

GRAY PANTHERS OF SAN FRANCISCO



Don't Call it Health Reform

We Still Need Single Payer

General Membership Meeting, Tuesday, January 19, 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, January 6 & February 3

Civil/Human Rights Comm. 11:00 AM
Wednesday, January 13 & February 10

Newsletter Committee 12:00 Noon
Thursday, January 7 & February 4

Program Committee 1:00 PM
Wednesday, January 13 & February 10

Health Committee 1:00 PM
Tuesday, January 12 & February 9

Book Club 10:30 AM
Monday, January 25 & February 22

Good Good-Bye 2009



Good surroundings, good food, good vibes, and best of all, good friends—that's what we shared at our holiday party, December 19th at Western Park Apartments. And since this was a Gray Panthers party, good politics, too.

We also held our annual elections for Board members for 2010. Elected to their first two-year term were: Ila, Lisa, Joanne and Earl, and to their second two-year term, Michael, Deetje and Mitzi. They join ongoing members Barbara, Caty, Inda, Marshall and Winslow. Termed out after four years are Natalie, Patricia and Sonia—a hearty thank you to them for their invaluable service.

The new Board meets Wednesday, January 6th, 12:30 PM at the office. First order of business will be election of officers for 2010. Many thanks to Western Park Apartments for their gracious hospitality. Happy New Year.

The party also featured the UDHR Players' first performance of "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights—What It Is and Why It Matters," featuring Caty as Eleanor Roosevelt (much applause).



This program about the UDHR and its relevance today is now available for showing anywhere. Help us out here, people. Get some groups to invite us.

January Meeting

"The private insurance system is like a cancer: It is analogous to a malignant tumor, composed of cells that use up all the body's nutrients, while performing no useful function. In the same way, private insurance is eating up the health care dollars that should be spent for direct delivery of patient care. In an effort to cure cancer, do we open up the patient, do some artful carving on the tumor to rearrange its shape, and then sew the patient back up, leaving the tumor intact? No. We do everything in our power to remove the tumor completely."

—Cheryl Emmons

Come to our January meeting to discuss the so-called HealthCare reform plan, and explore how we can remove the tumor completely.

Michael and Lisa will briefly present a framework for discussion, Mitzi will moderate, and all of us together will decide what we want to do about the healthcare situation.



State Meeting

The State Gray Panthers meeting will be on Saturday, January 23, from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM at the Lifelong Medical Care West Berkeley Family Practice Clinic, 2031 6th St. in Berkeley. It is not BART-accessible, so please call the office, 415-552-8800 for a ride, if you are interested in going.

One focus will be on the California Democracy Act, a petition campaign to overturn the 2/3 requirement to pass a State budget.

Too Many Friends in Jail

Justice is supposed to be evenhanded—blind—but in practice is influenced by the times, the politics, public perception, our leadership. When former Attorney General Ramsey Clark was interviewed about her case in 2005 he said: “It is clear that Lynne Stewart and the truth and the Constitution of the United States are all victims of 9/11...ordinarily, it would be recognized that everything that Lynne did was exactly what an effective attorney representing a client zealously would be obligated to do.” Lynne stated in 2006 that her actions were consistent with how she had always represented her clients, but that she had failed to recognize the difference in a post-2001 America. No harm was caused to anyone by her actions. Her life work as cited by the judge in her previous sentencing stands as a testimony to her good intentions.



Since November 19, Lynne has been serving her 28-month sentence as prisoner #53504-054, MCC-NY, 150 Park Row, New York, NY 10007. “While I have received ‘celebrity’ treatment here in MCC—high visibility—conditions for the other

women are deplorable. Medical care, food, education, recreation are all at minimal levels. If it weren’t for the unqualified bonds of sisterhood and the commissary it would be even more dismal.”

Formal re-sentencing is now set for April 22. The judge may either throw out his previous sentence and start from scratch or update the sentence he already gave Lynne of 28 months. The prosecution still is pushing for a sentence of 30 years.

Political prisoners: Lynne Stewart, Mumia Abu Jamal, Leonard Peltier, countless young black men in jail, countless small-time crack and marijuana smokers in jail while dealers go free. It would be cheaper to send at-risk youth to college than to put them in jail. In the US we spend more money on prisons than schools. Students are being busted right now for protesting education cuts. And then there’s the expense and inhumanity of the death penalty, outlawed by all advanced states. Something is very wrong with priorities here.

What’s Our Advantage?

Like all things bad in the Medicare Modernization Act, Medicare Advantage plans were established as a backdoor to privatize healthcare. The MMA gave an initial \$14 billion to private insurers to set up their own plans providing services that Medicare did not offer. However, insurance corporations through “Advantage“ plans charge 19% more for home health care and 14% more for in-hospital care. By 2012, these combined advantage programs will collect over \$54 billion more for Medicare services than the government would have spent providing services directly.

