

California campaign: socialist candidate John Christopher Burton hits Iraq war in television, radio interviews

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The gubernatorial campaign of socialist candidate John Christopher Burton is attracting mounting interest among workers, young people and professionals in California. Over the past several days Burton has participated in a live radio interview on KPCC, a National Public Radio affiliate in Pasadena, and taped a radio interview for Pacifica station KPFK in Los Angeles. He has also prepared a video to appear on public television station KCET.

Burton has made opposition to the US invasion and occupation of Iraq a focus of his campaign statements and appearances. He is calling for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US forces from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Burton's campaign has evoked considerable interest. His office has received numerous emails from people wanting more information or volunteering to support the campaign and make financial donations.

"I would like to thank all those who have expressed support for my campaign," Burton told the *World Socialist Web Site*. "Since I announced my intention to run for governor of California in the special recall election, I have been struck by the broad interest in socialist ideas my candidacy has evoked among a wide range of people. My campaign, endorsed by the Socialist Equality Party, is alone in advancing a comprehensive analysis of the roots of the California budget crisis and outlining a program to resolve this crisis in the interests of working people." (See: Vote "no" on the California recall. Vote John Christopher Burton for governor, for a socialist solution to the crisis.)

Burton is calling for a "no" vote on the recall of California Governor Gray Davis. The October 7 recall election is the product of a drive led by right-wing elements and largely funded by multi-millionaire Republican Congressman Darrell Issa. These forces have sought to exploit public anger over rising unemployment and cuts in social services to overturn the results of last November's gubernatorial election and impose an agenda even more reactionary than that of Davis and the Democrats. While opposing this anti-democratic maneuver, Burton is giving no political support to Davis, Lt. Governor Cruz Bustamante, who is running in the replacement election, or any other candidates associated with the Democratic Party. He is calling for a vote for his own candidacy as the socialist alternative to the politicians of both big business parties, should the recall election succeed in ousting Davis.

Speaking of the televised gubernatorial debate held September 3, from which he and all but six of the other candidates on the October 7 ballot were excluded, Burton told the WSWs: "None of the so-called 'major' replacement candidates in the recall election could address in a serious way the economic and social crisis facing working people in California. Governor Davis and those who hope to replace him could only speak in sound bites. None of them were able to make a serious analysis of the California budget crisis or connect what is happening in California to the broader issues of American society, the Bush administration or the war in Iraq, which is consuming billions of dollars each month."

On September 4, Burton gave a live interview on KPCC at Pasadena City College for the *Talk of the City* radio program. (Click <http://www.scpr.org/features/2003/09/recall/> for an audio file of the interview.)

Asked how he planned to implement his proposal to transform the banks and corporations into public utilities under the democratic control of the working class, Burton replied, "The incredible wealth and productivity in California must be used to meet human needs. Until people realize that market economics and the capitalist system are not meeting human needs and start to consider how society can be reorganized, their lives will continue to stagnate and social programs, such as education at this community college, will become more and more inaccessible. My proposal to take the major corporation and banks and convert them into public utilities is a way to concretize how this could be done. I would protect the rights of the small shareholders, the workers, and those with 401 k plans, but I would try to recover the hundreds of millions of dollars that have been looted out of these corporations by CEOs and other corporate criminals in America. I think the big myth in this recall election is that there is no money to meet human needs. There is plenty of money. The resources have to be reallocated."

Burton was then asked what would he would do if corporations attempted to flee California after he was elected. Burton replied, "I think there are two answers to that. First, the workers of California, mobilized behind this program, wouldn't let them leave, and the assets would remain, whether the CEOs left or not. Second, this is not just a California problem. It is a national and international problem. Part of my campaign is to reach out to the people in the 37 other states that are facing deficits, people

throughout the United States who are facing record deficits created by the irresponsibility of the Bush administration, and, indeed, to people throughout the world.

