

GRAY PANTHERS OF SAN FRANCISCO



WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT THE BUDGET CUTS?

Speakers:

Jenny Freidenbach, Coalition on Homelessness, on local budget issues

Jodi Reid, California Alliance of Retired Americans, on state budget issues

General Membership Meeting

Tuesday, February 17, 12:30—3:00 PM

Unitarian/Universalist Center, 1187 Franklin (near Geary)

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, February 4 & March 4**

**Program Committee 1:00 PM
Wednesday, February 11 & March 11**

**Newsletter Committee 12:00 Noon
Thursday, February 5 & March 5**

**Middle East Study Group 1:00 PM
Wednesday, February 18 & March 18**

**Health Committee 1:00 PM
Tuesday, February 10 & March 10**

**Book Club: 10:30 AM
Monday, February 23 & March 23**

Bureaucracy Buster

That's what Don Bechler, Chair of Single Payer Now, calls single payer healthcare for all. "If you have one payer, the federal government, it would save billions by cutting the middlemen," said Bechler, speaking at the January general meeting.

Nationally, the bill to support is HR 676. Originally proposed by Rep. John Conyers, it now has 87 co-authors and a new national coalition of supporters called Guaranteed Healthcare. Unfortunately, it does not yet have the support of the Obama administration, which appears to be leaning toward a multi-payer plan that does little to challenge the status quo, though it does cover many who now are not insured.

The state version of single payer, SB 840, has passed the legislature twice, no doubt will pass again in the 2009-10 session, and once again will be vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger.

We have our work cut out for us!

Our Network Officers

The Board of Directors for the San Francisco Gray Panthers met on Wednesday, January 7 to elect officers for 2009. Co-convenors are Michael and Sonia. Secretary is Caty and Treasurer is Mitzi. Other members of the 14-person Board are: Barbara, Kay, Deetje, Harriet, Inda, Marshall, Natalie, Patricia, Virginia and Winslow.

Medical Students Rally

Half a dozen Gray Panthers were on the Single Payer Only bus to Sacramento on January 12. The nearly four dozen passengers visited Bay Area legislators to thank them for their past support for SB 840 and urged them to continue working for universal single payer healthcare.



But we were there this particular Monday also to cheer for the medical students gathered for their annual rally for healthcare for everybody. Soon-to-be docs

and medical professionals in training from all over the state were there.

February General Meeting

As we write, the California Legislature and the Governor still have not managed to agree on a budget and California may soon have to issue IOUs. In San Francisco, activists are mobilizing for a last ditch stand to prevent cuts targeting services for the sickest and neediest.

In February we will meet to assess the carnage with Jenny Friedenbach and Jodi Reid and hopefully to have a substantive discussion about what we as Gray Panthers can do to "keep the finger in the dike." (See article page 5) For instance join forces with other groups to amend Prop 13 to raise property taxes for corporations?

Gray Panthers Networks Meet

California Gray Panthers networks held their quarterly meeting January 17 to describe recent activities, suggest priorities for coming months, and plan ways to coordinate joint campaigns. Host network was Berkeley. Present were members from Sacramento, Southern Alameda, San Francisco (five of us) and national vice-chair Brooke.

Recommended priority issues were health (SB 840 and HR 676); repealing the Medicare Modernization Act; strengthening Medicare; revising AB 1629—the way California uses Medi-Cal funds for and regulates nursing homes; get out of Iraq and bring the troops home; the state budget and economic issues; and protecting social security. One issue was implemented then and there. Everybody filled out and signed CARA's heart that says Keep the Heart in the Budget.

Featured speaker was Charlene Harrington of the UCSF Nursing School Faculty. A copy of her well-informed report on AB 1629 is available in the office. Brooke described national Gray Panthers outreach to boomers and youth via Facebook and our new, lively website. And Barbara made a strong plea for civil liberties issues and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Copies of the issues resolutions passed at our National Convention were distributed and are available at the office.

The next quarterly meeting will be hosted in three



Things You May Not Know About Gaza

While the mainstream media has been uncharacteristically frank about the brutality of Israel's most recent incursion into Gaza, it almost always leaves unquestioned US and Israeli claims that Israel is acting purely in self defense against a terrorist, Islamist organization, namely Hamas. Missing from most reports is the complex context in which this conflict exists.

For example, did you know that Gaza's 1.5 million residents are almost all descendants of refugees driven out of their homes in what is now Israel proper after Israel's war of independence in 1948? Or that, to this day, a high proportion of these people live in squalor and poverty? Or that after Israel "ended" its occupation of Gaza in 2005, removing its army and settlements, it retained control of all access to the area, turning Gaza into a virtual prison, making it impossible for Gazans to import needed food, medicine, and other supplies, or to export their produce, to fish in their own waters, to leave the territory to find employment in Israel or the West Bank? Did you know that unemployment in Gaza has been as high as 75% and might not this help to explain Hamas's desperate rocket attacks? (See: *What You Don't Know About Gaza*—Columbia professor Rashid Khalidi's op ed piece in the *New York Times*, 1/8/09.)

