

GRAY PANTHERS OF SAN FRANCISCO

What's Going on in Haiti?



**Update by Leslie Mullin,
Haiti Action Committee**

**General Membership Meeting
Tuesday, January 18, 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, January 5 & February 2**

**Civil/Human Rights Comm. 12:30 PM
Monday, January 10 & February 14**

**Newsletter Committee 12:00 Noon
Thursday, January 6 & February 3**

**Health Committee 1:00 PM
Tuesday, January 11 & February 8**

**Program Committee 1:00 PM
Wednesday, January 12 & February 9**

**Book Club 10:30 AM
Monday, January 31 & February 28**

December Party

We had a great holiday party (thank you again, Western Park Apartments). The room was spacious, the tables were festive with tablecloths and candles (thank you, Barbara and Ila), the food and



drinks were plentiful and delicious, and everybody ate to their hearts—and stomachs—content (thank you, Marshall, for delivering all the accoutrements).



The DVD about redundant human beings fighting soul-less corporate bean counters was hilarious and to the point (thank you, Michael) and

we finished off singing around the piano (thank you players, Barbara and Norma).

In spite of the rain and cold outside, it was warm and festive inside.



Happy New Year.

New Board Members

Our holiday celebration was not all party. We also elected new or returning members of our Board of Directors: Barbara, Marshall, Sonia, Patricia and Sandra. They join ongoing members of the Board: Lisa, Earl, RuthAnne, Ila, Joanne, Deetje, Michael and Mitzi. Why aren't you one of them?

The first meeting of the new 2011 Board will be at 12:30, January 5, at the office. New officers of the SF Gray Panther Network will be elected—convenor, co-convenor, secretary and treasurer—and policy and actions proposed for the coming months. All members are welcome at Board meetings to participate in planning and discussions, but only Board members can vote.

January Meeting

In January, we will visit Haiti again, after the Earthquake, after the Elections, after rains, after cholera (do the troubles never end). Leslie Mullin, member of Haiti Action Committee, who was in Haiti in August meeting with grassroots Haitian women's groups, will speak. We will be reviewing US involvement, the ouster of Aristide, and then talk about the roles of NGOs and the UN. Are they serving any useful purpose? What kinds of grassroots movements offer hope? How can we help?

Come help us kick off a new year of activism.

On the Prowl

The UDHR players had another successful outing at the Redwoods in Mill Valley on December 6, presenting the UDHR skit to the Marin County Seniors for Peace. Talk about preaching to the choir! The average age of that group, we were told, was 87, with many members over 90. Four of them filled in for our missing players, reading from scripts, and they didn't miss a beat. We talked with a member who had actually spent time with our hero, Eleanor Roosevelt. Altogether a delightful day. We salute their commitment and activism.

Bring the Troops Home

On Thursday, December 16, many Panthers joined veterans groups, rights groups, anti-war groups and others to Stand Up for Peace! and Stop All the Wars! at the new Federal Building. This demonstration was in support of a Washington D.C. veterans-led action that resulted in over 125 arrests. In SF, 26 protesters were arrested.

The SF action featured a die-in blocking the entrance and speaker Charlie Liteky, former priest and chaplain in Vietnam, who received the Medal of Honor for rescuing over 20



wounded men and bringing them out under enemy fire. He gave up the medal to protest that war and all other wars. As far as we know, neither *Chron* nor *Examiner* reported, so you heard it here first.

Prison Strike in Georgia

Prisoners in ten Department of Corrections facilities across the state of Georgia stayed in their cells on December 9 in an unprecedented organized and nonviolent strike by thousands of men for better conditions. The strike was organized using illegal cell phones, most of them sold to prisoners by the guards, to text from one facility to another. Begun as a one-day strike, the historic action is still going strong, despite violent efforts by the DOC to force prisoners back to work.

“The nine specific demands made by Georgia's striking prisoners in two press releases pointedly reflect many of the systemic failures of the U.S. regime of mass incarceration, and the utter disconnection of U.S. prisons from any notions of protecting or serving the public interest,” writes Bruce A. Dixon, managing editor of *The Black Agenda*. “Prisoners are demanding, in their own words, decent living conditions, adequate medical care and nutrition, educational and self-improvement opportunities, just parole decisions, an end to cruel and unusual punishments, and better access to their families.”

Prison activist Elaine Brown, whose son is in one of the affected prisons, said the strike was remarkable for rising above the sharp racial divides common among prisoners: “...there are leaders of different factions in the prison, and they were able to...discuss what could they do. Instead of fighting among themselves, is there anything that they could do to try to change the conditions of being just constantly bombarded with violent attacks, with...idle time...and so on? And they—at some point, a number of them just decided, ‘Well, we just shouldn’t work.’ And it just became a prairie fire. It was truly the spark that lit the prairie fire.”

With less than five percent of the world’s population, the US has almost a quarter of its prisoners, nearly half of them African-American. There are more African Americans under correctional control today than were enslaved in 1850.



