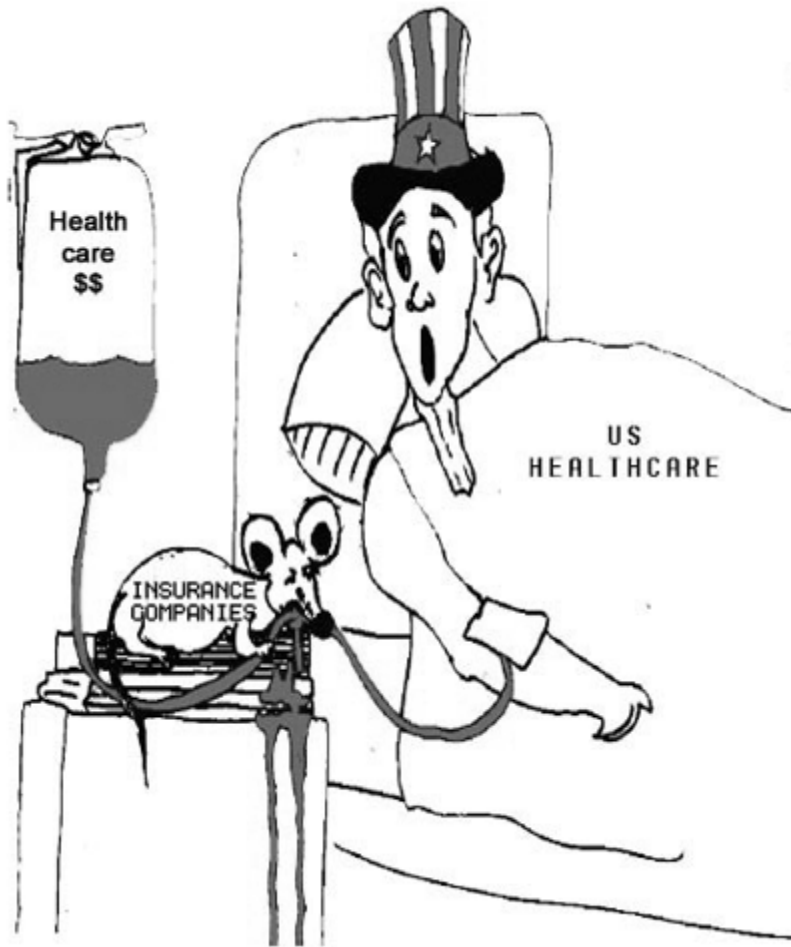


GRAY PANTHERS OF SAN FRANCISCO



Will Health Insurance Companies Continue Bleeding Us?

A Report
on Latest Developments
in the National
and State Campaigns

Speaker: Don Bechler
Single Payer Now

General Membership Meeting
Tuesday, January 20, 12:30—3:00 PM
Unitarian/Universalist Center, 1187 Franklin (near 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, January 7 & February 4

Middle East Study Group Call office for
January/Feb Meetings

Newsletter Committee 12:00 Noon
Thursday, January 8 & February 5

Program Committee 1:00 PM
Wednesday, January 14 & February 11

Health Committee 1:00 PM
Tuesday, January 13 & February 10

Book Club: 10:30 AM
Monday, January 26 & February 23

Holiday Party

A bunch of happy, hungry Gray Panthers kicked off the winter solstice holiday feeding week Saturday, December 20, at a lunch potluck. Good food, good friends, good vibes. We were delighted to see Gretchen come down from Antioch to party with us, and to welcome Tommi and John and their guitars, singing for us. Thank you, troubadours.



At the same party, we elected five new members to the Board of Directors: Inda, Winslow, Marshall, Barbara and Harriet for their first two-year term. And Caty as a returning member for her second two-year term. They join ongoing members Virginia, Kay, Deetje, Michael and Mitzi, who are starting the second year of their first term, and ongoing members Patricia, Sonya and Natalie, who are starting the second year of their second term. Board members are elected for two years and may serve two, two-year terms. The new Board will meet the first Wednesday in January at 12:30 at the office to elect officers for the coming year.



Mumia: 27 years on Death Row

Scene: Philadelphia, late at night, 1981. Gunshots, sirens, police, ambulance, reporters. Upshot: one dead policeman, one badly wounded cab driver, and wounded journalist and Black Panther, Mumia Abu-Jamal, accused of the policeman's death.

