long overdue. But this reconciliation will proceed only if we move beyond liberalism. ¶Don Fraser's defeat exposed serious flaws in the Minnesota liberalism of

Humphrey, McCarthy and Mondale. Neo-conservatives like Bob Short are manipulating these weaknesses, and voters' authentic resentments, to spread a right wing populism. Only by developing an anti-corporate populism can progressives counter this, and create an agenda for a new majority in the 1980s.

Economic growth and prosperity had shrouded liberalism's tragic contradictions for nearly a quarter century. But the economic crunch of the '70s has pushed liberals to the wall: corporate liberalism can no longer attempt to serve two masters. While posturing as champions of reform and social justice, liberals have become the handmaidens of corporate priorities and private greed; while posing as advocates of participation and democracy, liberals have become pawns of corporate planning and private power. The day of reckoning is at hand.

The Fraser defeat and Proposition 13 represent the "politics of resentment." What are the implications of this trend? It does *not* mean that voters are becoming right wingers, mean-spirited and selfish, ready to dismantle government, racist and anti-poor, rescinding public programs.

It does mean that the average citizen's sense of fairness is deeply offended. Liberalism, at the expense of the vast majority, has extended rights and benefits to the corporate rich and crumbs for the poor. People are outraged by the paternalistic and self-righteous manner in which liberals set and carry out public policy.

A new majority is expressing its resentment by joining the only alternative game in town—neo-conservative politics and know-nothing economics.

For five weeks liberals have exhibited the "4R&4D" Syndrome. Some are filled with Rage and Resentment, seeking Revenge and planning Retaliation. Others are suffering from Depression and Disillusionment, open to Defeatism and Dropping out.

Yes, Bob Short ran a vicious and dirty campaign. Yes, Republicans shamefully crossed over and voted Democratic. Yes, single issue fanatics distorted the political process. Yes, the Wendell Anderson crowd helped get Fraser. Yes, Bob Short bought a lot of votes.

Rather than pausing by the stream of politics and reflecting on the character defects of the New Deal, liberals are muddying the waters by blaming everybody else for polluting the pond. Rather than extracting the beam in liberalism's eye, they are pointing out the speck in their neighbor's. Rather than acknowledging that they live in the glass house of welfare statism, liberals continue throwing stones at passersby.

The people may be voting for the wrong programs, candidates and parties—but for many of the right reasons. To call Minnesota voters greedy hayseeds, dumb bumpkins and selfish hicks, is moral blindness and elitist arrogance. The real reasons

for the Fraser defeat, and a possible Republican sweep in November are painfully obvious: "disgraceful" taxation, runaway inflation and the white elephant of government bureaucracy, waste and corruption.

Don Fraser rightly claims that neo-conservative politicians "play the middle class, hard hit by inflation, against the poor, and turn back the clock on social legislation." Bob Short and the new right politicians, in exploiting the legitimate grievances of working and middle income people, are proposing programs that will make the rich richer, and the poor poorer. This was true in California with Proposition 13.

But who caused this situation? Since liberals took over the Democratic Farmer Labor Party 30 years ago, they have led the charge to create the welfare state. New Deal capitalism has expected the middle third of society to pay not only for the poor that the corporate economy excludes, but to provide government subsidies for

oil corporations, real estate developers, the health care industry, agribusiness and other corporate interests.

From 1950 to 1974 corporate taxes fell from 23 percent of total federal revenues to 14 percent. During the same period the portion collected from personal income taxes rose from 31 to 40 percent.

The basic necessities—food, energy, medical care and housing—are increasing in cost at a 12.6 percent annual rate. Liberals have been too timid to take on the corporate giants in these industries. While they are out raping and pillaging the pocketbooks of the American public, lobbies for energy corporations, agribusiness, real estate interests and the American Medical Association still have a cozy relationship with a liberal Democratic Congress.

Even though liberals have created social programs to insure citizens' social welfare, they allow the private sector to administer many of the programs with poor service and self-profit. The small amounts of charity that liberals are willing to dole out to the weak, sick and lame are provided in a way that breeds dependency and fosters self-contempt.

The rash of scandals and exposures of theft, waste and inefficiency in governmental operations have appalled the average person. It is time to stop explaining away these horrors, and time to rethink and retool our public administration of the people's business.

A recent Gallup Poll shows that those of us definitely "left of center" account for 17 percent of the electorate, while the solidly "right of center" is 23 percent. The broad "middle of the road" make up 36 percent, while 17 percent have "no opinion." This means a pool of 53 percent, a majority of citizens, are open to persuasion about the major public policy questions of the 1980s.

