

GRAY PANTHERS OF SAN FRANCISCO



PANTHERS ON THE PROWL—ACTIONS FOR 2010

Bring your ideas to a discussion of our focus for this year.

General Membership Meeting

Tuesday, February 16, 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.

Board Meeting 12:30 PM

Wednesday, February 3 & March 3

Newsletter Committee 12:00 Noon

Thursday, February 4 & March 4

Health Committee 1:00 PM

Tuesday, February 9 & March 9

Civil/Human Rights Comm. 11:00 AM

Wednesday, February 10 & March 10

Program Committee 1:00 PM

Wednesday, February 10 & March 10

Book Club 10:30 AM

Monday, February 22 & March 22

January General Meeting Don't Call It Reform!

At the January general meeting, co-convenors Michael and Lisa presented disarmingly convincing information that neither the House nor Senate versions of the health reform bill will solve current problems of inadequate coverage and rising medical costs, and that coverage for more people will be paid for by cuts to Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security.

Lisa summarized the chief points about both bills: they are not single payer, they do not address rising costs of medical care, they perpetuate an ineffective and unaffordable health care system. She addressed what the bills have in common and how they differ. Even the best scenario leaves 18-24 million people uncovered (a third of them undocumented immigrants), increases the cost of insurance for most who are covered, requires most people to buy private insurance, reduces funding to safety-net hospitals, and eliminates federal coverage of abortions—among other things.

And both are funded largely by cuts in Medicare spending. As Michael went on to explain in more detail, one of the proposals in the Senate bill is to create a new bipartisan commission to make recommendations to reduce growth in Medicare costs. Its proposals would be fast-tracked through Congress with limited debate or amendments. It would be triggered into action whenever per-person Medicare costs exceeded a certain rate—and the result would be to hold spending no matter how much actual health costs increase. The bi-partisan commission or task force with power to fast-track recommendations through Congress is the latest model for bypassing public objections to cuts in Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

In the discussion that followed, some people believed there was still hope of changing the bill and thought individuals could do a lot through phone calls and letters. However, many felt that passage would actually set back our goal of getting a single payer universal health care system. There were calls for militant actions to promote this goal: taking over town hall meetings, stopping business as usual at health insurance companies, and widespread street protests. Many suggested refocusing on SB 810, the bill for single payer in California.

Panthers on the Prowl Actions for 2010

At our February general meeting, we will discuss goals and actions for the coming year. We can talk of major issues we as Gray Panthers can influence, can spearhead and work on with other organizations. How can we make our network stronger, encourage more participation get new members, and bring forth new ideas?. Join one of these committees; start your own new one. Our committees meet regularly and take their recommendations to Gray Panther monthly board meetings.

What are your burning issues for this year - Public Power? Housing? Health Care? Immigration? Civil Liberties? Education? Peace? Bring your ideas and let's get energized!

First Board Meeting in 2010

The 2010 board of directors met on January 6. This year's members are: Joanne, Lisa, Michael, Deetje, Barbara, Mitzi, Earl, Caty, Ila, Marshall, Winslow, and Inda. Before electing officers, the board decided to allocate 25 minutes to a general questioning of where are we going, how can we better serve the membership, are we allocating our resources wisely, what should we be doing differently. This on-going discussion will be revisited in February at the general meeting. Bring your ideas!

Board then elected officers for 2010. Michael and Lisa will serve as co-convenors. Caty continues as secretary and Ila continues as treasurer with Marshall's good counsel.

Statewide Meeting

The statewide meeting of the Gray Panthers in Berkeley on Saturday, January 23 was attended by networks from Sacramento, San Francisco, Berkeley, and Southern Alameda. Jim Dawson represented the National Board and the Los Angeles area networks. Among the presentations were Michael Lyon's on the commissions forming to cut Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid; Wendy Peterson's on "Acting Effectively for Social Change;" and Teed Rockwell's on signature-gathering for the California Democracy Act, a petition to replace the two-thirds rule for state budget and revenue measures with a simple majority.

Reparations for Haiti

When Haitian forces led by Toussaint L’Ouverture defeated the French, and Haiti became an independent republic in 1804, France, the US, and Canada refused to recognize the new government and placed an embargo against trade with Haiti. The reason? Haiti had stolen France’s “property” when it freed the slaves. To survive, Haiti eventually agreed to compensate France’s slaveholders, and in addition to bankrupting its treasury, was forced to borrow money from French banks to make the first payment. So, the new republic began life crippled by terrible debt and beholden to the bankers of France—a nation whose prosperity derived in part from the sugar plantations and slave labor of its former colony.

Haiti is often described in the media as “the poorest country in the western hemisphere,” but as Peter Hallward notes in a 1/13/10 article in *The Guardian*, “This poverty is the direct legacy of perhaps the most brutal system of colonial exploitation in world history, compounded by decades of systematic postcolonial oppression.”