Twenty-seven years later, after a badly flawed trial, countless appeals, several times being on the brink of execution, always declaring his innocence, Mumia is still on death row. In March, 2008, a three-judge panel of the US 3rd Circuit Court of Appeal denied Mumia a new trial, ruling that the judge in his first trial was not prejudiced; that Mumia was not deprived of due process, and that the jury wasn't racially biased. The Court did uphold a 2000 ruling offering Mumia a new trial, but one which could only consider punishment: execution or life in prison.

On Dec. 10, Gray Panthers were part of a worldwide demonstration demanding Free Mumia Now!

January General Meeting: Will Health Insurance Companies Continue Bleeding Us?

Don Bechler, of Single-payer Now, will report on the national and state campaigns for single-payer healthcare at our January 20th meeting.

Obama, Congressional Democrats, and "Health Care for America Now," a powerful coalition of business, some unions, and some healthcare advocates, are all behind a plan for covering the uninsured using private insurance, which would be expanded, subsidized, and regulated. This is exactly what we do NOT need. Despite media hype, this kind of plan has been a disaster in Massachusetts.

The good news is that there have been two big advances in national organizing for genuine single-payer—*i.e.*, HR 676. The first was a national meeting of AFL-CIO pro-single-payer unions in Washington. The second was a national meeting of pro-single-payer health advocates in Chicago. Don was a key player at both meetings.

The other good news is that in California, SB 840 is entering a new legislative phase with Mark Leno as chief author. Leno emphasizes that even if SB 840 passes and is signed, it will face a state ballot challenge from private insurers, so we need to prepare for a grass-roots campaign.

Our January meeting will focus on how we can respond to these new opportunities and challenges. Please come.

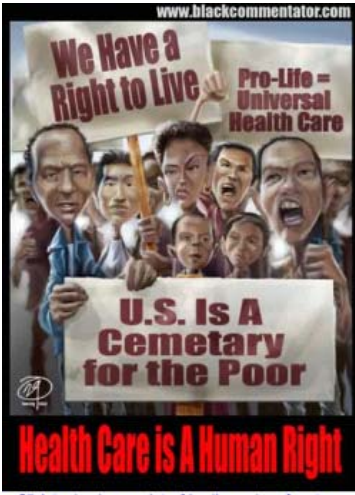
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"Power should not be concentrated in the hands of so few, and powerlessness in the hands of so many."  
"Learning and sex until rigor mortis."  
—quotes from Maggie Kuhn  
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California Networks to Meet

The next quarterly meeting of the Gray Panthers Affiliation of California Networks is Saturday, January 17, 9:30 AM to 3 PM at St. Paul's African Methodist Episcopal Church, 2024 Ashby Avenue (near Shattuck) in Berkeley. Call the office if interested—we'll be taking BART.

Now Is the Time for Universal Single-Payer Health Care

As unemployment lines lengthen and each day brings a new disaster in the financial sector, one of



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the few areas of the economy that continues to grow is health care. This might lead you to believe there're more doctors, more nurses, more hospitals and clinics, broader medical care for a greater number of people. But you would be wrong. As people lose job-related health insurance and neoconservatives of both parties

continue to squeeze the life's blood out of Medicaid, good quality preventative, critical and emergency care have become a distant dream for millions of people in America. The health care crisis is extreme. 48 million people (and counting) are uninsured; more are underinsured, cannot afford high co-payments, medications, or deductibles. What we need in this time of economic crisis for so many, is the same bi-partisan unity that bailed out the banks—this time to enact a national health plan providing universal single-payer health care for all who live here. This is what the government *should* be spending *our* money on—a health care system that would offer safety and comfort to all who need it.

But, there isn't enough money...Who believed that, almost overnight, they could find \$700 billion for the banks? The bailout of the financial sector is now estimated at \$7 trillion. The money is there if the issue is thought important enough.

Moreover, if money that now goes to the health insurance industry were redirected into direct care, there *would* be enough. As we wrote in a 2003 position paper:

“In every clinic and hospital, there are far more people processing claims and collecting bills than there are people practicing medicine. If a patient covered by, say, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, goes to the doctor's office, the patient must fill out forms

which the doctor must process and send to Blue Cross/Blue Shield, where a claims person processes them again. If the claims person questions the submission (as is his/her job, since insurance companies make more money if they can deny claims), the papers go back again to the doctor's office and the cycle repeats itself. And these claims people have supervisors and managers and administrators and CEOs. There are huge health insurance conglomerates, building after building of them, where no one is practicing medicine. When we or our employers or the government pay for health insurance, much of it goes to support these extra-medical activities.”

