

GRAY PANTHERS OF SAN FRANCISCO



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Civil Liberties in the Time of Obama

with a speaker from the Asian Law Caucus

General Membership Meeting

Tuesday, March 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, March 3 & April 7**

**Civil/Human Rights Comm. 11:00 AM
Wednesday, March 10 & April 14**

**Newsletter Committee 12:00 Noon
Thursday, March 4 & April 8**

**Program Committee 1:00 PM
Wednesday, March 10 & April 14**

**Health Committee 1:00 PM
Tuesday, March 9 & April 13**

**Book Club 10:30 AM
Monday, March 29 & April 26**

February General Meeting

A handful of people discussed this year's action priorities at our February General Meeting. The Board scheduled this meeting to get input from the membership to enlarge democratic decision making. We don't want to be a top down organization. Discussion centered on how to get Washington to honor *our* funding priorities and our desire for peace, the California Democracy Act (see below), and how to balance our own Gray Panthers budget. Barry, Gladys, Audrey, Lisa and Michael formed an ad hoc committee on finances and would welcome your input and participation..

The California Democracy Act

"All Legislative actions on revenue and budget must be determined by a majority vote." These are the fourteen words on the California Democracy Act, the clear and simple initiative written by George Lakoff, Professor of Linguistics at UC Berkeley, which the Gray Panthers of SF endorsed at the February board meeting.

Networks around the State are also supporting and working to get the initiative on the ballot.

We all know how the 2/3 rule allows a minority in the CA legislature to hold the budget process hostage, withholding necessary funds for education and social services.

The initiative needs over a million signatures by April. If you can help in this all-volunteer effort, collect signatures from your family, friends and anyone else, call the office at 552-8800 for more information.

Look What *Could* Happen Here It *Has* Happened in Oregon

On January 26, Oregon voters approved measures endorsing higher taxes on business and the rich. The increases in income taxes will hit people with taxable incomes upward of \$135,000. Many businesses that had been paying the minimum annual business tax of \$10 will see that rise to at least \$150. Instead of projected budget cuts of up to \$727 million, the legislature will now focus on spurring job creation.

March Meeting: Civil Liberties / Obama

As with war, Obama has been disappointing in civil liberties issues such as renditions, military tribunals, torture, and Guantanamo, as well as uncertain on immigration reform. A representative of San Francisco's Asian Law Caucus, a leading advocate for civil liberties, will describe the impact, especially for our Sanctuary City policy.

Hands Off Social Security and Medicare! Join the Fight in San Francisco.

Representatives of six Bay Area groups, including SF Gray Panthers, met to discuss a campaign against government plans to cut Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. (See p. 3)

We agreed on the need to explain the severity of the planned cuts, how hidden they are, how all generations are threatened, and how they tie in with war spending and tax cuts for the rich.

We discussed outreach to students by joining the March 4 demonstrations for education (see p. 4) and internet social networks; to the faith community by working in church networks; and to workers by joining an April action for jobs, housing, and healthcare. We discussed sources of information and other groups to reach out to. CARA is already planning three town hall meetings in northern California.

Please join us! Our next meeting is Wed, March 3, from 2-4 PM. Call 415-552-8800 for the location.

Father Vitale Back in Prison

For the fourth time in the last decade, the Oakland based priest, Rev. Louie Vitale will spend the next six months in Federal prison for protesting against the School of the Americas (now called the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation). He was arrested in November for trespassing onto Fort Benning, Georgia, with the School of the Americas Watch peace group.

The SOA has for years been accused of training the Latin American military personnel that have subsequently carried out coups, torture and murder in their home countries.

A Heroine for International Women's Day

Monday, March 8, is International Women's Day and to commemorate that, we offer you a true American heroine who was in the right place at the right time and took full advantage of it. All of us have benefited ever since.



Her name is Frances Perkins. She was Secretary of Labor in FDR's cabinet for the whole time he was President. She was the first woman cabinet member in US history. And she made the most of it. Unemployment relief, public works, minimum wage, 40-hour work week, unemploy-

ment insurance, abolition of child labor, a National Labor Relations Act, giving workers the legal right to organize unions, and the SOCIAL SECURITY ACT of 1935 all came from her department and were real departures from past policies. Change we could believe in.

Today, Hilda Solis is Secretary of Labor. Judging by her past record, she would like to be fully as progressive and innovative as Perkins. Will she be? Seems unlikely. Perkins was so spectacularly successful because she rode a tremendous wave of support from a depression-battered in-the-streets populace demanding economic change to benefit ordinary people. Frances Perkins was their well prepared, unflinching advocate. She was an uncompromising supporter of the public welfare.

Another time, another era, another depression. What could Hilda Solis do with the kind of vocal mass support that propelled Perkins to success? Strengthen and improve Medicare, protect Social Security, provide full employment on a national scale with public works to build our crumbling infrastructure, pass the Employee Free Choice Act. We need our own progressive "tea party" movement to make Solis a heroine like Perkins.

