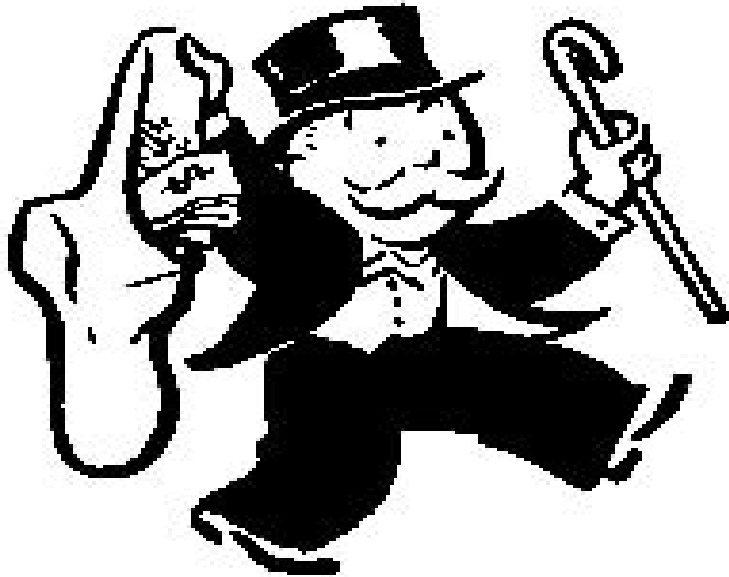


GRAY PANTHERS OF SAN FRANCISCO



WE CAN'T AFFORD THE RICH

Taxes:
Who Always Pays?
Who Doesn't?

Speaker: Emily Rusch, CALPIRG

General Membership Meeting
Tuesday, March 18, 12:30—3:00 PM
Unitarian Universalist Church
1187 Franklin at Geary

GRAY PANTHERS COMMITTEE MEETINGS & EVENTS

All meetings and events take place at 1182 Market, Rm. 203, unless otherwise noted.

Board Meeting 12:30 PM
Wednesday, March 5 & April 2
All SFGP members welcome.

Newsletter Committee 12:00 Noon
Thursday, March 6 & April 3

Human Rights Committee
Call the office.

Middle East Study Group 11:00 AM
Tuesday, March 11 & April 8

Health Committee 1:00 PM
Tuesday, March 11 & April 8

Book Club 11:00 AM
Tuesday, March 25 & April 29
Overthrow: America's Century of Regime
Change from Hawaii to Iraq
by Stephen Kinzer

Committee for Life on the Planet
War & Peace Committee
Call the office.

February Membership Meeting

Government budgets were the subject of our February meeting, and all the news was bad. Barry Hermanson, Green Party, talked about the national budget. We now have the biggest military budget since World War II, and that doesn't include Iraq/Afghanistan. There is no debate in this presidential year about how much we really need to defend ourselves and how much is hype.

James Chionsini from Planning for Elders in the Central City described the local Peoples' Budget and plans to dramatize the human impact of Mayor Newsom's city budget proposals. He emphasized, and we agreed, that the best possibility to influence the local budget is by mass action at the Board of Supervisors' budget hearings.

A lamentably small number of SFGPs came out on a cold and wet Tuesday. This month we will plan how we can fight back—how to use taxes to reverse the rich getting richer on the backs of the rest of us. Be part of the good fight—be there.

An Unexpected Pleasure



Photo by John Han, *Fog City Journal*.

The GP Board of Directors at our monthly meeting February 6 had a surprise visit from Lynne Stewart. Congratulations to Barbara and the others who organized a mini

brunch/fundraiser literally overnight, at the office before the Board of Director's meeting. The food was wonderful and we raised over \$400 for Lynne's defense organization.

Also present was Jeff Mackler, Mumia's lawyer. Mumia and his friends are hoping for a decision that could lead to a new trial. Lynne is also hoping for a decision that could lead to her conviction being overturned. Lynne wants so much to go back to doing what she is good at: defending the poor, the politically unpopular, the left-behind, the difficult to defend. Ralph, Lynne's husband, regaled us with tales of his early life as a musician. A good time was had by all and it's a miracle we could drag ourselves away for the meeting.

