

California SEP candidate denounces anti-immigrant law

No US-Mexico border fence! Defend immigrants' rights! Unite North American workers!

**Statement by John Burton, Socialist Equality Party
candidate for US Congress, 29th District of
California
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I condemn the bill passed last week by the US Congress to build a 700-mile fence along the US-Mexico border. This act poses a grave threat not only to millions of immigrants, but also to the democratic rights of US residents and citizens.

The bill instructs the Department of Homeland Security to construct a fence covering parts of California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas and to implement an expansive surveillance system, including “unmanned aerial vehicles, ground-based sensors, satellites, radar coverage, and cameras.”

The legislation has two aims, both reactionary. It seeks to divert social tensions within the US over declining living standards by scape-goating immigrant workers, who are unjustly blamed for the consequences of policies put in place by the American ruling elite, and to provide another pretext for the militarization of every aspect of society.

Immigrants, whether documented or not, have not caused the decline in US wages and benefits, nor the deepening crisis in social services such as health and education. Undocumented workers create social wealth and pay millions in payroll and other taxes. The responsibility for the problems facing working people in the US lies squarely with the American corporate-financial elite and its two-party system, which spends hundreds of billions of dollars on wars of aggression while enacting massive tax cuts for the rich. Profits for major corporations are at record levels thanks to an orgy of wage- and job-cutting and the gutting of social programs.

To derail a movement against these policies, politicians in both the Republican and Democratic parties are whipping up the crudest forms of anti-immigrant chauvinism, pitting one section of workers against another. I call on workers of all nationalities to oppose such divisiveness and unite to end the plundering of social resources by the super-rich.

The immediate effects of this bill on immigrant workers will be devastating. The fence will drive thousands of impoverished immigrants to cross in more dangerous areas,

with the result that even more poor workers will perish attempting to enter the United States across the great deserts of the Southwest.

Construction of the physical border fence will be accompanied by a program headed by defense contractor Boeing to create a “virtual fence” which, according to an article in the *Washington Post* of September 21, “rests heavily on adapting military technology from the battlefield to the border.” Among the technologies proposed is a network of the same ground-based sensors that are currently used to track and kill fighters opposing US occupation forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.

There is an inseparable link between domestic and foreign policy. Militarism and war abroad lead to political repression at home. The same methods used in the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan—where opposition is crushed with brutal violence—are being prepared to confront an inevitable mass movement of social and political opposition to the American ruling elite.

The American people are being conditioned to accept military and state intrusion into every aspect of daily life. The battle to “safeguard the border” against a supposed invasion by hordes of Mexican immigrants is, like the so-called “war on terror,” a political fiction contrived to justify the most brutal and repressive measures. The very fact that politicians and media demagogues routinely link poor workers with the terrorists who destroyed the World Trade Center points to the deeply reactionary and anti-working class essence of the bogus war that is relentlessly promoted by the government, the media and both parties to justify an unprecedented attack on democratic rights.

The construction of a fence along the US-Mexico border will be a new step in the direction of a military-police dictatorship in the United States. The bill on the border fence goes hand-in-hand with a raft of other police-state measures.

Congress passed just a day earlier legislation to authorize the Bush administration’s torture program and subject anyone deemed an “alien unlawful enemy combatant” to kangaroo military commissions, stripping them of constitutional protections and the fundamental right to challenge their confinement and treatment in US courts. This follows the Bush administration’s defense of its

previously secret program of domestic spying, including eavesdropping on phone conversations and amassing data banks on millions of American citizens—all without the legal requirement for court warrants.

With the immigration bill, the Democratic Party has once again fallen into line behind the right-wing proposals of the Republicans. In the Senate, more than half of the Democrats voted in favor of the bill, which passed overwhelmingly by a vote of 80-19. In the House of Representatives, the vote was also lopsided: 283-138. Among the Democrats voting for the bill were the two “liberal” senators from California, Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer.

To the extent that there is opposition from some Democrats, it is based on concerns that repressive measures against immigrants, if not coupled with other provisions, will disrupt a ready supply of cheap labor. Before she voted for the bill, Feinstein pushed for it to include an amendment that would create a “guest worker” program for agribusiness, which depends heavily on immigrant labor.

Feinstein’s position reflects the hypocrisy of the American ruling elite. Big business welcomes undocumented workers because they are denied any semblance of rights to fight for decent wages and working conditions. This is why the Bush administration had first pushed for “comprehensive reform,” which would militarize the border in conjunction with a nationwide “guest worker” program. This program would make immigrant workers completely dependent upon their employers for their right to stay in the country.

Although my opponent, Democratic incumbent Representative Adam Schiff, voted against the bill, he issued no public statement critical of it. His weekly email instead brags about his co-sponsorship with the notorious xenophobe David Dreier, the Republican representative from the adjacent 26th Congressional District, of new legislation to criminalize the digging of border tunnels.

The mass demonstrations held earlier this year, especially in Los Angeles, expressed broad opposition to the proposed fence and other anti-immigrant measures. But the passage of the new bill underscores the futility of a political perspective based on the notion that mass pressure on the Democratic Party can persuade it to oppose the Bush administration and the Republicans, and defend democratic rights.

Neither big business party offers any solution. The only humane and progressive response to the flow of immigrants

into California—desperate for work to feed and clothe their families—is a socialist foreign policy, one geared to the cooperative development of the world’s resources in order to end poverty, raise living standards and achieve social equality. This is the direct opposite of the foreign policy of the American capitalist ruling elite and its two parties, which exploit, oppress and plunder the peoples of the world in order to maximize the profits of US-based transnational corporations.

Mass impoverishment in places such as Central and Latin America compels people to leave their homes. This poverty is itself the result of predatory policies pursued by US imperialism in its so-called “backyard” to the south, including US-sponsored military overthrows of elected governments—Chile, Argentina, Brazil—and support for fascist and military dictatorships and death squad regimes. By these and other means, the American government has assured its corporate elite access to raw materials, markets and cheap labor.

Raising wages and expanding social programs cannot be accomplished by walling out immigrants. There must be a massive redistribution of wealth through the elimination of the gargantuan military budget and the restructuring of the tax code to fund health and education, while providing quality jobs for all US residents. The giant corporations and banks should be turned into public utilities, controlled democratically to meet social needs, rather than for the drive for private profit and the further enrichment of a financial oligarchy.

The question of immigration goes to the heart of the SEP’s program: internationalism. We categorically reject all appeals to nationalism and chauvinism, the stock-in-trade of the AFL-CIO trade union bureaucracy.

I call for full political rights and social benefits for all workers, documented or undocumented, regardless of their national origin. I further uphold the right of all workers to live and work in whatever country they choose.

The working class is an international class. Workers in all countries and of all nationalities are exploited by the same transnational companies. The interests of working people can be defended only through a common struggle against the common enemy.

I call on workers in California to help fight for this program by writing in my name, John Burton, for US Congress in the 29th Congressional District. Join the Socialist Equality Party and the fight for international socialism!

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