

California recall: socialist candidate campaigns on college campuses

Our reporting team
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John Christopher Burton, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for governor in the California recall election, addressed students at several community college campuses during the past week as part of a continuing campaign by the candidate and his supporters in both Northern and Southern California.

On September 23, Burton spoke to two well-attended history classes at Irvine Valley College in an Orange County suburb of Los Angeles. The socialist candidate introduced himself and spoke briefly to each class, followed by extensive discussion and questions lasting until the end of the hour-long classes.

Burton explained that he was a civil rights attorney specializing in cases seeking redress for incidents of police brutality. He had joined the socialist movement 20 years ago in order to fight against the system which was fundamentally responsible for the examples of injustice with which he dealt on a daily basis.

The candidate stressed his opposition to the recall as a reactionary attempt to overturn the results of an election held less than a year ago. This anti-democratic initiative has been organized with the support of big business to implement a right-wing social agenda even more onerous than that of Democratic governor Gray Davis, an agenda for which there is little popular support.

At the same time, Burton explained that he was giving no support to Davis or any other section of the Democratic Party, which was complicit in the attacks on jobs and living standards, and which was incapable of seriously opposing the Republican right. "Davis should be removed, but how?" asked Burton. "By far right-wing Republican millionaires who paid to get signatures and are seeking even deeper attacks on the working class, or by a popular, politically educated movement of working people?"

He explained that he was running to provide a socialist alternative in the event the recall was successful, and to take forward the fight for the political independence of the working class. "I and the Socialist Equality Party are stressing that the crisis in California is not simply a local question, but rather an expression of a national and international crisis. The root issue is," he continued, "the failure of the capitalist system, which subordinates all human needs to the accumulation of personal wealth and corporate profit."

Burton explained that he was placing opposition to the war against Iraq at the center of his campaign. He pointed to the cost of the war not only in the lives of American soldiers and the many thousands of Iraqi victims, but also in terms of its impact on federal, state and local spending for basic needs like education and health care. "I am calling for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, Iraq, and the entire Middle East," he told the students.

Briefly outlining his program, he called for a \$15 an hour minimum wage, a 30-hour workweek at 40 hours pay, free tuition for higher education and free quality medical care for all.

Following the presentations, there were numerous questions and comments from students. One student suggested that the more than one million signatures on the recall petitions indicated the popular nature of the recall campaign. Burton explained the role of paid petition gatherers in exploiting the justified anger of voters over the crisis and the Democratic governor's record in order to pave the way for even more reactionary attacks.

A student who came originally from the Czech Republic claimed that the experience in that country had shown that socialism did not work. Burton

explained that the Stalinist regimes that previously existed in Eastern Europe and the former USSR did not represent the working class, but rather the rule of privileged bureaucracies that had smeared the cause of genuine socialism.

After the classes, a number of students came up to the candidate to express their interest and agreement with his analysis, and to ask for further information on the SEP's public meeting scheduled for Sunday, October 5.

Later that week, on September 26, Burton returned to Santa Monica College, where he had spoken previously. This time he addressed a political science class, and his remarks were followed by a spirited exchange with students on the issues of socialism, taxation, the influence of giant corporations and the nature of democracy.

In Northern California, Burton spoke at a candidates' forum in Oakland sponsored by the Peace and Freedom Party. Present at the forum, in addition to Burton were C.T. Weber, the Peace and Freedom gubernatorial candidate, and a representative of Green Party candidate Peter Camejo. Later in the week, a representative of Burton's campaign spoke at a candidates' debate at Saratoga High School outside of San Jose.

On September 29, Burton spoke to a class of political science students at Claremont McKenna College in a Los Angeles suburb. A lively question and answer session followed the candidate's opening remarks.

The next day, the candidate spoke at a candidates' forum sponsored by the California Humanist Society at California State University at Los Angeles. At the same time, representatives of the campaign held an hour-long discussion with advanced civics students at Morningside High School in nearby Inglewood.



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