March Membership Meeting

Our March meeting will talk about taxes, with the emphasis on how California can not only balance its budget but expand it. Featured speaker will be Emily Rusch of the California Public Interest Research Group, their longtime, well-qualified state tax expert. Come join the discussion on who pays what and why—and what we can do about it.

Peace Day at Everett Middle School



April 4 is Peace Day for Everett youth. Gray Panthers plan to celebrate with the children of Everett. Ideas so far include planting flowers for peace, signing peace pledges, discussions of what peace means, what will bring peace to lives of youth today. We also want to recognize HR 808 calling for a Department of Peace. We need Gray Panthers to help make this happen, so call the office if you want to volunteer.

State Quarterly Meeting

The California Networks met on Saturday, February 2, with Michael attending from San Francisco. A surprise item on the agenda was a proposal to formalize a statewide organization to be known as the "California Gray Panthers," which has been operating for a time informally without the participation of San Francisco, although we have continued to meet and work with other networks. Jim Dawson suggested that the proposal be tabled until the next quarterly meeting of the networks. San Francisco was asked to formulate our objections to the existing proposals and ideas for how we think a statewide Gray Panther organization should look.

A committee drawn from our Board is working on a draft outlining our positions and we will be discussing it at the next general meeting. Please come and give us your input. Up to now in San Francisco we have been in favor of grass roots activism over legislative activity; bottom up over top down organization; and community organization and education on social issues as a major focus. What do you think? Should we become part of a State organization with HQ in Sacramento?

A Taxing Situation

While most of us have been busy coping with our daily life survival, stressed by wars of invasion, wars on our streets, and erosion of our civil rights, the tax burden has increased on poor families and decreased for rich families. California has 95 billionaires worth \$102.9 billion. Yet, hundreds with incomes above \$200,000 pay no income tax at all. The gap between our state's rich and poor is becoming a canyon. Hourly wages of low-income workers over the last 30 years have dropped 7.2%. High earners wages have jumped to 18.4%. The state's top 1% saw their incomes rise 108% from 1995-2005.

Schwarzenegger informs us that *we* have a \$14.5 billion state deficit, and *he* will not raise taxes. He will not replace the \$20 billion car tax he used to cement his first recall election. He says we have to make it easier for businesses and not punish them with regulations and more taxes. Those cries of "overtaxing" are mythological, for California places 19th in the country in terms of overall taxes. Instead our governor and many legislators butcher social services including: slashing MediCal; stealing millions from education funds that were guaranteed by Prop 98; and delaying cost of living increases on welfare payments.

Fair Share—Share Fair

Why is it always programs for people that take the budget cuts? Do we even need budget cuts? There is plenty of money to be shared or allocated, and over 70% of our citizens support raising the top rate on state income tax of the wealthiest residents. The tax rate on incomes over \$275,000 in 1991 was 11% - now it is only 9.3%. For years, UCLA professor Paul O'Lague and Cal State professor John Bachar have advocated progressively raising taxes from 0.5% to 7% on the richest 3.1 percent of California tax payers (or the non-payers). That alone would raise close to \$14 billion. If the same formula is applied to those with yearly incomes of \$200,000 or more reaching 7% for those who make \$5 million or more, the revenue increase would be more than \$26 billion; no bond measure, interest free.

We just need to demand a Fair Share!

Inequality, Taxes and Electioneering

There is widespread agreement among economists that inequality in the United States has increased hugely over the last 25 years. According to Dean Baker of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, the benefits of the 3.1 percent average growth rate in the GDP "have gone overwhelmingly to the richest 10 percent of families" and what few gains most households experienced were mainly from an increase in two-earner households.

Baker believes "this upward redistribution has been largely driven by deliberate policy decisions"—in trade and immigration policies, in the Federal Reserve Board's emphasis on keeping inflation under control over sustaining high levels of employment, in anti-union policies which have driven wages down, and in the increasing costs of health care that are a much greater burden for low and middle income wage earners.

And now, recession looms. Baker and economist John Schmitt predict a severe recession of three to four years, with huge job losses, a possible 5.8 million increase in unemployed (with a 41.4 percent unemployment rate among black teens), reduced family income, and even more people without health insurance.

This is an election year. Are the candidates who seek to run our country addressing these issues? What do we want to hear from them?