The 19-year occupation by US Marines ending in 1934, US support of the notoriously brutal dictatorships of “Papa Doc” Duvalier and his son, the recent US assisted removal of the popularly elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide—all have prevented Haitians from governing their own country for their own benefit.. The result? Hallward again: “Haiti is now a country where, according to the best available study, around 75% of the population ‘lives on less than \$2 per day, and 56% – four and a half million people – live on less than \$1 per day.’” Starting in the 1970s, US dumping of cheap foodstuffs forced tens of thousands of small farmers off their land and into urban areas to look for work. They lived in substandard housing on steep deforested hills. Many of them are now dead. Their houses collapsed and slid down the treeless hills on January 12.

It did not have to be like this. Earthquakes are a fact of nature, but the decimation of Port-au-Prince was caused by human hands—criminal hands—reaching back hundreds of years. The Haitian people are long overdue for compensation.

Yemen, Next US Battlefield?

The US protests it will not invade Yemen, only offer strategic support, but this is hard to believe. Following the Dec. 25 attempted airliner bombing, Obama vowed “to use every element of our national power to disrupt, to dismantle, and defeat the violent extremists who threaten us—whether they are from Afghanistan or Pakistan, Yemen or Somalia,” and US General Petraeus visited Yemen promising all aid short of invasion. Civil wars in North and South further complicate the situation

Yemen and Somalia are on opposite sides of the Gulf of Aden connecting the Mediterranean and Red Seas and the Indian Ocean. It is the world’s third most important oil tanker route, carrying some 3 million barrels of oil daily, primarily to Europe and the US.



Obama is asking Congress in 2010 for \$150 million for security and counter-terrorism, and the Pentagon requested \$60 million which was a 50% increase over 2009. Civilian casualties in drone attacks are already fueling anti-US anger, and 70 civilians were killed in a December 14 air attack in Northern Yemen.

Sitting just south of rich Saudi Arabia, Yemen is the poorest country in the Arab world, one of the 49 least developed countries, with 40% unemployment in 2007 and an annual income of under \$600. It is dependent on its dwindling oil, expected to be gone by 2017. Water is also being depleted and the capitol, Sanaa, is expected to be dry by 2015. An IMF Structural Adjustment Program is making the economy even worse. Yemen’s population is rapidly growing, expected to double by 2035, and 45% of the population is under 15. Many young people leave the country to find work.

Most of us first heard of Yemen after an October 2000 bombing of the destroyer Cole in the port of Aden by radicalized Yemenis returning from the US-funded war to push the Soviets out of Afghanistan, the war which gave bin Laden and Al Qaeda their starts. Back to square one?

ACORN Fights Back

Last year a right-wing group ran a sting operation on an ACORN group, sending in a couple purporting to be a pimp and a prostitute, asking for advice in getting social services. The ACORN counselor ignored their claimed professions and offered them the requested advice. The media—especially FOX news—trumpeted this “sin” of helping the “sinful” with nationwide headlines. Congress promptly reacted by prohibiting any government funding of any ACORN group. (“Defunding”)

ACORN—The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now—is one of the nation’s largest grassroots organizations, bringing low and moderate income families together to work for social justice, advocating for affordable housing, voter registration, a living wage, and an end to predatory lending. Some of its programs were eligible for and received government funding.

In November, the Center for Constitutional Rights—CCR—filed a lawsuit challenging the defunding as unconstitutional, charging that it violates the Constitution’s prohibition against Bills of Attainder, as well as the 5th Amendment right to due process and the 1st Amendment right to freedom of association by targeting affiliated and allied organizations. A Bill of Attainder is a legislative act that punishes a specific individual or group without a judicial hearing. CCR contends that Congress violated the Constitution by declaring ACORN guilty of a crime and punishing it without benefit of a trial.

For more information, visit www.CCRjustice.org/acorn-v-usa.



Prisons, Part One

In his State of the State address, the Governor said that “spending 45% more on prisons than on universities” speaks badly of California. However, this disturbing proportion happened during his reign. His solution—privatizing prisons—means a small group of already very wealthy white men (probably the governor’s cronies) become even wealthier at the expense of both guards and inmates.



Historical background on privatized prisons shows that while the country’s economy flounders, business is vastly improved for the private prison industry. The revenue of the largest owner of private prisons, Corrections Corporation, was \$1.4 billion (2007). The money value of private prisons grows, but so do charges of negligence, civil rights violations, abuse, even death.

In Tacoma, Washington, the GEO Group facility is located on top of a toxic waste dump. Conditions there, and in other privatized prisons, violate international and domestic laws, laws granting right to food, due process, and humane treatment. When profit is the prime motive, expenses must be cut back: medical care is expensive, so dangerously reduced, and guards are insufficiently trained. In 2004, at a Corrections Corp. facility in Colorado, a major riot caused overwhelmed staff to run. Outside law enforcement had to be called in.

Detaining immigrants has been very profitable for GEO; the number of immigrants jailed by the USA has grown 65% in the last 6 years. The African-American community suffers: for every black man on a California campus, 5 are behind bars. The average sentence for blacks is 49% higher than for whites. African-American women are the fastest growing group in jail. The number of female inmates has tripled since 1985, 78% are mothers, many single parents.