“What we have now are corporations that are transnational in their structure, using their ability to shift production throughout the world to pit one set of workers against the other. First, it was manufacturing jobs that moved to South Asia. Now, technical jobs are moving to places like India. The solution is not to lower the standard of living in California to the level of those countries, but to raise the standard of living in those countries to what we should have here in California.”

In closing, the interviewer expressed appreciation for Burton’s remarks, exclaiming, “Well, it’s certainly conversation we didn’t hear last night at the debate.”

The next day, September 5, Burton went to KPFK in Los Angeles, operated by Pacifica Radio Foundation, to do a taping for the *Uprising* program moderated by Sonali Kolhatkar. The program airs weekdays between 8 and 9 a.m. Burton’s interview is scheduled to be broadcast September 9 or September 10. (The station can be accessed at 90.7 FM Los Angeles and 98.7 FM Santa Barbara, or online at <http://www.kpfk.org>)

Kolhatkar asked detailed questions about Burton’s views and those of the Socialist Equality Party. The socialist candidate began by explaining that he was running to present a socialist alternative and open a debate over the crisis in California and how it could be resolved in the interests of the working class.

He continued, “I am not opposed in general to recall elections. In the past, recalls have been seen as an important tool of democracy. I am against this recall because it is part of a right-wing Republican attempt, like the Clinton impeachment and the halting of the 2000 Florida recount, to overturn the results of an election.”

The program host then asked Burton how his platform differed from that of other “progressive” candidates, such as independent Arriana Huffington and Peter Camejo of the Green Party. Burton replied, “Unlike all the other candidates, I do not accept the inviolability of the present social order.” He explained that there were more than enough resources to satisfy all basic human needs. He then outlined his “Bill of Social Rights” for the working class, including guaranteed employment, a \$15-an-hour minimum wage, high quality education for all, and universal health care.

Also on September 5, Burton made a three-minute videotaped statement that will be aired later this month on public television stations in California. In it, Burton outlined the basic planks of his program.

On the Iraq war, he said, “No one can solve California’s crisis while the federal government spends \$500 billion a year on the military budget, plus \$75 billion more on the occupation of Iraq. Our young people should not be sent to Iraq and Afghanistan to defend the interests of Big Oil. I call for the immediate withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and Iraq.

“Wars overseas lead to repression at home. I have spent the last 25 years fighting to defend and expand democratic rights. I oppose the death penalty and the three-strikes law. I advocate the repeal of the Patriot Act and the dismantling of the Homeland Security Department. I demand that the Bush Administration cease its abhorrent practice of incarcerating citizens and non-citizens alike

without charges, lawyers, or access to courts.”

Burton continued: “California is a concentrated expression of the failure of the capitalist profit system, which subordinates all social questions to the accumulation of personal wealth. This is the root problem—not a lack of wealth. As a socialist, I would resolve California’s crisis in the interest of working families, small business owners, students and professionals. The satisfaction of human needs, not amassing corporate profit, would be the basis of California’s economy.”

People from across California and the United States have contacted Burton’s campaign to express support or to ask for more information. Among those emailing the Burton campaign (johnburton@socialequality.com) was a professor who wrote, “I appreciated your reply to Jay Leno and your demand for an investigation into the blackout. Good luck in the election. I wish we had more candidates who were not hell bent on gutting social services.”

Another email read, “After reading your candidate’s statement for the California Recall Election of 2003, I found we have similar political interests. I want to take this moment to wish you well and best of luck with your campaign. Finally, I wanted to let you know that you can count on my vote.”

The campaign has also evoked interest from an international audience. A man from Kiel, Germany extended best wishes to Burton and raised concern over the “illegal election” of George Bush and “offenses against civil rights” and “illegal acts against foreign guests.”

A Sri Lankan said, “Wish you every success at your humane endeavor to humanize US society, upon which the destiny of humans on our planet rests.”

Full coverage of Burton’s campaign and details of upcoming events can be accessed on his web page: <http://www.socialequality.com/>.



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