



# THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

March, 2005

## Corporate Concerns

By Robert Bernstein

UCSB history professor Nelson Lichtenstein started his part of the February 19th meeting on "Do Corporations Rule the World?" by answering, "Not Always." He noted that corporations rule in various ways. Today, we typically think in terms of political contributions. However, Lichtenstein explained that their biggest influence may be in the very way we think about society.



*N. Lichtenstein*

*R. Appelbaum*

*Photo: R. Bernstein*

His historical analysis focused on US Steel, General Motors and Wal-Mart. Each is very big, accounting for about 3% of the GNP at its peak.

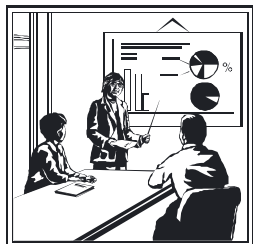
US Steel at its maximum power, fixed prices at a level called Pittsburgh Plus, namely, the price at Pittsburgh plus the price of transport.

Hence, the South and West had to pay premium prices, keeping them underdeveloped. As another example of its implicit power, the social order of US Steel replicated that of the United States of that time. White, Protestant males held all the power while women, blacks, Jews and other minorities were excluded from power. Finally, the twelve-hour day was in force at the time and justified as a "technological necessity" due to the necessity of keeping Bessemer furnaces function at top efficiency. Yet in 1924, US Steel was forced to switch to an 8-hour day long before it became the law as a result of union demands.

The year 1929 was a turning point. Corporate leaders bought stock as a show of good faith in "corporate America" at the start of the crash. But it was not enough and it showed their finite power. By the late 1930s the labor unions and the New Deal gained power, keeping wages and benefits high.

In the post-WWII era, General Motors at its peak provided half of all cars as well as refrigerators, locomotives and financial services. They could have easily bankrupted Ford and Chrysler but held back to avoid an anti-trust crackdown.

*(See **Corporations**, Page 7)*

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Board meetings are scheduled on the Monday preceding the Saturday general monthly meeting of the Society and are usually held at the home of one of the board members. HSSB members are welcome to attend these meetings. Contact any board member for more information.

**Membership Notes**  
by Mary Wilk

Humanist Society meetings are held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of each month at 3 pm in the Patio Room of Vista del Monte, 3775 Modoc Road, Santa Barbara, CA. More information is available at our web site:

[www.SantaBarbaraHumanists.org](http://www.SantaBarbaraHumanists.org)

or by contacting any of the board members listed in the left-hand column of this page.

If you would like a copy of this newsletter mailed to a friend or someone who might be interested in our Society, please send their contact information to PO Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130 or call Mary Wilk. Alternatively, all of our newsletters are available at the web address shown above.

If you are not already a member, we encourage you to join our Society. Annual membership dues are \$36 for a single person, \$60 for a couple, and \$100 (or more) for a sponsor. Members receive the monthly newsletter and have the option of attending meetings, outings and special events sponsored by the society.

Those unable to attend our monthly meetings may subscribe to our newsletter for an annual fee of \$20 but are not entitled to other membership privileges. When attending our meetings, a donation of \$2 from members and \$5 from non-members is appreciated. First or second-time visitors are welcome on a complimentary basis. For more information, please contact Mary Wilk or any member of our Society.

(See **Membership**, Page 3)

*Membership, continued from Page 2)*

We are pleased to welcome the following new members to our Society:

Sylvia Abualy  
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IN MEMORIAM

We regret to report that our member, Warren Orsburn died on February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2005. His career was as a CPA, but he was also an accomplished painter and sculptor, as well as a knowledgeable gardener. For many years Warren had been a generous sponsor of our Society. We wish to express our sympathy to his wife, Thomasine.

## Program Notes

### by Nancy Wahl

Our speaker for March is Glenn Branch, Deputy Director, National Center for Science Education, Inc. **Please note: this meeting will be held in SBCC's Fé Bland Forum.** Branch published this very brief introduction to the topic in the *San Jose Mercury News*.

“Charles Darwin once wrote, only partly in jest, that ‘it is like confessing a murder’ to admit to accepting evolution. So he would probably not have been surprised that even as we celebrated the 195th anniversary of his birth Thursday, his theory of evolution remains a matter of public – though not scientific – controversy.

“The latest dust-up was in Georgia, where a proposed set of state science standards avoided mentioning evolution altogether. But the reaction to the proposed omission of the e-word was overwhelmingly negative. Former President Jimmy Carter wrote, ‘As a Christian, a trained engineer and scientist, and a professor at Emory University, I am embarrassed by [the superintendent's] attempt to censor and distort the education of Georgia's students.’

“But Georgia is just one of several states, including Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Ohio and Texas, where the study of evolution has recently been challenged. California is not immune; in the Sacramento suburb of Roseville, a parent recently lobbied, unsuccessfully, for the addition of what he described as evidence against evolution to the high school science curriculum.

