

Socialist candidate John Christopher Burton replies to Bush speech on Iraq: “Stop the slaughter in Iraq and the looting of America! US troops out now!”

10 September 2003

The following statement was issued September 8 by John Christopher Burton, a civil rights lawyer in Los Angeles who is running as an independent candidate for governor in the California recall election. Burton, a supporter of the Socialist Equality Party, has been endorsed by the SEP.

In response to Sunday’s speech by President Bush, I redouble my call for working people to utilize the California recall election to deliver a blow to the Bush administration and its policies of war, repression and social reaction. If there was any doubt that solving the crisis in California required a struggle against the war in Iraq and the right-wing consensus of Republicans and Democrats that produced it, Bush’s demand that another \$87 billion be squandered on the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq should remove it.

This sum is more than the federal government will spend on education this year, and double what it will spend on roads and public transit. It comes on top of \$79 billion for the Iraq war approved by Congress just last April. This vast outlay—for the purpose of repressing [“liberating”] the Iraqi people, stealing [“developing”] their oil resources and awarding multimillion-dollar contracts to fat cat associates of Bush and Cheney [“Iraqi reconstruction”]—will plunge the federal government further along the road to fiscal insolvency, bringing the budget deficit to more than half a trillion dollars.

Nothing could more emphatically demonstrate that the budget deficits in California and dozens of other US states are expressions of a broader crisis that is both national and international in scope.

Can there be any doubt who will pay for the criminal

enterprise in Iraq? One thing emerged clearly from Bush’s catalog of lies Sunday night: the sacrifice of resources and lives—Iraqi and American—is to be open-ended. The American people, including the people of California, will foot the bill for the imperialist designs of the ruling elite through the further decay of their schools, health care, housing and basic services—from water and sewage to electricity and roads.

The aggression abroad and looting of the economy at home must be halted! I have placed at the center of my campaign in the gubernatorial recall election the demand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Afghanistan, Iraq and the entire Middle East.

Neither Governor Gray Davis nor any of the so-called major candidates running to replace him—including Green Party candidate Peter Camejo and independent Arianna Huffington—have addressed the question of the ongoing slaughter in Iraq. In the course of the two-hour-long televised candidates’ forum, held September 3, the issue of the Iraq war was never raised. This is in line with the attempt of the Republicans and Democrats, as well as their liberal critics, to promote the illusion that the crisis in California is essentially a local question. In fact, the crisis in California is a concentrated expression of the crisis of American and world capitalism.

The eruption of militarism is itself one of the most noxious expressions of the fundamental incompatibility between the needs of society and an economic system geared to the accumulation of personal wealth and corporate profit. This is the basic reality that the media and political establishment seeks to conceal.

The Democratic Party is utterly complicit in the invasion and colonial occupation of Iraq. Whatever criticisms various Democrats make of Bush's tactics, the Democratic Party will supply Bush with the votes he needs to pass his new war appropriation bill, just as it gave him authorization to go to war and voted for the initial \$79 billion in war spending.

This will be justified with a revival of Vietnam-era phrases about "exit strategies" and the impermissibility of "cutting and running." In a September 8 editorial on Bush's speech, the *Los Angeles Times* provided the basic script for all such defenders of American imperialism who are alarmed over the Iraqi quagmire.

"The president said he was determined that the US would not run," the newspaper wrote, "and indeed this nation has the moral obligation to finish what it started and hand back Iraq to the Iraqis. Then, perhaps, the dream of taxpayer dollars building new schools, roads and medical clinics can be one that can be afforded not just in Iraq, but in the United States."

Working people should reject such hypocritical mouthings with contempt. The only "moral obligation" the US has is to stop raping Iraq and leave the country. Who asked the US military to come in the first place? Not the Iraqis, hundreds of thousands of whom have demonstrated in the streets to demand that the US get out. Not the American soldiers, who increasingly feel they have been duped and exploited and want nothing more than to come home. Not the broad masses of the American people, who, far from being consulted, were bombarded with an endless stream of lies to justify an illegal war. They do not consider decent schools, roads and medical clinics some distant "dream." They consider these things to be the rudiments of civilized life to which they are entitled.

To secure these needs, defend its democratic rights and put a halt to war, the working class will have to break from the parties of big business and build its own party—the Socialist Equality Party—to fight for political power and a revolutionary restructuring of the economy.



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