To create an alternative agenda for the 1980s liberals must end their commitment to corporate-government. An important test for Minnesota liberals is whether they can participate in citizen movements for economic democracy, and return government to the people by following this grassroots democratic leadership. In Min-

nesota there are numerous struggles from which liberals are conspicuously absent: control of utility rates, public ownership of power, anti-nuclear battles, rent control, cooperative housing, ending real estate speculation, neighborhood autonomy, progressive tax reform, food co-ops, saving the family farm, alternative health care, anti-powerline struggles, runaway shops, community-owned and controlled enterprises and increasing worker participation in management.

Redistributive economic reforms are meaningless without redistribution of other forms of power. If reforms are carried out in an individualistic, elitist and centralized manner, they will become part of the problem they are meant to solve. The core of an anti-corporate populism is democratic control of social, economic and political institutions; common people can be empowered in new cooperative, participatory and decentralized organizations. An unresponsive governmental bureaucracy is as undemocratic as private domination of the economy.

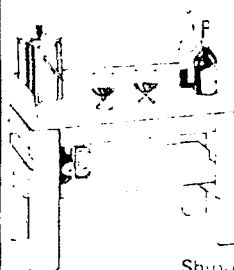
Within or without the DFL, the democratic left must forge a new majority that includes the poor, working and middle classes; a political movement of farmers, laborers, taxpayers and consumers. To carry out this task, we can learn a lot from the old Farmer Labor Party of the '20s and '30s.

The FLP created a political movement by listening and responding to the needs of common people. This movement helped citizens translate their personal troubles into public issues. Not above or separate from the daily struggles of Minnesotans, the FLP was a vehicle for the people's participation in solving their common problems.

Minnesota liberals cannot serve two masters: they must choose between the corporate elite and the vast majority of citizens. By learning from the people, corporate liberals can become anti corporate populists.

Monte Bute is active with the Farmer Labor Association (FLA). He works as an organizer with the Minnesota Tenants Union in Minneapolis.

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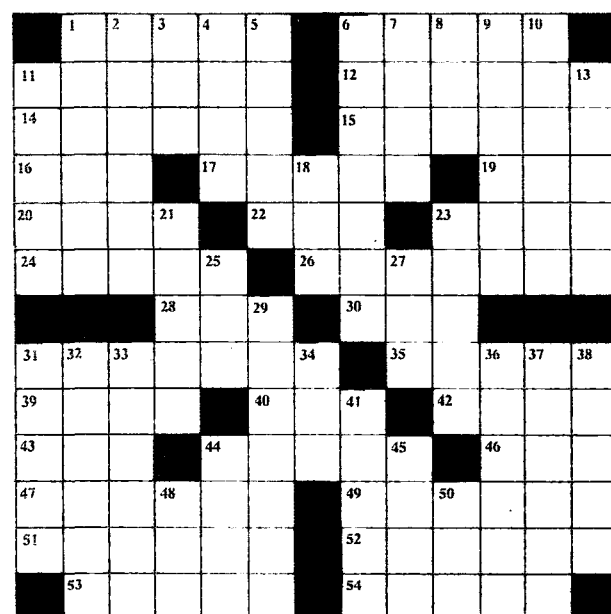
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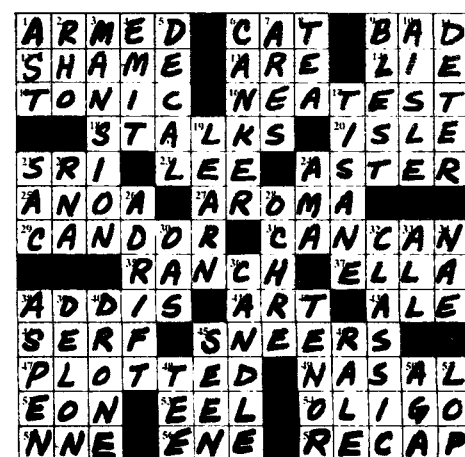
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- 1 Leggings
- 6 Degree
- 11 Football player's protection
- 12 Inmate
- 14 Idle
- 15 Record again
- 16 RR stop
- 17 Sidedish
- 19 Legal matter
- 20 Camper's equipment
- 22 52, to Tacitus
- 23 Word with hot
- 24 Mother of note
- 26 Designate
- 28 Dolt
- 30 Help!
- 31 Dappled
- 35 Relating to John Paul II
- 39 Units of land
- 40 Scarlet
- 42 Etna's output
- 43 SST concern
- 44 Beliefs
- 46 Butterfly catcher's gear
- 47 Designer Cardin
- 49 Protracted speech