(See *Evolution*, page 7)

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## Chairman's Chat by Dick Cousineau

The very idea that this Society is nearly ten years old boggles my mind. Starting with six or seven folks in May of 1995 and growing to over 130 today is a tribute not only to the Founders' vision but to all who have worked and served to keep the flame of honest inquiry alive. In no small measure, the work of the program and publicity committees over the years have brought us some fine to excellent speakers to our meetings. Ah well, and then there were some real duds too; remember The Great Scambini? The Geochemical dating of fossils? And others?

But out of over 100 monthly programs I could count only a handful of less than adequate presentations. How many great parties have we had thanks to the Activities Committee? Numerous. And the infusion of new ideas and procedures by newer members has been so significant that our outreach to the local community has been notable and new members keep coming. We are now approaching 135 members with 60 to 70 percent regularly attending each monthly meeting. An informal poll of Humanist Societies showed that we are among the largest and most well-attended Humanist Societies in the Nation.

Our monthly newsletter, the Secular Circular has continued to improve yearly and its professional and informative nature is now being taken for granted. The Editor and helpers are doing an exemplary job. Even some of our columns are being quoted by other groups in various parts of the country. Our Web Page is excellent and our Webmaster has done outstanding work in updating and bringing our notices to the

World Wide Web. It is exciting to be part of this movement and especially this Society.

For all these reasons to celebrate and many more, I look forward to our Tenth Anniversary Event, to be held at The Holiday Inn, Goleta, and featuring nationally-known speakers and authors from within the Humanist Tradition. I urge you to attend and to bring a spouse, significant other, and/or friend. You will not be disappointed. Also please consider being a "Sponsor" of the event by donating additional funds beyond your ticket price to help defray the overall costs of hiring the Hotel, and for the costs of the speakers travel and lodging.

You will be receiving an invitation in the mail soon. Please return it with your ticket purchase reservation and, if possible, your "Sponsorship" donation.

All the best,  
Dick

### Advertisement

For sale: two-year-old, large, comfortable overstuffed chair with matching ottoman. \$125. Light brown. Very fine condition. Will deliver. Call Dick Cousineau at 687-2371

*(Ed. Note: This ad reminds me to remind you that the Secular Circular is happy to carry your advertisement for products or services for sale or that you are seeking. An ad of the above size costs only \$5. What a deal!)*

## Health Care For All - Again

by George Delury

Humanist members may recall that several months (a year?) ago (*Ed. Note: actually, it was April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2003*) we gave a nearly unanimous endorsement to California Senate Bill 921, a single-payer universal health care system for the state. That bill passed committee and floor votes in the Senate and was approved by the Assembly Health Committee. It was then withdrawn for strategic reasons, primarily to work out in detail the fairest way to fund the proposed health system.

Backers of the bill submitted it for closer study to the Lewin Group, a company specializing in the analysis of health care system costs. The results of that study were released on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2005, by Sen. Sheila Kuehl (D., Santa Monica), the author of SB 921. On February 23<sup>rd</sup> of this year Sen. Kuehl submitted a slightly revised bill, renamed the California Health Insurance Reliability Act. The new bill improves cost controls by strengthening the referral policy, adds a payment board to establish compensation for providers and upper level managers, and creates a capital management system that applies to all capital health care investment. The new bill will get a new number and go through the full committee process again. New endorsements, hopefully including ours, are required for this new bill.

The latest Lewin report on the legislation concludes that if the system were to go into effect in 2006 (not likely, but a benchmark), it would cut California health care expenditures by \$8 billion in the first year, a reduction of 4% of the projected \$184.2 billion cost under the current fragmented system. Over the next ten years, it would continue to cut increasing

amounts from the costs of the current system. How is that possible?

Largely by saving \$19.9 billion in the administrative costs currently incurred by insurers, hospitals and doctors, and \$5 billion by negotiating bulk purchases of prescription drugs and durable equipment. Of the total savings of \$30.6 billion, \$22 billion would go for a larger health insurance package, including dental and vision care, mental health services, adult day care, and other health care needs. Initially, nursing home care would not be covered except for Medi-Cal eligibles. Workers compensation medical costs would remain in private insurer hands. But both services might be added to the package later.

With the end of the fragmented and wasteful insurance system, the single-payer system would be financed by a Health Care Trust Fund supported by payroll taxes on employers and employees, the self-employed, unearned income, and a surcharge of 1% on incomes over \$200,000. The first \$7,000 of income would not be taxed. Most current government spending (federal, state and local) would be folded into the new system.

Employers would save some \$8 billion a year in health insurance costs, or about \$775 per employee. Families would save an average of \$340 each. The only people to pay more under this system would be employers not currently offering health care coverage (e.g., Wal-Mart) and those families with incomes in excess of \$150,000 annually.

Beyond the cost savings, a unified single-payer system would offer major benefits by enabling a comprehensive collection of data on medical conditions, effective treatments and hospital safety problems, creating a

database that could be used to improve medical care and expose patterns of fraud and abuse. Using a system of global budgeting, total costs can be held to a fixed portion of the state gross domestic product.

This is NOT, by any measure, socialized medicine. Hospitals and doctors' practices would remain privately owned and managed, with the added benefit that county medical groups would have a direct say in how the system is operated.

A great deal of further information can be found at [www.healthcareforall.org](http://www.healthcareforall.org).