Privatizing prisons prevents sentencing reform and sacrifices public safety to maximize profits. Even conservative Wm. Buckley says addiction treatment is 1/7 the cost and is much more effective. A result of our quarter century War on Drugs: in 1985, 40,000 people a year were jailed for drug crimes, now 500,000 are. (Continued in March)

In late December 2008, Israel embarked on its brutal assault on the Gaza Strip, Operation Cast Lead, killing approximately 1400 Palestinians. A year later, in late December 2009, approximately 1400 international nonviolence activists from over 40 countries, converged in Cairo, Egypt, with the goal of entering the Gaza Strip to march with the people of Gaza in the Gaza Freedom March (GFM), calling for an end to the siege of Gaza.

From the time they arrived in Cairo, the international solidarity activists—including SF Gray Panther Arla S. Ertz—met with hurdles thrown up by the Egyptian government that prohibited the group not only from entering Gaza, but even from setting out on previously chartered buses to the Egyptian town of Al-Arish, near the Gazan border. Moreover, the Egyptian government revoked all permits for venues the GFM organizers had arranged for the international group's meetings in Cairo.

GFM delegates came up with creative ways to communicate, meet, and organize to counter Egypt's attempt to stop the march. First, delegates headed in small groups to a bridge across the Nile, where they tied flowers and cards bearing messages memorializing the Gazans who had died a year ago, winning support from Egyptian passers-by, until the police caught on and abruptly ended the tribute, ripping the cards and flowers from the bridge's railings. Later delegates moved on to the next action—releasing 1400 memorial candles in biodegradable cups into the Nile from dozens of feluccas, traditional open sailboats—but the police ordered the boat owners to cancel their rentals to the group. Undeterred, they conducted a candle-light procession on the sidewalk along the Nile, with much impassioned chanting and singing, lasting for hours into the evening. Egyptian motorists in the heavily traveled area witnessed the strong international support for Gaza.

Succeeding days brought increasingly intensified actions, including a highly spirited rally outside the World Trade Center building, which houses the local UN office. Three representatives, including Philippine parliament member Walden Bello, met with UN officials to persuade them to urge the

Egyptian government to reverse its prohibition and allow passage to Gaza, without success. Also, many delegates approached their respective embassies. One day, Arla met with diplomats at the US Embassy, but no amount of discussion would move them to take steps in the group's behalf. Another day, a group returned to the US Embassy, only to be held in detention by Egyptian police for five hours! Repeated calls to officials inside US Embassy failed to garner their release. A highlight action was a rousing rally held by Egyptians on the steps of the Journalist's Syndicate, with internationals present in support, especially moving because speaking out this way is highly risky for Egyptians under their repressive government.

In the end, delegates decided that if they couldn't march *in* Gaza, they would march *to* Gaza, and organized the march for December 31. Small groups headed for the Egyptian Museum, posing as ordinary tourists, and gathered relatively inconspicuously in various spots nearby. On signal, they converged, whipped out banners and flags, and began to march! For some minutes, they marched for Gaza, until the police surged on them en masse, using force to stop them. Plainclothes officers dragged Arla by the arms through the street, tossing her on the sidewalk. Police dragged and beat other delegates, finally cordoning all the marchers into one area, which delegates declared "Free Gaza Square," and held a rally with heart-felt speeches by internationals from various countries.

Although the GFM was fraught with difficulties and disappointments, positive outcomes rose from it. For one, the GFM closed by adopting the Cairo Declaration, a position statement developed by the South African contingent. For another, the GFM events in Cairo cast a spotlight on Egypt's undeniable complicity in the siege of Gaza along with Israel, with the US backing both of them. We must all call attention to the underground steel wall Egypt is building, with US financial and technical support, designed to cut off Gaza's lifeline by blocking the tunnels that provide the only way for Gazans to receive the supplies they need for daily living, such as food, pure water, construction materials, and school supplies. We need to call upon our government to investigate alleged violations of the US Arms Export Control Act by Israel in its assaults on Gaza.

Justice for Gaza!

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 **FEBRUARY 2010**

Actions and Events

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

Thursday, February 4, 8:00—10:00 PM

Film, "Return From Gaza & Lebanon"
Short films & personal accounts
ATA, 992 Valencia. \$6 donation requested

Friday, February 5, 7:00 PM

Haiti Relief Benefit, with Pierre Labossiere of Haiti Action Committee. Sponsored by ANSWER Coalition and other groups. Centro del Pueblo, 474 Valencia St. (betw. 15th & 16th Sts.). \$10-\$20 donation. No one turned away.

Saturday, February 6, 2:00—4:00 PM

Organize for March 20 Anti-war protest
Centro del Pueblo, 2nd Floor, 474 Valencia
ANSWER & March 20 Coalition

Tuesday, February 9, 7:30—9:30

"500 Years Later" film for Black History Month, ATA, 992 Valencia.
\$6 donation requested. No one turned away

Thursday, February 11, 9:00—3:00

SAN Meeting, Unitarian Universalist Church
1187 Franklin at Geary

Thursday, March 4

Students march to protest education cuts

Have a heart. Free Mumia and all political prisoners.

The Gray Panther Newsletter is produced every month by a Newsletter Committee. This issue includes articles from eight contributors. We welcome your participation in writing, editing, proofing, printing and mailing.

