

GRAY PANTHERS OF SAN FRANCISCO



**MAY 2008:
IMMIGRATION & LABOR
—WHERE ARE WE NOW?**

**General Membership Discussion
Tuesday, May 20, 12:30—3:00 PM
Unitarian Universalist Center
1187 Franklin at Geary**

Bring a snack to share.

GRAY PANTHERS COMMITTEE MEETINGS & EVENTS

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

All members are welcome.

**Board Meeting 12:30 PM
Wednesday, May 7 & June 4**

**Middle East Study Group 11:00 AM
Tuesday, May 13 & June 10**

**Newsletter Committee 12:00 Noon
Thursday, May 8 & June 5**

**Health Committee 1:00 PM
Tuesday, May 13 & June 10**

April in Venezuela



Sonia buying cocoa and coffee at a Venezuelan supermarket.

At our April meeting, we took a (virtual) nine-day trip to Venezuela with our convenor, Sonia, and the Marin Task Force on the Americas.

Our companions were a diverse

group, ranging in age from graduate students to retirees, and in background from an ex-priest to business representatives and ordinary people just plain curious about what is going on in Venezuela.

Venezuela is the northern-most South American country, about the size of California, with 25,000,000 people and 2000 miles of coast on the Caribbean—and oil. In 1999 their people repudiated years of government run by an elite two parties and elected Hugo Chavez, running as an independent. To the consternation of the moneyed interests, he really was an independent, using Venezuela's oil riches to implement social reform, universal medical care, widespread education, community-based planning to bypass the entrenched bureaucracy. His program is called The Mission—to transform society. So is it working?

Sonia's group crisscrossed the country, visiting big city (Caracas) and outlying clinics, schools, farms, cooperatives, community planning groups. Unfortunately they didn't get to talk to the so-called student opposition—the ostensible reason being it was exam time. The general feeling was that the country was being energized (no pun intended!) by being for the first time involved in planning their own futures, that there is widespread local participation and support, that the entrenched interests are fighting back vigorously and deviously. Sonia's report was frequently interrupted by and followed by a vigorous audience discussion, enhanced by knowledgeable contributions from Camilla, Earl, and Dolores.

Perhaps our conclusions can be best summed up by Earl's comment—a continuing revolution in process—and Sonia's quote from one of the Venezuelans—CHAVEZ GIVES US HOPE.

May, 2008: Immigration and Labor Where are We Now?

On immigration, a legislative stalemate exists between reactionary interests that hope to simply expel immigrants versus liberal business interests, which hope to exploit more immigrants through a Guest Worker program that recreates the 1950s bracero program. So, instead, immigration police are sweeping the nation in workplace raids, and workers are marching on May Day to support immigrant rights.

In labor, a huge fight is developing. Workers will need strong and united action against layoffs and wage cuts as the country goes into recession, yet one of the country's largest unions is rolling out a strategy of growth through cooperation with corporations and employers.

It is becoming clear that workers' needs and immigrants' needs are the same. We will explore these connections and how we can work together to build a movement that improves life for us all.

June Primary Election Your Vote Is Important

Our Board Recommends:

Prop. 98—We Hate 98—NO
Prop. 99—Fine with 99—YES

Ordinances

F—F Is Fine
G—G is God-awful

California Networks Meeting

The next meeting of the Gray Panthers California networks will be hosted by the South Alameda network, Betty Moose convenor, on Saturday, May 24 from 9:30 to 3:00 PM. This will be at the San Lorenzo Library, 395 Paseo Grande, San Lorenzo off 880 south of Oakland. Call the office if you are interested in going. We will try to send at least two carloads.

Healthcare Not Corporate Shares

There is something insidious about corporations making money off of people's illnesses. Isn't it a disconnect from patient care to corporate share? The insurers use the term "medical losses" for the times they *must* pay a medical bill. Most of their time, on your dime, is spent figuring ways to deny claims to doctors and hospitals and screening out people with serious illnesses or "pre-existing" conditions. With pharmaceutical corporations placing poorly tested drugs on the market—often causing more medical conditions and requiring more expensive healthcare, the industry has created themselves as a self-perpetuating entity.

How did we get from a time when your family doctor came to your home to today's HMOs placing roadblocks to dissuade you from treatment? Why are there all these layers between you and healthcare: HMOs, PPOs, Brown and Toland, Blue Shield, and Medicare Supplementals? United Health Group and Humana Inc., among others, will collect, over the next four years, \$54 billion *more* from Medicare than the government would have spent providing care directly. Is this why we are told that we need so called "Medicare Advantage" plans? There are dozens of them, and they are all to their advantage not ours. Seniors with Medicare Advantage plans were charged 19 percent higher overall costs for home health services and 16 percent for inpatient hospital care. Healthcare must be part of the *Commons: That collection of shared programs for people provided by a government of, by, for and answerable to the people.*

How Did Insurance Get into Our Healthcare?