Did you know that the US and Israel helped to give birth to Hamas? In his lengthy article *America's Hidden Role in Hamas's Rise to Power*, USF professor Stephen Zunes, makes a strong case for his contention that "The US bears much of the blame for the ongoing bloodshed in the Gaza Strip and nearby parts of Israel. Indeed were it not for misguided Israeli and American policies, Hamas

would not be in control of the territory in the first place." According to Zunes, "Beginning in the early 1980s with generous funding from the US-backed family dictatorship in Saudi Arabia, the antecedents of Hamas began to emerge through the establishment of schools, health care clinics...and other entities that stressed an ultraconservative interpretation of Islam." At the same time supporters of Arafat's more left-leaning PLO were denied the right to hold political rallies or to have their own media outlets, Mubarak Awad, a Ghandian, Christian pacifist leader, was forcibly exiled, and the US was encouraging its consular officials to meet with Hamas while barring them from meeting with the PLO. (See: www.alternet.org/story/116855)

Did you know that lust for natural gas may have helped to motivate Israel's recent massive assault? According to two blogs circulating on the internet there is a direct relationship between the Israeli invasion and the fact that the British firm British Gas Group (BG) discovered \$4 billion worth of natural gas in Gaza's territorial waters. (See: Mark Turner in *The Electronic Intifada* and Omar Kalinge Nnyago in *Monitor Online*.)

Let Gaza Live SF Gray Panthers Protest the Bombing

At the beginning, speakers called for an end to US aid to Israel, divestment, and an immediate cease fire. By the time the crowd left Civic Center and marched down Market Street, it had swelled to several thousand. On January 10 all over the world, people protested the Israeli attack on Gaza and US support. We were part of that protest. Our banner said, "No \$s for Israel" and "No Justice, No Peace, Fruitvale Bart to the Middle East."



Israel's Refuseniks

With the occupation reaping unending hardship in the West Bank and disaster in Gaza, the economy rapidly declining in Israel proper, and upcoming Israeli elections promising little if any change, the growing refusenik movement offers a welcome glimmer of hope.

The movement was born when a band of soldiers refused to serve in Israel's first invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Calling themselves *Yesh Gvul* (*there is a limit*), they exist today in opposition to all unjust military incursions, above all the occupation. Since armed service is compulsory in Israel, they offer legal support to men and women who go to jail rather than serve, as well as material aid to their families.

New Profile was born next—a support group for the refusenik movement made up of feminist women and men. Its members oppose the militarization of Israeli society and work for a more democratic civic education that teaches the practice of peace and conflict resolution rather than preparing children to enlist and accept warfare. According to news reports in September, one result was that *New Profile* was the target of a criminal investigation for encouraging draft-dodging (a serious crime in Israel).

Refuser Solidarity Network formed in 2002 to raise money to support the growing refusenik movement as well as other Israeli organizations advocating a peaceful resolution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land seized in the 1967 war.

Later came *Combatants for Peace*, a group of Palestinians and Israelis who had participated in violence on both sides of the conflict but were now committed to non-violence. Among the group's activities are demonstrations against Israeli roadblocks in Palestine, protecting Palestinian farmers from harassment by Jewish settlers during the olive harvest, promoting a plan for supplying running water to people on both sides, and a well-publicized memorial day ceremony commemorating lost lives on both sides.

Last, but far from least are the *Shministim*, Israeli

high school students who refuse to serve their required time in the military (or who avoid serving by getting medical excuses), a crime for which some have gone to prison. Since the group's membership changes with each graduating class, it is working on ways to organize, such as holding mass meetings and forming discussion groups.

(For further information about these groups and how to donate, go to: <http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org>.)



Post-Inaugural Hopes

On the Washington mall where slave markets once flourished, two million people roared, chanted, laughed, and danced. As Barack Obama put his hand on the Lincoln bible and took his oath of office, many also wept with joy for a day they thought they'd never see: the inauguration of the first African-American U.S. President.

As Jesse Jackson puts it, when the wedding is over and the marriage begins, what do we hope will emerge from this love affair? The list is so long and the problems so deep—the wars, foreign policy, the economy, jobs, healthcare, the environment, education, youth, prisons, and on and on.

Perhaps our hopes are most realistically summed up by a young Kenyan, who said, "Maybe now America can be part of the world instead of trying to control the world," and a young man from Oakland, who said, "Obama may not be able to fix everything, but at least he won't go around breaking everything." Or...hope for the best and stay in the streets.

State & City Budget Cuts That Kill

State Republicans say they won't increase taxes until the State guts the 8-hour day, paid mealtimes, and environmental and other regulations. Democrats passed an illusory budget with horrible cuts for seniors, kids, the poor, and the sick. Schwarzenegger cut a half billion more for seniors. Now Democrats look ready to cave in again.