Princeton economist Uwe E. Reinhardt and others estimate the “excess” spending on health care administrative costs will be \$150 billion in 2008. Enough to cover all uninsured persons.

Support a National Health Plan. HR 676, the Conyers-Kucinich National Health Care Act, would create a publicly financed, privately delivered health care plan by expanding and improving Medicare and extending it to all who live in the US. Its passage would relieve families and individuals of their desperate anxiety and debt around health care issues; it would free people to move from one job to another, or one state to another; it would relieve business of the costly burden of providing health insurance. A system which provides the same benefits for all people, no matter where they live or what their income, is right and rational. We need it now!



“The financial meltdown has made it impossible to ignore the blatant irrationality of global capitalism.... Saving endangered species, saving the planet from global warming, finding a cure for AIDS, saving the starving children...All that can wait a bit, but ‘Save the banks!’ is an unconditional imperative which demands and gets immediate action. The panic was absolute. A transnational and non-partisan unity was immediately established, all grudges among world leaders momentarily forgotten in order to avert catastrophe.”—Slavoj Žižek

More Than Marriage

The issues confronting LGBT elders are similar to those facing all seniors: can we continue to pay rents or mortgages; are we able to remain in our homes independently, will our medical wishes and end of life concerns be honored; and will there be a community for us? These dilemmas for LGBT people are superimposed on layers of lives lived in closets, relationships questioned, living spaces denied, and perhaps lives of isolation. Many LGBT elders are estranged from all nuclear family members and may face the loss of the only trusted companion of many years. Is Gay Marriage the best solution? Or are there more inclusive and more creative ways to gain quality lives for all of us. Do we believe in separation of church and state? If so, we can honor the joy and commitment between people separate from governmental permission and create our own spiritual rituals to recognize and honor relationships.

The pain and anger at the passage of Prop. 8 galvanized a movement of LGBT activists, especially youth and our allies. Rallies and town hall meetings began November 5 and continue. At every gathering, racist reactions fueled by false media reports blaming African-Americans for the passage of Prop. 8 must be dealt with; we must stand up against prejudice and racism. Prop. 8 grew out of the same scapegoating forces which attack the undocumented, women's right to choice and all people of color.



This movement can provide a revolutionary forum to create change that goes far beyond marriage. Marriage as an institution eventually must morph, because it cannot guarantee the rights that we all are ultimately seeking. Joining with other progressives in winning these rights can eliminate mandated marriage as a

requirement for receiving our human rights. It is winning universal health care, affordable housing, free quality education, meaningful jobs with living wages, and ending poverty, racism, sexism and homophobia that will bring all of us benefits and guarantees.

Review of Kinzer's *Overthrow*

I think that second in importance to Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* is Stephen Kinzer's *Overthrow*. It's great to read a historian who writes so well and with perception and vision.

Christian "improvement" and "manifest destiny" were rationales used for our economic interest to overthrow the democratically elected governments of Hawaii in 1893, of Cuba and Puerto Rico in 1898, Nicaragua in 1909 and Honduras in 1912. In the 1950's, economic interests—natural resources, a large consumer market or strategic location for global markets—explain our history of aggression against the democratic nations of Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1954, Chile, Vietnam in 1963 and Chile in 1973.

Nationalism, the natural self-interest of nations in the developing world of the 1900s, was interpreted by the State Department and CIA as "Communist." We were educated to fear the economic and political autonomy of sovereign nations. We were told that the natural interests of these valid and mostly democratic countries were threats to our economic/political stability.

Kinzer traces each decision for regime change to the influence of particular people, e.g. John Foster Dulles, Henry Kissinger, the "Banana Man." The White House has depended on the opinions of one or two senior advisors and not sought further counsel or discussion in Congress.

Sound familiar? The Congress was expected to rubberstamp White House decisions.

Let's ask President-elect Obama to trash the 20th century tradition of regime change. Iran, Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba, et al can govern themselves without the threat of a USA-instigated coup. We have delivered Obama a mandate to change the course of history. *Si se puede*.