All over the world people wear a sprig of mimosa to honor International Women's Day. Acacia is our mimosa. Pin it proudly to your jacket on March 8.

Attacks on Social Security, Medicare: We need to FIGHT BACK!

Call the office, 552-8800, to join us.

Gray Panthers are determined to fight the attacks on Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. They come in different forms, but they all have the same purpose: to make elders, kids, the poor and people with disabilities pay for oil wars, bank bailouts and tax cuts for the rich. Some government plans:

1. Create powerful, independent, and bipartisan commissions to strip legal protections from Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid benefits. (These benefits are legally protected now because their budgets must grow as more people join.)
2. Make companies set up individual, private retirement accounts for each worker. Income from these individual accounts would gradually replace Social Security, leaving retirees entirely on their own and at the mercy of the stock market.
3. Manufacture hysteria about the federal deficit and the need to reduce Social Security and Medicare benefits *that we have already paid for*.
4. Propose "job-creation" plans that give companies a one-year relief from paying *Social Security payroll tax* for new hires.
5. Promote the GOP *Roadmap to America's Future*, in which seniors get vouchers to buy health insurance, premiums are higher than under Medicare, and Social Security is replaced by individual private investment accounts, as in Bush's plan.

We must fight back. Why is it important to know their different lines of attack? Two reasons:

So we'll understand how complex this is, and that a big education campaign is needed to warn people about these plans and get people to fight them.

So we'll understand the need for the guiding principle that *none of these cuts is acceptable*. As in the health reform fight, there will be considerable pressure to compromise and accept "lesser-evil" cuts, particularly as Democrats are pushing them.

Please join us in this fight. Read more on p. 2.

Those Were the Days: Free Speech, Free Tuition

The current student uprisings against escalating tuition fees and closed classes that deny education to youth remind us of the energy and power of student revolts in the 60s. In this current rebellion students not only fight against tuition hikes but have incorporated the demands of hundreds of laid off university workers. University union members of UC-AFT, UPTE, and AFSCME Local 3299 service workers have joined with the students.

In the 1960s California's state public universities and colleges were tuition free. But, in 1978, Prop 13, limiting both individual and commercial property taxes severely damaged our entire education system. Then, in 2004, Schwarzenegger tied *any* state education funds to increases of private revenue, primarily through tuition hikes. The California State University system receives 80% of its funding from the state.

This fall the Board of Regents insisted that due to state budget cuts they were forced to make layoffs and increase fees by 32%. Next year they say tuition must go up to \$10,302; add in books, supplies, room and board and a student faces over \$30,000. These cuts will further affect working class and students of color. Only 3.5% of UC Berkeley students now are African American.



David Bacon

Students across the state have responded with large demonstrations, strikes, walk outs and sit ins; one of the largest rallies at UC Berkeley had over 5,000. A thousand students rallied at

UC Irvine in 95-degree heat. Many students were arrested and not all injuries by police officers were reported in the media. Students face charges, hearings and large fines. They need our support. Students now are calling for solidarity with the larger community: more unions, more workers and community organizations, and students K through 12. SF Gray Panthers has endorsed the March 4 state-wide strike and day of action to save public education. This is a fight to save all levels of public education and a strike back against the attempt to privatize our schools.

Prisons Part Two

In December 2009, channel 9 showed "Prisontown USA", a film produced by two women, Katie Galloway and Po Kutchins. Being aware of the hundreds and hundreds of prisons being built in rural America, they wanted to show the human cost of the atmosphere of fear that prisons breed. Researching and filming (2002—2007), they chose the town of Susanville, CA where most other industries died and the 11,000 prisoners outnumber the "free" population of 7,000 people—most of the "free" men work in the four prisons.



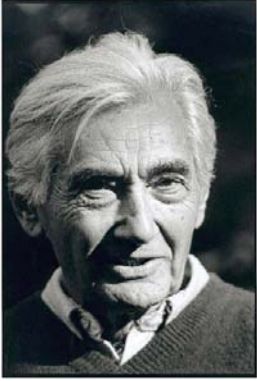
To tell the stories of an inmate family, a guard, and a local business person, they had to break down the distrust ruling a prison town. The inmate was a man who lost the job he was trained for, painting planes, and was traveling, looking for work, with his wife and two children, 18 months and 2 years old. It was in Susanville where Lonnie could no longer bear to hear his children crying from hunger; he stole \$40 worth of food. He was sentenced to 16 months imprisonment and one year parole, when he could not leave Susanville, so his family was stranded.

The people of Susanville had been promised an invigorated economy if they accepted the building of prisons. The prisons did bring higher wages for the guards. However, local businesses do not get that money; big, big corporations do; Walmarts and fast food businesses moved in, employing locals at minimum wage.

The USA imposes sentences on prisoners that are 5 to 12 times longer than in other nations. We have more prisoners than anywhere in the world—over 2 million. Over half that prison population is in jail for non-violent offenses. The state of California now runs the largest prison system in the world. Though California has spent \$5.2 billion since 1977 building prisons, its prisons are the most overcrowded in the country. It does not make sense to invest \$50 billion a year in prisons.

