

GRAY PANTHERS OF SAN FRANCISCO



HANDS OFF SOCIAL SECURITY!

General Membership Meeting

Tuesday, February 15, 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 2 & March 2**

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

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

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

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

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

Report on Haiti at January Meeting

Leslie Mullin of Haiti Action Committee sketched the history of Haiti since its 1804 independence, emphasizing the on-going struggle between US efforts to control Haiti and the fierce drive for democracy and self-governance that characterizes so much of Haiti's history.

Coups, occupations, support of brutal dictatorships, violence and repression against popular movements, kidnapping, destruction of local agriculture are among the methods that have been used to subdue Haitians and force them into low-paying jobs producing cash crops and garments for export to the US. (Minimum wage for garment workers is \$3 per day.) Since 1990, the wildly popular people's party, Fanmi Lavalas, led by Jean-Claude Aristide, has posed a strong challenge to the US, and the people's efforts continue despite removal of their democratically elected president in a US-sponsored coup, exclusion from subsequent elections, and deadly attacks by UN occupying forces.

Money for reconstruction poured in from around the world after the devastating 7.0 earthquake in January, 2010, but much of it has not reached those most in need, funneled off by NGO expenses and held up by governments. Hundreds of thousands still live in tents or under tarps with no running water or sanitation, no jobs, and a desperate shortage of food. Cholera has broken out in some of the camps (see December 2010 Newsletter). An election in which most of the population didn't participate remains unresolved.



In the midst of this hardship, people are organizing. Mullin visited grassroots women's groups in the refugee camps

last August that are rebuilding Haiti by themselves—setting up schools and markets, establishing a barter economy, making plans to restore Haiti as an agricultural country that grows all its own food. Lavalas' popularity is undiminished, and they want Aristide back now!

February Meeting

As we go to press, we await the State of the Union address to find out what Obama plans for Social Security in 2011 and beyond. We hope for the best, but fear the worst. Social Security, the most successful government program ever, has been under attack for fifty years. We fought to get it in the first place. Now we need to defend it.



Come to the February general meeting to strategize on how to organize our new Hands Off Social Security campaign.

Gray Panthers in 2011

A special board meeting met January 11 to discuss plans of action and priorities for 2011:

Protecting Social Security and pensions coupled with a demand for jobs: "Hands Off Social Security!" and "Real Stimulus, Jobs Now!"

Health: Protect Medicare and Medicaid from national, state and city attacks and budget cuts. Work with CARA and Single Payer. We can provide a unique voice exposing how the Obama Plan leads to Medicare cuts. We know a lot about the Deficit Commission and have initiated two law suits against MediCal cuts, one successful.

Human Rights/Civil Liberties: Promote awareness of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, protect immigrants' rights, and oppose civil liberties abuses such as the Patriot Act, FBI raids and Grand Juries. Support individual cases like those of Mumia and Lynne Stewart.

Financial: We spend \$10,000 more per year than we take in. At this rate, we will go broke in 2-3 years. We feel the SF Gray Panthers makes a significant and unique contribution to the Bay Area and we should assure future viability.

These are the areas where we hope to take leadership roles in the progressive community. In other areas, i.e. single payer, we will participate as part of a coalition. We welcome suggestions.

Boomer Bashing

Most people think of ageism as discrimination, particularly in employment, against people on the basis of their age, or as the stereotyping of old people. But what about demonizing the elderly as the cause of everyone else's troubles?

"Boomers Hit New Self-Absorption Milestone: Age 65," read the title of an article in the *Sacramento Bee* on December 31: "A generation fascinated with itself"; "no intention of ceding to others what they consider rightfully theirs: youth"; "[t]he self-aware, or self-absorbed, feel less self-fulfilled, and thus are racked with self-pity." Entitlement, refusal to step aside and leave the world to the young, disappointed hopes—the general picture is of a pampered and self-indulgent generation soured on the world because their unrealistic ideals are unfulfilled and determined to live on easy street to a ripe old age at everyone else's expense. And there are 79 million of them! Never mind that the unemployment rate is rising faster among people 55 and over than anyone else, or that millions have postponed retirement because the bottom fell out of the private investment accounts forced down their throats.

What's more, a lot of them are feeding at the public trough! "The generosity of many public pensions is an incendiary topic, with taxpayers potentially on the hook for billions and billions in unfunded promises." "...unreasonable pension costs are causing deficits that will last 'for the foreseeable future.'" (Bloomberg Business Week, January 11) Never mind that these pensions were negotiated—usually in exchange for lower salaries for public employees—by states and municipalities who then failed to live up to their obligations.

They expect too much, they'll live too long and we can't let them bankrupt the country—that's the general tenor of the media coverage. Why?

Because if the boomers can be blamed for the country's economic woes, we won't have to talk about where the money is really going. The Friends Committee on National Legislation estimated that in 2009, 44.4% of US tax payer's money went toward war, but *that* topic is not even part of the conversation. We need to change that!

