

# GRAY PANTHERS OF SAN FRANCISCO



## **Celebrate! Rejoice!** at the **Annual Holiday Potluck**

**Saturday, December 20, 12:00—3:00**  
**Gray Panthers Office, 1182 Market Street, Room 203**  
**Bring food and drinks 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, December 3 & January 7**

**Middle East Study Group 11:00 AM**  
**Call office for Dec/January Meetings**

**Newsletter Committee 12:00 Noon**  
**Thursday, December 4 & January 8**

**Health Committee 1:00 PM**  
**Tuesday, December 9 & January 13**

**Book Club 10:30 AM, Monday, December 22 & January 26**  
**Book to be announced—call office.**

## Mackler on the Financial Crisis

Long-time Bay Area activist Jeff Mackler of Socialist Action was a stimulating and informative speaker at our November general meeting on the economy. In his view, the present financial crisis has nothing to do with incompetence, corruption, greed, or bad decision-making (although all of those are present), but rather with inherent weaknesses in the capitalist system.

The economies of Europe, UK, and Japan, which dominated the world prior to World War II, were destroyed by the war, and in 1945 the US emerged as the most powerful nation on earth. With no competition, US business was able to dominate world markets without putting money into modernization. But by the 1970s, as other countries modernized, it had fallen behind in some areas and began looking for other ways to maintain profits: mechanization, massive attacks on unions with concomitant reduction of wages and benefits, relocation of factories to countries where labor was cheaper, consolidation of US industries.

The pattern of boom and bust seen throughout the last two centuries has persisted in this one, but with an overall downward trend. In 1945, everyone was in debt to the US; today, the US owes other countries \$9.6 *trillion*, and owes the Social Security and Medicare funds \$55 *trillion* that the government “borrowed” for its own purposes, mostly military. With worry over the US’s ability to re-



pay, other countries have no reason to invest here, except for access to our markets; these are shrinking because of the million jobs lost each year—and job loss will only get worse in the present crisis.

Mackler believes the system is in a crisis from which it cannot recover easily. With both the trade union movement and the socialist movement at their lowest ebb, we are in for a major depression. Ultimately, we will become so hard-pressed we will have to take action to survive. We need to organize real opposition around needs of workers rather than business and stop thinking about rescuing “our” economy. It’s not ours, and never was.

## December Party!

On Saturday, December 20, San Francisco Panthers will prowl. Conversation, songs, games and **fabulous food** as always. Come and celebrate what has become a very interesting year. After some pretty gloomy times, we deserve some fun. We probably will also be tossing around some ideas for further fun and action in 2009.



Safety Net, by Khalil Bendib, Z Graphics

## Another Election—Our Own

Each year at our December party, the San Francisco Gray Panthers network elects new members to the Board of Directors, our governing body. According to our bylaws, a member of the Board must be a paid-up Gray Panther, is elected for a two-year term, can be elected for a second two-year term, and can serve only for four consecutive years before going off the Board for at least a year.

Two members of our current Board, Ila and Rhoda, have served four years and are not eligible for election. We thank them. Ongoing members Virginia, Kay, Deetje, Michael, and Mitzi are finishing the first year of their first term, and ongoing members Patricia, Sonya and Natalie are finishing the first year of their second term. Caty is finishing her first term.

Nominations for the Board are now open and can be made to any current Board member or to Caty at the office. Nominated so far are Winslow, Inda, Caty, Barbara and Marshall. Here’s your chance to be a winning candidate—nominate yourself.

## SFGP Board Supports Municipal IDs

At its November meeting, the Board of Directors endorsed the San Francisco municipal ID card program and called on Mayor Newsom to stop delaying its implementation. Last year, the Board did not support the program, many members fearing that ICE would use the information collected to incarcerate and deport undocumented immigrants. Since then, immigrants' rights advocates have explained in detail the protections built into the ordinance, and, despite some continuing apprehension, the Board voted in favor.

Under the program, all city departments and entities receiving city funds would be required to accept the municipal ID cards as valid forms of identification. The city would encourage local banks to accept them as well, and it is expected that local businesses would follow suit. Cardholders would qualify for city health services, library privileges and resident discounts at the zoo and museums. Advocates believe the cards will make it easier to apply for jobs, open bank accounts, rent apartments and report crimes.