Up until the 1900s, most people received care in their homes from doctors and midwives and used preventive practices. Medical care cost remained reasonable. As medical needs were deemed more "scientific" and the number of hospitals increased, the entire medical system was restructured. With the rise of textile and other industries and the exploitation of workers under hazardous working conditions, workers organized to protest. A few reforms were put in place during the early 1900's.

Demands rose for national health care, but various legislation passed by states was declared unconstitutional in state courts, (go to next column→)

and ultimately by the regressive federal Supreme Court of the time. The American Medical Association strongly opposed health legislation or insurance. As workers and labor groups demanded more health care, regressive forces in government united with corporate allies to quell the movement. Industry believed that governmental involvement with health care would cut into the profits of insurers at the time, mainly life and funeral coverage. In 1921 Metropolitan sold its first individual health policy. Prudential offered group insurance in 1925. By 1929, private medical insurance became firmly established.



Get Insurance Corporations out of Healthcare

Neither Clinton, Obama nor McCain is willing to get the insurance corporations and \$12 trillion Wall Street profits out of our healthcare. Remember, we stopped the privatization of Social Security, now we must win single payer universal healthcare. Gray Panthers and other organizations will protest June 19th at the National Insurance Convention, SF Moscone Center. Single Payer Universal Healthcare Now! **Pass HR 676 Pass AB 840 Now!**

Destroying Social Programs

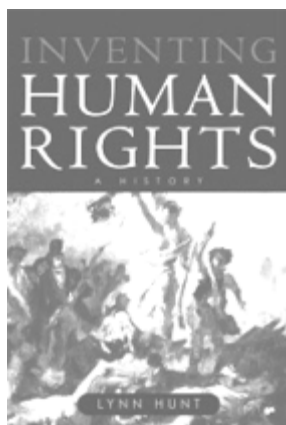
A *New York Times* article, "Insurers Faulted as Overloading Social Security," details how insurance companies are forcing people with disability claims to simultaneously file with the Social Security Administration, jamming the SSA with applications which are not even eligible, and causing a backlog in response to real needs. Delays have escalated since 2000, with the average wait today of more than a year and a half!

Lawsuits by whistle blowers against two of the largest disability insurance corporations, Unum Group and Cigna, revealed the practice of dumping people into the Social Security system's disability program and thereby adding to the depletion of its funds. Unum's revenue last year was \$10.5 billion.

Torture and the White House

On Friday, April 11, on ABC News, President Bush told White House correspondent Martha Raddatz, "And yes I'm aware our national security team met on this issue (of advanced interrogation techniques including waterboarding) and **I approved.**" The "national security team" included top advisors Rice, Rumsfeld, Powell, Tenet and Ashcroft. Meetings chaired by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice took place at the White House. In other words Rice told Mr. Tenet, head of the CIA, to do the job and the President "approved."

According to historian Lynn Hunt, it was the practice of such medieval methods of behavior control as water torture and breaking on the wheel, the iron collar and pillories of "judiciary punishment" common during the autocratic rule of kings in France, England and the Colonies through the 17th century that finally inspired the American Declaration of Independence and the French Right of Man and Citizens, in 1776 and 1789 respectively. By that time, autonomy of the individual and respect for the personal right to own one's body had developed. Widely read novels about ordinary men and women encouraged a greater understanding and respect for ordinary lives. Public opinion favored reform of the archaic system of Roman Law that had led to the Inquisition. The emerging culture of selfhood accepted that torture (and finally slavery) were violations of our right to own our very selves.



In *Inventing Human Rights*, Hunt details the times of these two revolutionary documents declaring human rights in the emerging USA and in France. It seems to us that our times call for a review of The Declaration of Independence and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Eleanor Roosevelt's

ability to effect the passage of the UDHR deserves a posthumous Nobel Peace Prize and a renewal in 2008 of the universal recognition of the rights of men and women. Let us outlaw torture finally and forever, abolish the death penalty and move forward in the 21 Century to keep the long awaited promise of human rights for all.

ILWU to Close Down West Coast Ports

Members of ILWU Local 10 have called for a "No Peace No Work Holiday" on the first of May to "demand an immediate end to the war and occupation in Iran and Afghanistan and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Middle East." We applaud the ILWU!



What will it take to redirect the war trillions toward food, housing, education, and health—here and across the world? In South Africa workers recently refused to unload a Chinese ship carrying arms for the illegitimate government of the troubled country of Zimbabwe. It seems dockworkers worldwide are showing us the way.

Letter to Our Representatives

This was sent to Representative Pelosi, and Senators Boxer, Feinstein and Durbin, on behalf of the San Francisco Gray Panthers:

On March 14-16, 2008, Iraq Veterans Against the War organized three days of testimonies from Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and active duty soldiers. We are concerned that you may not be aware of this extraordinary, emotional accounting of the consequences of this illegal war and occupation. This public testimony, entitled Winter Soldier, was not televised, not covered in any major news media, and therefore not entered in the public record. Winter Soldier took its name from the Winter Soldier testimony by Vietnam Vets in 1971. Those testimonies recounting the horrors of that war, including the massacre at My Lai, were given to Congress. There are no greater truths about this war than the voices of the youth we have placed in harm's way.