This review was contributed by a member of the Gray Panthers book club. The book club is currently reading The Declassified Eisenhower: A Divided Legacy of Peace and Political Warfare, by Blanche Wiesen Cook (1985). All members are welcome. Call the office for further information.

Budget Woes

The state of California is in fiscal crisis and will run out of money to pay its bills by next March, according to the experts. The legislature has been wrestling with the budget since July, the start of the fiscal year, with no agreement on anything. Why are we in such a mess? What can be done?

One of the major problems in this state is the steady cutting of taxes on the rich: Prop. 13—monster tax cuts for commercial property. Personal income tax—the top rate is now 9.3%, in 1991 it was 10% and 11% on high incomes. Corporate tax rate reduced in 1997 from 9.3% to 8.84%. Just to name a few. Budgets have two sections—income and outgo. Instead of concentrating on outgo—which translates into cutting programs which help people who need it most—we should be emphasizing increasing income by taxing the wealthy corporations and individuals who need it least.

Unfortunately, the Republicans in the legislature are able to block tax increases because such bills need a 2/3 vote to pass. Their budget solutions are to cut education and mental health services. One of our priorities should be to change the 2/3 vote to a simple majority.

Taxes come in two forms, progressive and regressive. Progressive taxation increases taxes on wealthy individuals and big business. Regressive taxation, like sales taxes, taxes everybody and proportionally falls most heavily on the middle class and the poor. One of the governor's proposals is to increase the sales tax.

Meanwhile, the city and county of San Francisco is also in a budget crisis. Like the state, they are balancing the budget by cutting funds to those who need it most. We should be studying how to increase the city's income—local income taxes, oil severance taxes, excess profits taxes (Chevron?), property transfer taxes, higher commercial property taxes.

We have been attending the budget hearings as part of the Peoples Budget Coalition. We should also be thinking beyond the immediate crisis and work on how to prevent it from happening again and again.



Coalition on Homelessness and other groups protest Health Department budget cuts at die-in at City Hall, December 11, 2008

Single Payer Now Potluck

Over 125 people braved the pouring rain Sunday, December 14th, to share a potluck dinner for Single Payer Now, the organization spearheading the drive in SF for single payer universal health care SB 840. Senator Mark Leno, the featured speaker and newly elected State Senator, takes over as author of SB 840 from termed-out Senator Sheila Kuehl, the previous principal author. Leno promised to shepherd the bill through the legislature once again with the support of his audience and other groups all over California. SB 840 has twice been passed by the legislature only to be vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger. Leno pledged to keep getting 840 passed until we get enough votes to override the governor's veto, or we get a new governor who will sign it. Enthusiastic fellow-diners, including a dozen Gray Panthers, agreed to keep up the pressure!

Our other State senator, Leland Lee, is a co-author of SB 840. We can do our part right now by calling the senators local offices; thank them for their support and urge them to keep fighting until we win. On January 12, ride the Single Payer Now bus to Sacramento to support the Medical Students Rally for SB 840. Call 415-695-7891 for more information.



“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.”—from Jon Carroll in the *Chronicle*, quoting D.D. Eisenhower.

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

January 2009

Actions and Events

Thursday, January 8, 5:30 PM

Demo against "Scrapping the Health Care System to Find a Solution." Speaker: Zeke Emanuel (Rahm's brother!) 595 Market St.

Friday, January 9, 9:00 AM

Support Dee Allen at Court Appearance at Hall of Justice, 850 Bryant, Dept 13, 2nd Floor accused of spitting (!) at police officer during counter-demo to Minutemen, facing jail time.

Monday, January 12, 8:45 AM

Single Payer Now bus to Sacramento to support Medical Students Rally for SB 840 St. Mary's Cathedral, Geary & Gough Call 415-695-7891

Sunday, January 18, 1:00—4:00 PM

Opening Night, Western Workers Labor Heritage Festival. Speeches, Songs, Spoken Word SEIU Local 1021, across from 350 Kansas St.

Saturday, January 24, 10:30 AM—2:00 PM

Stop the War on Women-Unite to Fight the Right! Demonstration to support abortion rights, gay marriage and immigrant rights, Assemble Justin Herman Plaza, Market and Embarcadero; sponsored by BACORR, 864-1278

Sunday, January 25, 11:00 AM—5:30 PM

Marx Brothers Extravaganza Contemporary Jewish Museum, 736 Mission St. Free w/admission. \$10 adult \$8 senior/student

HAPPY
NEW
YEAR