Who was this generation that was so self-absorbed that it earns the wrath and contempt of the rich controlling the press, boardrooms, and Congress? This self-absorbed generation risked their lives fighting Jim Crow racism in the South, and later, institutional racism nationwide. This self-absorbed generation brought the Vietnam War to a halt by rebelling inside the military and marching and sitting-in at home. This self-absorbed generation made fighting sexism a working class issue. This self-absorbed generation put the issues with the Democrats squarely up front: "Hey, Hey, LBJ, How many kids did you kill today?" This is the kind of self-absorption we need today!

From *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2/14/89 Valentines, Sealed With a Kick

Maggie Kuhn has sent President Bush a Valentine greeting on behalf of the 70,000 "card-carrying liberals" who are members of the ageless organization she founded, the Gray Panthers. "None of us voted for you, but we wish you the best," read the message by Germantown's white-haired warrior for human rights, who hasn't lost her spirit despite a decade of conservatives' dominance of America's domestic agenda.



Enclosed with the greeting was a box of assorted not-so-sweet reminders of the choices facing the new President. The collection included:

1. A coat hanger for 'do-it-yourself' abortions.
2. fifty pennies to help reduce the deficit.
3. A gold-plated toilet seat and wrench to cut down Pentagon waste and hanky-panky defense contracting.
4. An empty plate for the hungry.
5. Sparklers for your thousand points of light.
6. A large, sturdy box to be recycled as shelter for the homeless.
7. A *Home Sweet Home* sampler to adorn the box.

"We hope you will appreciate and accept our Valentine gifts on behalf of the poor, the hungry, the homeless and Americans everywhere who are concerned about our country's future."

Do Something Outrageous Every Day.

Maggie Kuhn

Single Payer Alive and Well

Some 300 people gave a rousing welcome to Senator Mark Leno at the Single Payer Now potluck on Saturday, January 8. Leno took over as chief sponsor for SB 810 after its original proponent, Sheila Kuehl, was termed out. He will reintroduce it in the State Senate at the right moment if possible to get the number 810 again (the formal name of SB 810 is The California Universal Healthcare Act.)

Leno points that bear repeating: To those who say we can't afford to pass single payer, we reply, we can't afford not to....SB 810 gets rid of the middle man, the insurance companies that perform no health function...proponents are currently discussing strategy, chances are good that it will be sent by the legislature to Governor Brown, who will hopefully sign it. Then a repeal will undoubtedly end up on the ballot, heavily financed by the health industry. Question: should we beat them to it and put our own proposition on the ballot first with our own slant?

Don Bechler of Single Payer Now chaired the meeting and Hank Abrams of Physicians for a National Health Plan (PNHP) and Jodi Reid of CARA also spoke. GPs were well represented.

The following Monday, January 10, hundreds upon hundreds of medical, nursing, and other health students marched toward the state capital building, filling the West Lawn with a sea of white coats, with chants that could be heard blocks away, demanding single-payer and an end to insurance companies.

It was the annual Lobby Day of the California Health Professional Student Alliance, and this was the biggest year yet. Buses from all over the state brought additional hundreds of supporters from Single-Payer advocates, unions, community clinics, and senior and disability groups. So many Bay Area people from Single Payer Now, CARA, Gray Panthers, and other groups came that separate buses were needed for SF and the East Bay, a first.

Every Gray Panther should attend this annual event, you'll leave feeling great. The Obama Plan has muddied up health reform, but single payer is indeed alive and well.

Talking About Social Security

Continued from the January Newsletter

- *Raising the retirement age.*

Why? Does it reduce the deficit? NO. As we pointed out in our previous column, Social Security payments come from an account separate from regular government expenditures, fully funded by a dedicated tax with a vast surplus, and are not part of the federal deficit nor do they contribute to said deficit. Is it necessary to provide an adequate national workforce? Stupid question in view of the current unemployment rate—plus which you can keep on working while on Social Security if your skills are crucial. Then why? Is it a ploy to blame deficits on the elderly and deflect attention from the real reasons for deficits? Is it a stratagem to use the excuse of deficits to further shred the social safety net? Is it another step in the constant effort to weaken support for Social Security so Wall Street can get its greedy hands on the \$2.5 trillion trust fund? All of the above?

What is the result of raising the retirement age? In effect it is a sneak cut in benefits. Each year denied is roughly a 6%-7% cut depending on how long you live. For instance, if you die at 70, raising the retirement age to 66 is a 20% cut; if at 80, about a 7% cut. Since statistically in the US, well-to-do people live longer than the poor (this is an average—not necessarily the people you know), it is another case of less for the poor, more for the rich.

In today's economy, when an older worker—say 55 or 60—is laid off, his/her chances of getting rehired are pretty bleak and getting another job at equal pay even bleaker. So you are left barely hanging on until you can get Social Security and at least some assured income. Why add another year to that misery? If you subscribe to the Keynesian prime-the-pump theory, you should support *lowering* the retirement age to get money more quickly into the hands of those who will spend it rapidly.