DOWN

- 1 Sofa
- 2 Flexible
- 3 I love, to Virgil
- 4 Hardy girl
- 5 Tiptoe
- 6 Airs
- 7 Played golf
- 8 Monet's forte
- 9 Turkish inn
- 10 Annul
- 11 Welcoming people
- 13 Remainder (Fr.)
- 18 Pinocchio's nemesis
- 21 Short blasts
- 23 Rope material
- 25 Singer King Cole
- 27 Spinning item
- 29 Polecats
- 31 Punishes
- 32 Like Pollyana
- 33 Weasel relatives
- 34 Sandre or Ruby
- 36 Type of hat
- 37 Photographer Richard
- 38 Afterwards
- 41 Inhibit
- 44 Ontario tribe
- 45 Singer Martin, to friends
- 48 Soak, as flax
- 50 Zodiac symbol

Answer to last week's puzzle:



Montreal socialists

Continued from page 4.

had become more concrete, and more difficult. After all, the task was now to devise the socialist project for the city in practical, every-day terms.

Unavoidable problems.

In retrospect, RCM's internal divergences reflect problems that urban socialists in a city like Montreal cannot possibly avoid. Fundamental to RCM's urban socialism is community control. Because of this, efficiency and even coherence have at times been sacrificed to decentralization, a centralized party structure not being consistent with a "communitarian" socialism that places primacy on the expressed needs of working people rooted in the neighborhood.

Union socialists in the RCM also emphasize building a socialist base among Montreal's workers. Any move to "purge" these groups from the party would contradict the commitment to the principle of community control. The other alternative—abandoning activity in all Montreal

neighborhoods where a genuinely rooted socialist base is not yet to be found—isn't very attractive either, since that would serve only to abdicate its responsibilities toward political education and eliminate the party from active participation in the municipal arena.

The upshot is that militants have learned, sometimes painfully, that what they saw as pitched ideological battles between two sides were more often conflicts inherent in the very nature of the party and its objectives, and the positions taken by individuals more often resulted from the position they occupied in the party and the district in which they worked than from some fixed doctrinal position. It remains to be seen whether the party has gained the maturity to handle fundamental divisions and contradictions next time—a time that can be expected to come when it accedes to power, as it may do on Nov. 12.

Henry Milner is the author of *Politics in the New Quebec* and the regular IN THESE TIMES correspondent in Quebec.

Rizzo's racist try

Continued from page 9.

have been worse—they could have endorsed him. They have in the past."

Free TV.

A most important aspect of the campaign for left electoral politics is the free TV and radio time the Stop Rizzo Coalition has gotten. David Kairys, attorney for the coalition, explains: "We sent letters to the radio and TV stations, explaining that under the fairness doctrine if they run ads supporting one point of view they have to provide time for opposing views. So, we got a lot of invitations to talk shows. And now that there are more and more Rizzo ads for charter change, we are getting free air time for ads of our own."

Whether or not this Philadelphia election leads to permanent left unity, it may have changed some organizations' outlook. Rizzo is now losing in every recent poll taken—by two or three to one. It's

hard to resist the euphoria of winning an election, and hard to forget the experience of working well together. The Stop Rizzo Coalition is not a marriage, just a date. But the 200,000 new voters, most of them from minority wards that have voted against the Democratic organization, means that the electorate itself has shifted to the left.

"You should see these folks come in here," says Tully. "The leadership thinks participating in this election is intellectually justifiable, because of Rizzo. The members, they walk around asking people to register. They're starting to see a different side of their own community, a side of organizing that they may have ignored before. And they're getting good at working it. Nuts and bolts. That's all it is. Nuts and bolts. And do the shitwork. Politics in this country is up for grabs."

Jim Quinn is associate editor of *Philadelphia Magazine* and frequently reports on Philadelphia for the *Washington Post*.

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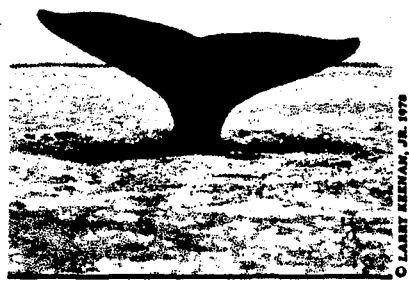
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