Immigrants' rights groups have struggled long and hard for passage of the legislation, arguing that it offers both safety and dignity to undocumented immigrants and others who have trouble proving their identity and residency. As the ordinance now stands, applicants for the ID card would have to establish proof of identity (e.g., passport, state driver's license or ID, consular identification, birth certificate) and San Francisco residency (utility bill, rental agreement or receipt, homeless residency verification, etc.) to qualify.

The program was originally scheduled to begin in August, but after a series of inflammatory articles in the *San Francisco Chronicle* about crimes allegedly committed by immigrant youths, Mayor Newsom delayed its implementation pending "a thorough review" of its compliance with federal and state law. Despite the finding by a State Supreme Court Justice that the ordinance was in compliance, and the dismissal in a lower court of a suit against it, the mayor continues to delay. Over the next few weeks, immigrants' rights groups plan actions to pressure the mayor into setting a firm date for the program to begin in the next three months. We encourage our members to join in.

## Get Those Cards and Letters Going!

"Today we begin in earnest the work of making sure that the world we leave our children is just a little bit better than the one we inhabit today."—President-elect Barack Obama

Or how about a *lot* better? We all need to let him know how *we* think the world could be better. Go to his transition website, [Change.gov/](http://Change.gov/) and submit your letters! Or mail them to P.O. Box 8102, Chicago, IL, 60680.

As Alice Walker wrote in *her* letter, "We are the ones—we are the ones we have been waiting for."

## Balancing the Budget by Picking the Pockets of the Poor

Wednesday, November 19th was a statewide day of protest against Governor Schwarzenegger's cancellation of the annual low-income renters tax rebate. For many years, California renters who applied for it received a tax rebate to partially offset some of the tax advantages given to landlords and home owners. A few years ago the law was quietly narrowed to low-income renters and changed to sliding-scale rebates. Last year, 467,000 renter households received payments averaging \$316 per household. This, year in the interest of balancing the budget, the governor used his line-item veto to eliminate the rebate altogether.

In San Francisco the protest was at noon on the steps of the State Building at Van Ness and McAllister. We were part of it.



## Open Letter to President Obama

*A historic movement brought the first Black man into a White House built by African-American slaves. After years of exclusion and repression, people are energized and hopeful, and see the possibility of the validation of our voices.*

*Yet, as we celebrate, we simultaneously realize that Obama can only go where progressives can carry him. Across the country and the internet, a synchronicity of letter writing is taking place. Our GP Board voted to send our own letter:*

We, San Francisco Gray Panthers, congratulate you on your ability to inspire our youth and to raise the possibility of change for all people. We have lived through many decades of wars, economic crises, and much discrimination. As elders, we honor your humility in stating that this election was not about you, but about all of us.

We believe you appreciate elders and our insights; in this spirit, we offer our suggestions, our beliefs for creating a society that puts the needs of people ahead of the profits of banks and corporations.

Please act with Congress to:

- End the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan
- Establish a Department of Peace with passage of HR 3760 and SB 1756
- Pass Single Payer Universal Health Care HR 676
- Repeal the Medicare Modernization Act & Part D
- Strengthen and do not privatize Social Security
- Place a moratorium on home foreclosures
- Protect our civil liberties: repeal the Patriot Act
- Create jobs with public works and infrastructure projects
- Establish funds for decent and affordable housing
- Revise or repeal trade agreements like NAFTA
- Honor immigrants' rights; stop ICE raids causing separation from parents and deaths in detention camps
- Stop bailing out the financial sector and fund state budgets

We praise your willingness to ask for help in creating changes to make the world a place in which the young can look forward to growing old.

In Peace,  
San Francisco Gray Panthers

## Restore Medicare! Repeal the MMA!

A nationwide Alliance to Restore Medicare has just been formed among major health advocacy groups. It aims to get Congressional support for its "Call for Action to Restore and Ensure Medicare's Health," a six-part plan to insure Medicare's long-term viability and repeal dangerous provisions of the 2003 Medicare Modernization Act (MMA).

For five years, SF Gray Panthers has worked to expose how the MMA threatens to privatize all of Medicare, irreparably harming over 40 million seniors and disabled people, and driving Medicare itself into bankruptcy and oblivion. Our video "Privatize Medicare? No Way!" which we produced and showed to Bay Area senior groups, was also distributed two years ago at meetings of the American Public Health Association, one of the members of the new Alliance. Other Alliance members have also praised our video.



More than just a disastrous Part D drug program, the Medicare Modernization Act is a plan to drive healthier Medicare recipients out of traditional fee-for-service Medicare and into private plans, which would profit since their patients will need less care. Traditional Medicare would be left with the sickest, most expensive patients, and would have reduced funding because of fewer patients and stringent new cost controls built into the MMA.