No Cuts to Education
March 4 5 pm Civic Center
Everyone Out Together

Howard Zinn—Hail and Farewell



The Gray Panthers book club (which meets the last Monday of each month at 10:30 AM) began *its* history with the best book ever published on American history. Each chapter of Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States, 1492 to Present* reveals truths usually not mentioned

in either the public or private schools of our day! From the so-called discovery of America to the genocide of native Americans to slavery as a capital investment, from the writing of the Constitution to the wars of "liberation" and the fight for freedom to vote, Zinn covered it all. Orators and activists are liberally quoted, their voices adding a sparkle to the excellent writing of arguably the most famous historian of his day. We will miss the humanity and intellect and progressive thought of Howard Zinn.

For example: "We need to decide that we will not go to war, whatever reason is conjured up by the politicians or the media, because war in our time is always indiscriminate, a war against innocents, a war against children."

And: "Dissent is the highest form of patriotism."

New Books in the GP Library

The Value of Nothing: How to Reshape Market Society and Redefine Democracy, by Raj Patel.

A Paradise Built in Hell: Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster, by Rebecca Solnit

And Old Favorites

The Education of Little Tree, classic, controversial tale of a Cherokee childhood by Forrest Carter

Understanding Power, The Indispensable Chomsky, edited by Mitchell and Schoeffel

A Power Governments Cannot Suppress, a collection of writings by Howard Zinn

Haiti on the Cusp

Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA) has introduced a bill in the House that calls for the Treasury Dept. to "use the voice, vote and influence of the United States in multilateral financial institutions" to cancel Haiti's debts completely, suspend payments until the debts are cancelled, and extend future aid in the form of grants. As of mid-February, HR 4573 had 37 bi-partisan co-sponsors.

The debt is one of many problems. The current plan for developing Haiti's economy, backed by international financial institutions, is to grow tourism and export of fruit and textiles. Many Haitians are apprehensive that with pre-earthquake plans already in place to increase employment in apparel factories from 5,000 to 150,000, exploitative practices (\$3/day is minimum wage) will be expanded. The US Hope Act of 2006 provided that garments made in Haiti have tariff-free access to the United States and US companies rushed to take advantage of the low-wage environment. The Clinton Global Initiative is working to open more factories. A thousand people died in one apparel factory when the building collapsed on workers locked in until production quotas were met. Within a few days, the company was pulling out piles of t-shirts rather than the many bodies still inside.

Resistance by Haitian workers to the sordid working conditions has grown in recent years, and the *organisations populaire*, the base for Fanmi Lavalas that put Aristide in power, remain a powerful presence despite almost 9000 UN troops, 3700 UN police, and 13,000 US Marines on the ground. In rural areas, peasant organizations are already meeting to head off "trade-free zones" that would grow fruit for export to the US rather than the basic food stuffs now needed more than ever by the Haitian people. They call for decentralization of the government to the countryside, and the building of an economy that meets the needs of local people.

There will be a major struggle in the next few years to decide the direction of the economy. Already, massive demonstrations are calling for the return of Aristide, the legally elected president removed by the US in 2004. Haitians will draw inspiration from their long history of resistance to exploitation and liberation from slavery..

Gray Panthers of SF

1182 Market Street, Room 203
San Francisco, CA 94102-4916
415-552-8800
graypanther-sf@sbcglobal.net
http://graypantherssf.igc.org

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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 **MARCH 2010**

Actions and Events

Monday, March 1, 1:30-3:30 PM, and every
Monday until May 24
Mental Aerobics for Adults 55 and Older
Main Library, Lower Level, Latino/Hispanic
Community Meeting Room. Free

Wednesday, March 3, Noon—1:00 PM, and
every first Wed. Free Presidio Shuttle Tour
Must reserve, 415-561-5418

Thursday, March 4, 3-6 PM
3 PM Gather at 24th & Mission to March to City
Hall. Rally @ 5 PM in SF Civic Center
Strike and Day of Action in Defense of Public
Education, SF and Statewide

Saturday, March 6, 9 AM
Save Muni Summit, Women's Building
3543 18th Street, between Valencia & Guerrero

Thursday, March 11, 10 AM
SAN General Meeting "The Economy of War"
UU Church, 1187 Franklin & Geary

Saturday, March 20, 11 AM
US Out of Afghanistan & Iraq Now!
March and Rally, SF Civic Center
info: ANSWER coalition.org 415-821-6545

Saturday, March 27, 10 AM
OWL Celebration of Women's History Month
Performance by Gray Panthers UDHR Players
Showing of Documentary "The Giants Wore
White Gloves" Flood Building, 870 Market Street,
Rm 975

Saturday, March 27, 3 PM & 7 PM
Benefit Screening and discussion of
"Corner Store" a new film on the Palestinian
Diaspora, set in San Francisco's Mission district
Victoria Theater, 16th Street and Capp