One thing we'd like to hear on tax day this year is ideas for changes in the tax structure—like ending the Bush tax cuts, restoring the estate tax, raising the capital gains tax to previous levels or higher. Most people in the country pay more in payroll taxes (for Social Security and Medicare) than income tax, yet no one pays Social Security tax on income over \$97,500. Remove the cap!

And what about corporate taxes? Surely we can do better than just close a few loopholes. Corporate profits have been astounding in recent years. How about an excess profits tax? And a war profits tax? Let them give some of their obscene profits back to infrastructure and social services.

Candidates, let's hear it! Whatcha gonna do?

Health Care and SB 840

Every year the California Medical Students Association has a lobby day in Sacramento. Future doctors come in their white jackets from medical schools all over the state to rally on the steps of the Capitol Building for better health care. Joining them this year was a busload from the Bay Area lobbying our representatives for SB 840. On the bus were people from CARA, SAN, Senior University, Progressive Democrats, Church Women United, Wellstone Democrats, and SF Gray Panthers (Cathy and Mitzi). Specifically we visited the offices of State Senators Yee and Migden and Assemblypeople Leno and Ma to thank them for sponsoring and supporting single-payer universal health care.

Coincidentally this was the day the Senate Health Committee refused to approve the Governor's health bill Assembly Bill X1-1, effectively killing it. The deciding vote was Senator Leland Yee, 8th Senate District, SF and San Mateo. We heartily applauded him for that. A few days later Sen. Yee had an article in the *SF Chronicle* explaining his reasons. A few quotes from that article: "As a co-author of the true universal health care bill, SB 840, I opposed ABX1-1 because it would have required consumers to buy their policies regardless of the cost....All Californians would have been required to buy insurance with no caps on premiums, no regulation of the costs of insurance or medical expenses, no maximum deductibles, and no clearly defined minimum coverage....if an individual did not purchase insurance within sixty days of the enactment of this flawed legislation, then the Franchise Tax Board would have been authorized to collect premiums by garnishment of wages or mortgage liens on the property of working Californians...."

One of our jobs now is to keep health care reform on the agenda. A favorite tactic of the opposition is to present a flawed bill that can't be passed and when it is defeated, to declare health care reform a dead issue (i.e., not only the above bill but the Clinton proposals early in the Clinton presidency, which effectively ended all efforts in Washington). We must continue to educate about and push hard for real health care, SB 840. Don't let the health insurance companies win—again.



Gray Panthers and other community organization staged a protest, February 13th against the threatened closure of St Luke's (Gray Panthers were part of a sit-down inside the hospital).

Time to Boycott Israeli Goods

The following article is an opinion piece by two Gray Panthers members involved in an effort to get Rainbow Grocery, a worker-owned collective in San Francisco, to boycott Israeli goods.

Rainbow Boycott Israeli Goods (RBIG), a group of shoppers and worker-owners at Rainbow Grocery, has been out in force at the store, gathering shoppers' signatures for a petition asking the store to remove Israeli products from its shelves. Information distributed emphasized the strong resemblance between the violations of human rights and international law under Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories and South Africa's apartheid system which began to crumble only after an international boycott led to its economic and cultural isolation.

While Rainbow Grocery carries few Israeli products, RBIG supporters contend that a Rainbow boycott could lead other similarly progressive community organizations to follow suit, bolstering the growing international boycott/divestment/sanctions movement. They add that a boycott would also draw attention to US unconditional financial and diplomatic support of the occupation.

Shoppers can express their support for a boycott of Israeli goods on a consumer comment form available at Rainbow's customer service counter.

S.1959, Real Home-Grown Terror

S.1959, the “Violent Radicalization and Home-grown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007,” is one of the most dangerous threats to civil liberties and political expression in US history. It passed the House virtually unopposed last October, and is currently on the back burner of the Senate Homeland Security Committee.

Its sweeping definitions of “homegrown terrorism,” “ideologically based violence,” and “violent radicalization” would classify as terrorism: planning, advocating, or participating in strikes, demonstrations, civil disobedience, or boycotts, as well as membership in organizations who use these time-honored means of political expression.

The Commission and Center this act creates would be given powers to work with local, state and national homeland security officials to infiltrate and disrupt organizations it considers suspect, giving them legal cover to recreate the worst abuses of the infamous FBI COINTELPRO program.