Democrats are offering to pay for the current healthcare reform bill with over \$400 billion projected cuts to Medicare spending over a 10 year period. We are told that most of this amount will be cutting subsidies to Medicare Advantage. This would be an absolute step in reducing corporate insurer control of healthcare, and certainly insurance corporations steal billions out of our healthcare; but we must be aware and stop any other cuts to Medicare to our disadvantage!

Panther on the Prowl

Among the 1400 people from over 40 countries in the Gaza Free-



dom March is San Francisco Gray Panther member Arla Ertz who flew to Cairo on Christmas day to join the non-violent action to protest the treatment of the residents of Gaza. The March marks the one-year anniversary of the 2008 Israeli invasion of Gaza.

Support Our Students

During their winter break, students will hit the streets with petitioning for the California Democracy Act, which does away with the 2/3 majority vote that has held us all hostage to tyranny of the few. More than one million signatures are needed by April – but with age and youth together **WE CAN DO IT!**

Go to the websites:

**www.californiansfordemocracy.com
or www.camajorityrule.com.**

Afghanistan and 2012

In "Obama's Indecent Interval," a 12/10/09 article in *Foreign Policy* by Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, the authors say of Obama's December 1 speech on Afghanistan, "The U.S. president and his advisors labored for three months and brought forth old wine in bigger bottles."

And so he did. Immediate withdrawal was not even an option on the table. It was all about how many troops to send. But this is a war the US cannot win. Johnson and Mason again:

Afghan President Hamid Karzai's regime is an utterly illegitimate, incompetent kleptocracy.... The U.S. Center for Army Lessons Learned determined by statistical analysis that the ANA [Afghan National Army] will never grow larger than 100,000 men because nearly 30 percent either desert or fail to re-enlist each year. The ANA is disproportionately Tajik, drug use is a major problem, all recruits are illiterate, and last month the ANA reached only half its modest recruiting goal despite 40 percent unemployment nationwide.... Pentagon press releases... vastly inflate the actual size of the Afghan military, which is actually less than 60,000 men, just 32,000 of whom are combat troops.

Obama is an intelligent man. He must know this. So why is he sending 30,000 more troops to join the 65,000 already in Afghanistan (and the 104,000 private DOD contractors)? Johnson, a professor at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, and Mason, a senior fellow at the Center for Advanced Defense Studies in Washington, believe that "the Administration has made a difficult but pragmatic decision: The war in Afghanistan is unwinnable, and the president's second term and progressive domestic agenda cannot be sacrificed to a lost cause the way that President Lyndon B. Johnson's was for Vietnam." The surge of 30,000 will provide "a 'decent interval' between withdrawal and collapse."

Or, maybe they're wrong and Obama will ramp up the troop numbers in 2010. And it'll still be a war the US cannot win. Meanwhile, how much more death, trauma, PTSD, ruined lives, \$1 million/day soldiers? If this is the best electoral politics has to offer, we need to do some serious rethinking!

It's one, two, three, what are we fighting for?

Iraqi oil deal: Two of Iraq's largest untapped oil fields were sold at a public auction. Royal Dutch Shell and Petronas won the larger field, Majnoon, in southern Iraq, which contains an estimated 12.6 billion barrels of recoverable oil. The second field, Halfiya, also in the south, was won by a consortium led by China National Petroleum Co. that includes Petrona and Total. It is believed to hold 4.1 billion barrels.—*SF Chronicle*, 12/12/09

SF Activists Prepare for National Fight Over Immigration Reform Bill

A national fight is brewing over immigration, following introduction of an immigration reform bill by Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-III).

On one hand, it threatens to draw hoards of anti-immigrant racists to town hall meetings, like last summer's tea party folks opposing health reform.

On the other hand, increasing numbers of immigrants and their advocates are demanding rights and equality beyond the Gutierrez bill, which is purported to have guest worker and border militarization provisions. The SF Immigrant Legal and Education Network (SFILEN), 13 local immigrant rights organizations including three we have worked with, has already formed its own Platform for the Rights of New Americans, encompassing legalization, family reunification, immigration policy for future workers, workplace rights of immigrant workers, due process in immigration enforcement, and rational border protection. SFILEN's Platform is closely in accord with our immigration position that we brought to our recent national convention.

In coming months, SFILEN will step up activity on local abuses such as deportation of immigrant youths and vehicle impoundments, and will chart the tricky path between fighting off xenophobic racists incensed at the very idea of immigrant rights, while exposing the weaknesses of the evolving Gutierrez bill and demanding true equality based on immigrant and citizen workers' common interests. We are familiar with this dynamic, and we should be there in the name of equality and justice. Stay tuned.