A large budget coalition had some success last November in unseating legislators who refused to raise revenues, but it has disbanded. CARA's Jodi Reid believes another coalition will form, with a more forceful approach. *Until then, the most important thing is to keep the issue of killer cuts alive. We are in a situation where the actions of smaller groups, like ours, can make a significant difference. We can be the finger in the dike.*

Meanwhile, San Francisco is cutting \$112 million in spending now, and for the fiscal year beginning in July, the City's shortfall is *half* its disposable income. Newsom is determined to cut public health and human services for seniors, the mentally ill, people with substance disorders, and poor working families, while opposing raising revenues.

Jenny Friedenbach and others say Healthy San Francisco, the City's barely-started universal healthcare program, will be gutted. SF General will compromise care by eliminating RNs, replacing certified with non-certified staff, and moving clerks with some clinical training to non-patient areas. New Leaf will cut therapy for 50 gay clients with both mental health and addictive disorders. Hundreds of non-English-speakers in Chinatown and Richmond will lose services and General Hospital may lose competency for half of its Asian languages. Half our acute diversion units, empowering alternatives to confinement for 1,400 mentally ill patients, will close.

The Coalition to Save Public Health and Human Services, of which we are a member, is pressing SF Supervisors to re-direct cuts to less vital services and place revenue-generating measures on the June ballot. Please support this effort.

Jodi Reid and Jenny Friedenbach will speak at our Feb. 17 meeting on State and City budget cuts.

Wall Street: Who Needs It?

A stock market is a private or public market for trading company stock and derivatives at an agreed price. The Stock Exchange provides companies with the facility to raise capital for expansion by selling shares to the investing public. The stock market is one of the most important sources for companies to raise money. However, the market reacts irrationally to news which may have no bearing on the technical value of securities. At the beginning of October 2008, the size of the world stock market was estimated at about \$36.6 trillion. The world *derivatives* market has been estimated at about \$480 trillion nominal value, or 12 times the size of the entire world economy. Yet after the bursting of the prime mortgage bubble, toxic securities that brought down Bear Stearns and Lehman Bros., even \$700 billion in write-offs could not save Wall Street. Indeed, Alan Greenberg, former CEO of Bear Stearns, stated, "There's no more Wall Street."

Wall Street has always created its own reality. Stock a trader does not actually own is traded using *short selling and margin buying* or is used to purchase stock with borrowed funds. *Derivatives* are used to control large blocks of stocks for a much smaller amount of money than would be required by outright purchase or sale. Most economic systems world wide have moved *our* savings away from traditional government insured bank deposits to *their* more risky securities. Unfortunately, workers' pension funds are thrown into the grab bag of speculators. *Maybe we don't need Wall Street!*

Investing in Community. The gap between rich and poor is growing into a chasm world wide. We could create ways to invest in communities of people and resources for poor and working people. We could support farmers and keep land out of agribusiness hands. And we could invest in locally based, affordable housing. The financial sector took over our lives. But we can reject that failing model. An economy needs to serve people, not the other way around. We can take control of natural resources out of corporate hands, stop land-theft, relearn basic skills of living. We might start simply, as some towns have done, with bartering. Creativity will prove to be better than greed.

Gray Panthers of SF

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ADDRESS SERVICE
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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 **February 2009**

Actions and Events

February 1-28, All Month

S.F Black Panther Party Exhibition
Main Library, Third Floor, Grove and Hyde
African American Center

Tuesday, February 10, 5:30 PM—12:30 AM

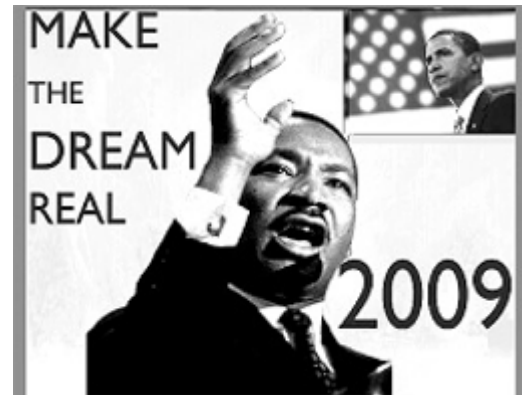
Bob Edgar, President & CEO, Common Cause
Helping Restore the Core Values of American De-
mocracy. 595 Market, 2nd floor 5:30 Reception
6:00 PM Program \$18/ \$7 student

Wednesday, February 11, 11:30 AM—1:00 PM

Matt Miller, *The Tyranny of Dead Ideas*, The
American attitudes of entitlement and excess and
how to change those attitudes.
595 Market Street, 2nd floor. Free

Thursday, February 12, 7:30—9:30 PM

Nothing But a Man, landmark independent film of
the 60s, ATA Theater, 992 Valencia/21st
Film showing & discussion for Black History
Month, ANSWER Coalition. Donation \$6



“We need, in every community,
a group of angelic troublemakers.”
—Bayard Rustin