The Commission’s power to hold hearings and compel testimony under oath give it the same unchecked powers of extra-judicial punishment as the McCarthy hearings of the 1950s. The Center’s power to infiltrate organizations would allow it to assemble secret lists of suspects which could be used years later. According to author Naomi Wolf, the National Counterterrorism Center holds the names of roughly 775,000 “terror suspects,” with the number increasing by 20,000 per month.

Only six representatives in the House voted against this, and NONE was from the Bay Area. Why? Learn more at our website and send messages to all the Senators on the Homeland Security Committee: http://graypantherssf.igc.org/s_1959_facts.htm. The bottom of the page shows you how to send the messages.

If S.1959 passes, it would give the government powers that would take decades to undo. Where will the country go in the meantime? The time to stop this is now!

“First they ignore you. Then they laugh at you. Then they fight you. Then you win.”
-Mahatma Gandhi

International Women’s Day Saturday, March 8



Why March 8? On March 8, 1857, women in the clothing and textile industries in New York City staged a protest against poor working conditions and low wages. The protesters were attacked and dispersed by the police.

In 1910 the first international women’s conference was held in Copenhagen by the Socialist International and as of that year International Women’s Day was established.

In 1913 on the eve of World War I, women across Europe held peace rallies. In the 1960s the feminist movement revived a largely dormant movement in the US. In 1975 (International Women’s Year), the UN recognized and began sponsoring International Women’s Day. Around the world, women and men wear a sprig of mimosa to salute International Women’s Day. Pin a yellow acacia blossom on your jacket to declare your solidarity.

Five Years Too Long

Five years ago, the US attacked Iraq. The justification for the war has proved a web of lies; US military deaths are near 4,000; and the Iraqi civilian death toll is estimated as high as 1.2 million, with over 2 million displaced. The economy, infrastructure, and social and political life of Iraq are in a shambles, and water and soil contaminated by depleted uranium and heavy metals will remain a problem for generations to come.



2004 anti-war march

We must bring this issue back to the front pages! Anti-war organizations across the country have issued a call to action for March 19, fifth anniversary of the US invasion. In San Francisco, anti-war protestors will gather at Civic Center Plaza at 5:00 PM for a march and rally. Meet at 4:30 PM at the office—or look for our blue banner in front of the Asian Art Museum.

Gray Panthers of SF

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We believe ALL people are
entitled to certain fundamental
rights:

meaningful employment
economic security
decent and affordable housing
quality health care
a life of dignity from birth to
death free from fear and abuse
a world in peace



Age and Youth in Action

Call the office for membership information.

Labor Donated

March 2008

Actions and Events

Wednesday, March 5, 6:00-8:00 PM

King Corn, movie & panel discussion on food security, sustainability & farm policy. Free.
SF Main Library, Koret Auditorium, 100 Larkin

Thursday, March 6, 7:30-9:00 PM

Cocalero, documentary on Evo Morales & struggle in Bolivia. ATA, 992 Valencia at 21st
ANSWER film series, info: 821-6545

Tuesday, March 11, 5:00-6:00 PM

Wear Orange, Street Party, Intersection for the Arts, 446 Valencia, **7:30-10:30** Live from Death Row, author Barbara Becnel & death row prisoner James P. Anderson via phone in Community Conversation about death penalty. \$5-\$15

Thursday, March 13, 10:00 AM

Senior Action Network (SAN) monthly meeting, St Mary's, 1111 Gough at Geary



Tuesday, March 18, 7:30-10:30 PM

Prison Town, documentary tells the story of Susanville, CA. Small rural community builds a prison. Free. Intersection for the Arts, 446 Valencia near 16th. Part of their ongoing prison project

Wednesday, March 19, 5:00 PM

Bring *ALL* the Troops Home Now
March and Rally, SF Civic Center
Info: ANSWERSf.org, 415-821-6545



GP Night at the Movies *BANISHED*

American Ethnic Cleansings

Marco Williams' award-winning documentary revisiting three communities that expelled their entire African-American populations.

Friday, March 28, 5:00 PM

Gray Panthers Office, 1182 Market, Rm. 203
Donation \$5