Commissions and Feinstein: Threats to Medicare, Social Security

Four years after Bush tried to privatize Social Security and cut its benefits, there is new clamor to restructure Medicare and Social Security and to cut their future costs. This time it is led by Democrats, and California Senator Dianne Feinstein is in the thick of it. These lawmakers want to slash the healthcare and income of seniors and people with disabilities to pay for the war in Afghanistan and for the insurance and drug company bailouts that pass for health reform. Forcing through these cuts involves huge concentration of government power, and overturns decades of budget principles to guarantee benefits for retired and poor people.

Feinstein and Texas Republican Cornyn are promoting their bill, S.276, calling for a “National Commission on Entitlement Solvency.” Almost half of Feinstein’s Commission would be Presidential appointees and the rest are leaders of House and Senate committees on revenue and spending. Each grouping has equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans, so neither party has to accept blame for the cuts. For a year, the Commission would hold town hall meetings on fiscal responsibility across the nation, and would then propose sweeping laws cutting Medicare and Social Security, which would be fast-tracked through Congress. The Commission would be permanent, and would submit new fast-tracked legislative packages to Congress every five years.

Congress has several more bills for commissions or task forces to reduce Medicare, Social Security, and Medicaid. They would be bipartisan, with House and Senate finance committee leaders whose recommendations are fast-tracked through Congress, often with no amendments allowed.

For decades, Medicare, Social Security, and Medicaid benefits have been guaranteed by having their funding increase automatically as the number of recipients increases. Both Democratic and Republican lawmakers have wanted to eliminate this protection for years, but they are pressing harder as millions of baby-boomers prepare to retire and deficits mount from oil wars, tax cuts, bailouts to banks and other financial institutions, and giveaways to health insurance and drug companies.

Social Security Alert: They are at it again.

Every few years Wall St. and its conservative allies raise the false bugaboo that Social Security is going broke and needs fixing. Four years ago we resoundingly defeated their latest attempts to privatize Social Security and put its funds into the stock market. This time the proposal is a fast-track commission made up of Presidential and Congressional appointments to hold town meetings and then come up with whatever plans they please and run them through Congress with little or no debate—that’s what fast-track means.



Social Security is not broke—it has a reserve of \$2.4 *trillion*. Last year it had a surplus of \$180 million. Social Security is not a gift to its recipients—an “entitlement.” It is your money that you paid in taxes and the government holds in trust for you for that purpose only.

Four years ago, San Francisco Gray Panthers were the moving force behind the HOSS coalition—Hands Off Social Security. This year OWL and CARA are already acting to protect Social Security and Medicare. Let’s join them.

“ETERNAL VIGILANCE IS THE PRICE OF LIBERTY”...AND SOCIAL SECURITY.

OWL Petition to Save Social Security and Medicare

In an on-line petition to the President and Congress, Older Women’s League calls for standing firm against the fast-track commission (S. 276, sponsored by Senators Feinstein and Cornyn).

To sign the OWL petition, go to: <http://bestpossiblelife.wordpress.com/>, read the article in the Frances Perkins blog, and click on “petition” in the third paragraph.

Even AARP has joined the protest against the “deficit commission” saying “we oppose legislation that would bypass or short circuit the protections afforded by regular order.”

Stop the Fast-track Commission

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

ADDRESS SERVICE
REQUESTED

Call the office for membership information.

Labor Donated **JANUARY 2010**

Actions and Events

Complete listing at <http://graypantherssf.igc.org/calendar.htm>.

Tuesday, January 5, 4:00-6:00 PM

Hotel Workers Local 2 Rally and March
Support their fight for a better contract.
Gather at 750 Market between 3rd & 4th

Tuesday, January 5, 6:00-8:00 PM

Organizing meeting Bay Area campaign for immigrant rights. Call 415-724-4987 for more info. St. Peter's Church, 1249 Alabama (betw. 24th & 25th)

Saturday, January 9, 7:30 PM

Raj Patel talking on his latest book, *The Value of Nothing*, Booksmith, 1644 Haight Street

Monday, January 11, 8 AM

Bus to Sacramento to support SB 810, (Leno)
Rally, hearing and lobby day for Single Payer
Fulton Street side of Main Library, 100 Larkin
Call Don Bechler to sign up for the bus
415-810-5826 or dbechler@value.net

Monday, January 18

Martin Luther King Day

Saturday, January 23, Time TBA

Day of action for reproductive justice, Protest against anti-abortion "Walk for Life" forces coming to SF for their annual event.

Lead organizer: BACORR and many others