## **Social Concerns Committee** by Ron Kronenberg

Some of our members would like to see our society involved in many political issues. That is how they want to express their Humanism. Of course we have core beliefs about civil rights and separation of church and state issues. Many other political issues allow a humanist to take different sides of an issues and all of them are still good Humanists. It divides our society to take stands on those issues.

One solution is to form a Social Concerns Committee. This committee can take stands or action on a variety of political issues in the name of their Social Concerns Committee of the Humanist Society of SB. So if they sign on as supporters of a cause it is in the name of the committee not the Society.

If you are interested in joining this committee please talk to Ron Kronenberg or Marion Shapiro. Humanism can be more than a one day a month commitment.

## **Activities** by Anne H. Rojas

We had two well attended restaurant events in February. The dinner after our Saturday meeting was at Ming Dynasty, featuring a Mongolian Barbeque. Lively conversations, good food and the price is right!

Our Last Sunday of the Month Brunch drew 13 to Crocodile in the Lemon Tree Motel. Again--very nice service, (no hassle over separate checks) and good food served in an attractive room. Easy parking and centrally located for most members.

My question to the membership is this: Why do we have so few attendees at these social events? Many of you have said you wanted the opportunity to "get to know other members." This is one ideal way! You would help me greatly by sending me your comments about why you don't attend and any suggestions you might care to offer. Is it about the restaurant selection? The time of day? The cost?

We are getting ready for Comedy Night in Ventura, on March 5<sup>th</sup>. Again, poorly attended. Your Social Committee has worked on a dinner at a beautiful harbor view restaurant and an evening of mirth with 4 comics. We have even arranged car pools. Only 6 persons have signed up.

Any input on social events you would care to see would be most appreciated.

*(Corporations, continued from page 1)*

In 1953, former GM president Charles E. Wilson was nominated to be Defense Secretary. Asked by the Senate of possible conflict of interest, he famously said, "I cannot conceive of one because for years I thought that what was good for our country was good for General Motors, and vice versa."

Today, Wal-Mart has created a new business model that does not involve making anything at all and treating employees as an expendable resource. For example, loyal US Steel employees had jobs for life while Wal-Mart has a 46% annual turnover rate. US Steel paid relatively high wages and benefits while half of Wal-Mart employees must get health coverage from Medicaid or other family members.

UCSB Sociology Professor Richard Appelbaum then carried the analysis of corporate power into today's world by first noting that the United States is currently the leading the world economy. He sees the candidates for future world domination as religions, nations or corporations. If the latter, he wondered "whose corporations?"

Intel's 1971 release of the microchip was the start of globalization. Appelbaum used shipping statistics to illustrate that labor markets are global. Today, Hong Kong, Singapore and LA are the biggest ports. Shenzhen, China has gone from a sleepy backwater to a major trade and manufacturing center in the previous decade.

The largest jeans maker is Taiwanese Nien Hsing. For caps it is Korean Yupoong. For shoes it is Taiwanese Pou Chen which has built the Huyen Binh Chanh mega-factory in

Vietnam. Yet do we know these names? Do we know the conditions in their factories or where the factories are?

The power of these corporations was dramatically illustrated by a chart of economies revealed that Wal-Mart is the 18th largest economy in the world, ahead of Switzerland at number 19. Wal-Mart makes nothing, but sets world prices and if makers cannot meet it, they lose. The name label companies don't make products, either. That is left to 3rd tier Asian companies.

Professor Appelbaum noted that one key technology to watch for the future of industry is nanotechnology and he noted that China is training 50,000 scientists now. He also noted some events that may presage a shifting of power away from corporations. For example, he noted that students are fighting corporate power with anti-sweatshop actions in the \$3 billion collegiate wear industry.

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*(Evolution, continued from page 3)*

"Part of the recent upsurge in anti-evolutionism is due to the continuing activity of traditional creationists.

"They hold that the Earth is no more than 10,000 years old. In contrast, mainstream scientists agree that the Earth is about 4.5 billion years old, basing their estimate on a variety of sources, including radioisotope dating of rocks.

"But the main reason for the surge of activity in the anti-evolution movement is that the traditional creationists have been joined by a new breed of creationists, rallying under the flag of 'intelligent design,' sometimes called

'stealth creationism' by its critics.

"Their central claim is that there are biological phenomena that are too complex to be explained by natural causes and therefore must be the products of an intelligent designer. The American Association for the Advancement of Science recently described intelligent design as scientifically unwarranted.

"Like traditional young-Earth creationism, intelligent design appeals to those who worry about the religious implications of evolution.

"For the moment, evolution receives reasonably good treatment in every secular

high school biology textbook on the market. Yet, in the last few years, anti-evolution legislation was introduced in 15 states. Debates involving evolution's place in science standards or textbooks have surfaced in a comparable number of states, and any number of local school districts have experienced their own episodes of the controversy.

"Such anti-evolutionist attempts to undermine evolution education have failed, by and large, thanks to the efforts of scientists, teachers, clergy, civil libertarians and parents concerned about the quality of science education. But with about 40 percent of Americans continuing to reject evolution for religious reasons, Darwin's legacy is anything but safe."