For those of us already on Social Security, this is our fight for those who come after us. Tell your kids we are fighting for their future. Invite them to become Gray Panthers and join the struggle.

Climate Change from an Oceanographer's Viewpoint

In *The World Is Blue: How Our Fate and the Ocean's Are One* (National Geographic, 2009), oceanographer Sylvia Earle explains how human pollution and other destructive activity is destroying earth's oceans. Some information culled from this interesting book:



It has taken about four billion years for living systems, mostly in the seas, to transform the lifeless ingredients of early earth into the Eden that makes our lives possible, and less than a century for us to destabilize these ancient rhythms....Human impacts on global climate are creating change of geological magnitude in a few decades.

The sunlit surface of the sea is the place where most of earth's oxygen is generated, where the great majority of CO₂ is extracted from the atmosphere. Without forest and sea life to absorb and transform CO₂, earth's atmosphere would most likely resemble that of Venus and Mars, and earth's temperature would be above 482°F....

If species continue disappearing from ocean ecosystems at the current, recent accelerating rate, all fish and seafood species are projected to collapse by 2048. Reducing CO₂ emissions is the most important factor for lowering the global impact of human activities on the climate system. CO₂ enters the air through the yearly extraction of hundreds of millions of tons of fish, oysters, clams and other carbon-based forms of life from the sea. Currently under 1% of the sea is protected....

Another of the most destructive attacks on the ocean is plastic pollution. The seas devour more than 22 million tons of CO₂ daily. They store 50 times more than the atmosphere. Industrial fishing is dismembering the dynamic but stable carbon cycle constructed over hundreds of millions of years....The problem is the magnitude of synthetic materials that are used briefly then thrown away. Less obvious and more insidious are small bits of plastic. Over 250 billion pounds of plastic spheres are created from petrochemicals yearly in the US. In 1997 the great Pacific garbage patch was dis-

covered, thousands of square miles of plastic debris. Small pieces of plastic concentrate toxins that are in the ocean. When toxin-loaded plastics are taken in by little fish that are consumed by larger fish, it doesn't take long to deliver a concentrated dose of something that started in the ocean in very dilute amounts....

Present climate change policies focus on the atmosphere, largely neglecting the ocean, despite ample evidence that the ocean drives and regulates planetary climate, weather, temperature and chemistry. The United States is the only major maritime power that is still not an official party to the United Nations Law of the Sea. How can we shake Americans out of the complacency that allows destruction of the earth?

For Your Information: CO₂ gas forms a layer in the atmosphere that traps the earth's heat, prevents normal cooling and thus adds to climate warming. This is called "the greenhouse effect."

Cancun—Was it Good? Mostly No

More than 190 countries recently met for two weeks under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Mexico with the aim to curb global warming by cutting carbon emissions. Was it a success? Well, compared to the previous meeting in Copenhagen that ended in chaos—yes. All the countries except Bolivia agreed on a compromise that will see *all* countries committed to cutting emissions for the first time. Participants also agreed to set up a "green fund" to help poor countries cope with climate change. A new scheme to halt deforestation was discussed.

BUT: the upshot is that even in the best case scenario in which all nations do what they have "agreed" to do (unlikely), it gets us only 60% of the way toward saving the planet from catastrophic global warming. **THIS IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH!**

House GOP Kills Climate Committee

"House Republicans have killed the House Select Committee for Energy Independence and Global Warming and hope to block bills regulating carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act."—*Democracy Now*, 1/7/11

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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Actions and Events

Thursday, February 3, 7:00—9:30 PM

Screening: *Occupation Has No Future: Militarism & Resistance in Israel/Palestine*, documentary by Upheaval Productions, War Memorial Veterans Building, 401 Van Ness @ McAllister.. Free

Saturday/Sunday, Feb. 5/6, 9:00 AM—5:00 PM

Teach-in by leading Bay Area artists/ intellectuals. to inaugurate The Free University. Viracocha, 998 Valencia info: 374-7048, fusf.wordpress.com

Thursday, February 10, 9:00—Noon

Senior Action Network (SAN) Monthly Meeting, U/U Church, 1187 Franklin @ Geary
Lunch \$2.00. Info: 415-546-1333

Wednesday, February 16, 6:00—7:30 PM

Screening: *Focusing on Latin America*: A project of Economica. Multimedia featuring artists, activists, of Argentina, Costa Rica, Mexico, Women's Building Audre Lorde Room, 3543 18 Street, near 16th St. BART Free. RSVP to imow.org

Sunday, February 20, 1:30 PM

Program on Negro spirituals and their connection to Africa. Progression of faith and culture starting with old Yoruba songs
Main Library, Koret Auditorium

Thursday, February 24, 6:00 PM

The Postwar Struggle for Civil rights: African Americans in San Francisco, 1945-75, by Historian Paul Miller, reading and book signing
Main Library, Latino/Hispanic Room

Saturday, February 26, 10:00—Noon

Inge Horton, author *Early Women Architects of the SF Bay Area, 1890—1951* speaks at OWL meeting, 870 Market Street