In addition, Medicare would become politically marginalized because the MMA encourages higher income seniors to leave Medicare, both by charging higher premiums if they stay, and by giving tax reductions if they leave to set up Health Savings Accounts. If Medicare becomes a program for low-income seniors, it will become politically vulnerable to further cuts, like other safety-net programs.

Improving Medicare's benefits and making it the public, single-payer plan it was meant to be for seniors and disabled will make Medicare an example of benefits everyone could have under single-payer. We are already engaging SAN and CARA to join the Alliance. As House Speaker Pelosi's home district, San Francisco should be strategic to the Alliance.

## Jury Duty—Panther’s Eye View

I had to report for jury duty last month. On day one, approximately 80 prospective jurors marched in orderly fashion into the courtroom. Three attorneys, the bailiff, and the court stenographer were there. Our names were called and then the attorneys introduced themselves and the defendants. The judge came into the courtroom and told us that the trial would last until the end of the following week. He then asked if we were available to serve on the jury. Those who said they were available were sent home for that day. I was sure that this case was going to be a horrific one. A two week trial: bank robbery or murder!

On day two, 16 people at a time were called up to sit in the jury box. People gave their names and each was questioned by the district attorney and one or both of the defense attorneys. The DA briefly outlined the case. The defendants, two homeless men, were accused of committing graffiti. The total damage was approximately \$600.

Attorneys asked prospective jurors about their experiences with graffiti. Two property managers who had experience with graffiti were dismissed. We all—and this includes the judge, prospective jurors, DA, two defense attorneys, bailiff, and court stenographer—had by now spent approximately seven hours waiting, listening, wiggling, checking our cell phones, and some, like me, wondering why we needed to sit here.



On day two, I was called to the jury box and questioned. I gave my name and my occupation. The DA asked me what I was thinking. I suspect he noticed my scowl. I hesitated and then told him

that these two homeless men should be given a scholarship to go to art school. (I suspected the scholarship would be more productive for the two men and cheaper for the taxpayer.) The DA then asked other prospective jurors if they shared my perspective. None did. Or anyway, none said they did.

The judge then asked me if I could put aside my personal feelings. I told him no. I was then thanked and dismissed from the jury. One free year!

## More on the GP National Convention

Gray Panthers Convention keynote speaker, United Central Methodist pastor Ed Rowe, had note-worthy wisdom to share with us. What follows is a paraphrase of his words:



Detroit monument to underground railroad, sculptor Ed Dwight, 2001.

At the core of each faith is the mandate for making a better world, a commitment to justice. The problem he sees in the world and especially felt in his city of Detroit is the elephant in the room—racism.

“For solutions to racism we’re not waiting for a Martin Luther King, Jr. or a Walter Reuther. We are the ones we’re waiting for.”

The unions are crossing over; workers are reading the free press. The rightwing belief in the right to work is, in the real workaday world, the right to steal. What has happened in Detroit is the rape of the history of labor; the sweat and energy of our fathers has been violated and betrayed.

“Racism is our mothers’ milk.”

The worst thing in fundamentalist religion is the annexation of the spirit. Ed Rowe equates their emphasis on individual salvation to spiritual capitalism. Salvation of the individual is not found in scripture.

Racism is a raging forest fire; we progressives must set a back fire...

Ed Rowe closed his talk with a quote from Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Hope is optimism. It comes from the passion of people who’ll not give up.”

(The Central United Methodist Church is a huge solid stone edifice from the 20s, one of many similarly designed churches on Woodward Street. It is a refuge to many homeless people and home to the Director of Human Rights. Its Senior Pastor, Edwin Rowe, who is white, is to Detroit what Cecil Williams is to San Francisco. The strength and sincerity of their ministry are one and the same.)

## 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

**December 2008**

## Actions and Events

### Monday, December 1, 7:30-9:00 PM

Documentary: "Paperback Dreams"  
Discussion with filmmaker Alex Beckstead  
The Booksmith  
1644 Haight Street, 863-8688

### Tuesday, December 2, 7:00-9:30 PM

Panel discussion: "Challenging Corporate Control of Water." No! to Privatization. Yes! to Community Control of Water.  
Mission Cultural Center  
2868 Mission

### Sunday, December 14, 3:00-5:00 PM

Single Payer Now Potluck with Mark Leno,  
SB840's new principal author  
St. Mary's Cathedral  
1111 Gough Street