For more information, read the eye-opening *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, by Michelle Alexander.

Lynne in Texas

Excerpt from an email from Lynne in prison in Texas: ... Food is vastly improved... a room with four bunks... the sunsets and sunrises are gorgeous, the place is very open and outdoors there are pecan trees and birds galore... The full moon last night gladdened my heart as I realized it was shining on all of you I hold dear.

New Address: Lynne Stewart, Federal Medical Center, Carswell, 53504-054, Unit 2N
PO Box 27137, Fort Worth Texas, 76127

Bradley Manning in Virginia

The army private accused of leaking info to Wikileaks but never tried has spent seven months in solitary, denied the right to exercise, denied a pillow and sheets, and is forcibly medicated, according to Glenn Greenwald on *Salon*.

School of the Americas AKA Western Hemispheric Institute for Security Cooperation

On November 20th peace activists held their annual protest at Fort Benning, Georgia, against the US School of the Americas, which they say has been training Latin American police and military for decades in the use of weaponry and torture against popular movements for democracy and in support of right wing governments. (Remember the Contras). The School says it teaches peace and cooperation, mutual knowledge, democratic values and respect for human rights.

One of the regular protesters is Oakland Franciscan priest Father Louis Vitale, who has been jailed four times previously for trespassing during the protests, and is now once again in federal prison for six months on the same charges. Father Vitale says, “The US military, with other countries, is increasing the violence, especially in Latin America and the Middle East. We find it very important to witness... We entered Fort Benning to show our disapproval and to change US foreign policy.”



Conspiracy Against the Truth

When did speaking truth to power become an international terrorist crime? It is enlightening to follow the response to WikiLeaks' public release of classified US diplomatic information.

Julian Assange was held for ten days incommunicado in solitary confinement in a British maximum security prison, ostensibly for questioning by the Swedes for *alleged* misdemeanor sexual misconduct, ordinarily requiring no jail time. Yet, he has not been charged with a crime. US Army Private Bradley Manning, thought to be the source of WikiLeaks' material, has been more effectively silenced in maximum solitary confinement in military prisons 23 hours a day for the past seven months. Members of Congress call for Assange's extradition and indictment under the archaic Espionage Act of 1917. One elected official even called for a Special Forces assassination. Pressure has increased on media outlets to withhold the leaked material from public view. Military personnel and government employees are threatened with reprisals for reading this material, even in their own homes! Visa, Mastercard, and Paypal cut off funding to any website publicizing the leaks.

Yet, WikiLeaks cooperated with all print media on concerns of security *prior* to release of information. Disseminating information is not a crime. These are not nuclear secrets, so why the attack?

As Ralph Nader warned in recent testimony before Congress, "Secrecy—keeping the people and Congress in the dark—is the cancer eating at the vitals of democracy." If the truth had *leaked out*, we would not be occupying Iraq today. Labeling all information as *national security* suppresses evidence. Opening access and keeping informed secures democracy.

What is our future for free speech and the First Amendment if this Wikimania is used to suppress and intimidate whistle blowers, investigative reporting, and the Internet, and to threaten our ability to organize through dissemination of information world-wide? The Patriot Act is up for renewal in February. Lets repeal it The arcane Espionage Act of 1917 should never have been passed in the first place and should have been repealed long ago.

Congress of the People Bail Out People Not Banks!

As the economy and its institutional pegs fall, we can demand funds be funneled into building a parallel economy. At local levels community survival and support systems must be in place and budgets must be set by the people. On November 20th, Gray Panthers participated with other progressive organizations in a Congress of the People initiated by the SF Living Wage Coalition.

The Congress intends to connect with local, state and national grass-roots organizations to create concrete action steps to build coalitions to organize and sustain our diverse communities. The workshops discussed all issues critical to our survival. Documentation will be available in the GP office. We will attend a follow-up meeting and report on the progress of the Congress in the next newsletter.

**Congress of the People
Wednesday, January 5
6 PM—8 PM
2940 16th Street, Room 301**

Reading for the New Year

It is Monday, August 29, 2005. Hurricane Katrina has hit New Orleans. The Mayor has ordered everyone who can to leave the city. A small businessman, a painting contractor who also owns some rental units, who lives in a middle class part of town, has sent his wife and four children out of town but opts to stay and look after his properties and his tenants. *Zeitoun* (pronounced zaytoon), by SF author Dave Eggers, is the story of that family told from the point of view of a Syrian born American citizen and his Louisiana born wife and kids, devout Muslims, caught up in the bizarre world of Homeland Security post 9/11 paranoia, racism, press hysteria about violence and looting and FEMA and police and military forces run amok. It brings the reality of Katrina down home and personal in a way that the media reporting at the time and subsequently never has.

The SF Public Library sponsors a program called One City, One Book—SF Reads. *Zeitoun* is one of the books selected by that program. This is a highly recommended book.