We urge you to read and listen to these testimonies. As one soldier said: "It's not going to be easy to hear what we have to say. It's not going to be easy for us to tell it. But we believe that the only way this war is going to end is if the American people truly understand what we have done in their name."

We ask you to bring these soldiers to Washington, hold a Congressional hearing and enter these testimonies into the Congressional Record.

Buster's Place Is Gone



Photo by Bill Carpenter.

Gray Panthers and others rallied at City Hall to fight the Mayor's plan to close Buster's Place, the only facility homeless people had that they could go to at any time, 24/7, for respite from the cold, the cops, the concrete, and the craziness. The Mayor refused to meet with us. On March 31, at 5:00 PM,

Buster's Place closed down. What was that like? Eyewitness account of Jennifer Friedenbach, Coalition on Homelessness, posted next day:

"At least 20 people were filed out the door. Four of them were in wheelchairs. Many were elderly. Not one that I talked to had anywhere to go. There was no one from the city, not one person—no homeless czar, not HOT, not DPH—to assist them. Many filed over to 150 Otis to try their chances at a bed ...for the night. The shelter had not opened yet. One woman...was in a wheelchair and looked to be in her early 90's. She was rolling slowly away and said she had somewhere to go. When I asked her where, she clearly had no idea and was very confused. She had nowhere to go...(150 Otis is only for men.) The struggle is not over....based on last night, the personal impact on human beings was devastating."

Senior Rent Control

Current state specifically forbids local government from regulating annual rent increases charged by residential care facilities for the elderly.

Last year we joined with other community groups and residents' associations to oppose this restriction. We convinced the Board of Supervisors to urge our legislators in Sacramento to introduce legislation allowing local control.

Now Assemblyman Mark Leno has introduced just such a bill, AB 2598. Its first hearing was April 29. Of course, if Prop. 98 passes, AB 2598 and all other rent control will be down the drain—so be sure to vote on June 3.

Get Health Insurance Companies Out of Health Care

Health care is one of our major priorities. America's Health Insurance Plans are holding a convention in San Francisco's Moscone Center West the 3rd week of June. On Thursday, June 19, the subject is health care reform.

Their version of health care reform is so-called universal coverage through mandatory health insurance bought from private companies. Our version is single-payer, government administered, universal coverage like an improved Medicare, as other countries have—no private companies. On a national level, HR676. On the state level, SB840.

On June 19 at noon, a coalition of people for HR676 and SB840 will greet the convention from the street in front of Moscone Center. Planners are discussing bands, banners, street theater (die-ins? health card burning—remember the draft card burning?), singing, just plain hollering, leaflets, maybe John Conyers (HR676) or Sheila Kuhl (SB840). We need a large and enthusiastic and angry crowd to emphasize and publicize and dramatize our position. Plan to be there!

Mark Your Calendar Now for June 19!

Oppose Aerial Spraying

Listen to UC entomologist James Carey: "I have talked to eight different UC entomologists about the LBAM problem....Not one...believes that the light brown apple moth can be eradicated. Nor do any of them believe that this is a recent invader. Not one. But none of these entomologists is willing to speak out because either of fear of retribution from the agencies and/or industry with regard to their research support..."

So why does the Dept. of Agriculture want to expose seven million people to spraying as often as three times a month for nine months of the year? Could it be the pesticide lobby? Follow the money.

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors has unanimously opposed the spraying—as have many cities. Tell the Governor your opinion next: Telephone (916) 445-2841 / Fax (916) 558-3160.

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

May 2008

Actions and Events

Thursday, May 1, 2:00 PM

International Workers Day Rally at Dolores Park,
Dolores and 20th Street, March to Civic Center

Thursday, May 8, 7:30-9:30 PM

Film, *Made in LA*, on immigrant workers struggle
ATA, 992 Valencia/21st. ANSWER film series
\$6 donation. Info 821-6545

Sunday, May 11, 7:00-9:00 PM

"Latin America and the Revolutionary Struggle,"
A talk by Jorge Martin, International Secretary of
Hands Off Venezuela, Brava Theater, 2781 24th
Street at York

Thursday, May 8, 10:00 AM

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

Saturday, May 31, 12:00 Noon-4:00 PM

Really Really Free Market, Dolores Park, Dolores
and 20th Street. Bring things to share and give

away: food, art, games, furniture, bikes, books
plants, skills. Organizers hope to do this monthly
and to start a movement. Come and enjoy.

GP Night at the Movies

Director Ang Lee's first film

Pushing Hands



Master Chu, a retired Chinese
Tai Chi master, moves to
Westchester, New York to live
with his son, American daugh-
ter-in-law and grandson. Cul-
ture shock and personal re-
birth.

Friday, May 30, 5:00 PM

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