Obama's Tax Plan

President Obama's Compromise Tax Plan contains a one-year reduction in the Employee Social Security payroll tax from 6.2 to 4.2 percent, a so-called Payroll Tax Holiday. This "holiday" may well be the end of Social Security as we know it.

Why is the Obama Administration willing to support a tax compromise that would reduce workers' contributions to Social Security by \$120 billion in just one year, a 16% reduction?

In fact, this crippling cut to Social Security might well be permanent, not temporary. If members of Congress representing the rich are unwilling to restore higher income taxes on the wealthiest, they will be unwilling to restore higher payroll taxes.

The real aim of these Wall Street indebted legislators is to make Social Security dependent on federal bail-outs and then privatize it. Social Security funds would be used to inflate the stock market and we workers would be assigned individual stock market accounts that could crash when the next bubble explodes.

Fifty-three million people receive Social Security benefits, one in four households. Almost 2/3 of seniors depend on Social Security for half their income or more. Social Security lifts half of disabled workers above the poverty line. Almost 9% of children are supported by Social Security.

Most of President Obama's Tax Compromise is a transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich, with its two-year extension of income and estate tax breaks for the rich and super-rich, while working people get a one-year extension of meager unemployment benefits, a smattering of other breaks, and the poorest third of us actually pay more taxes. Worse, this package, which adds \$185 billion to the debt, is being justified as "stimulus." Giving the rich more money to hoard is not stimulus.

Destroying Social Security, America's most successful social program, is not stimulus. A payroll tax reduction that gives working families a few hundred dollars more a month now, while sending them into poverty when they reach old age is generational warfare at its worst.

Talking to Your Kids—and Others

Do you ever talk to your children and grandchildren about the importance of Social Security? You should. It is under attack again, as it has been regularly, for the 75 years it has been in existence.

What do you say to counter the constant mainstream media anti-social-security barrage?

- *We must cut social security to decrease the national deficit.*

Answer: Social Security has NEVER contributed to the deficit. It is totally funded by taxes paid by workers and employers specifically dedicated to Social Security. It has NEVER dipped into other government money or in any way added to the deficit. The Social Security trust fund has a \$2.5 trillion surplus of money that belongs to each of you who have paid into it. It is your personal IRA that is held in trust for you by the Social Security Agency rather than by a bank. It is not a gift. It is money YOU personally put aside for your retirement. It has nothing to do with the deficit. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the budget deficit has been caused by: the ongoing wars, tax cuts for the rich, spiraling health costs and the recession. Social Security has nothing to do with any of those.

- *Social Security is going broke and won't be there for the current work force.*

Answer: This has been the mantra for the opponents of Social Security since the day it was enacted 75 years ago. In all that time, Social Security has never missed a payment. The Social Security fund has a \$2.5 trillion surplus which will rise to \$4.3 trillion by 2024. That's TRILLION, not billion or million. Even the most conservative estimates say it is fully funded for at least the next 27 years, by which time all the Boomers will have retired and be collecting the Social Security pensions that they have already paid for. And the fund will still be solvent. Social Security taxes are paid on earnings up to \$106 thousand dollars per year. If that cap were removed and taxes paid on all earnings, solvency would be guaranteed for even longer, perhaps indefinitely...However, if the 2% reduction described on this page remains in effect indefinitely, the objective of weakening Social Security is well on its way. That is really scary

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.

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JANUARY 2011

Actions and Events

Friday, January 7, 7:00—9:30 PM

The Fever by Wallace Shawn, a raw portrayal of a
man coming to social consciousness

AND

Saturday, January 8, 1:30 PM

Marx in Soho, by Howard Zinn, humanizes the
man whose ideas describe our social structure.
Both performances by actor/sociologist Jerry Levy
at Centro del Pueblo, 474 Valencia, nr. 16th
Reserved tix \$10, door \$20, no one turned away
To reserve: email: globon@comcast.net

Tuesday, January 11, 9:00—Noon

Senior Action Network (SAN) Monthly Meeting
U/U Church, 1187 Franklin @ Geary
Lunch \$1.50, info: 415-546-1333

Saturday, January 8, 3:00—5:00 PM

Healthcare Potluck, with Mark Leno author of
SB810 on 2011 campaign for Single Payer in CA
St. Mary's, 1111 Gough @ Geary
Info: 415-695-7891, or www.singlepayernow.net

Thursday, January 13, 6:00—9:00 PM

Bay Area launch screening of *The Economics of
Happiness*, one hour doc re worldwide movement
for economic localization, panel discussion
David Brower Center, 2150 Allston Way, Bkly
Free, donation appreciated, info 510-548-4915

Wednesday, January 26, 6:00—7:30 PM

A Sea Change: Imagine a World Without Fish,
Documentary Film by Barbara Ettinger “a love
letter to the planet and an urgent plea to its citi-
zens.”

San Francisco Public Library, Koret Auditorium
100 Larkin Street/ Grove

Saturday, January 29, 2:00-3:00 PM

A Sea Change: Imagine a World Without Fish,

