

Los Angeles Times publishes letter from John Christopher Burton, SEP candidate in California recall election

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On October 17 the *Los Angeles Times* published a letter from John Christopher Burton under the headline “Socialist Candidate Drew Votes on Merits.” Burton, who was the Socialist Equality Party’s gubernatorial candidate in the California recall election, wrote to the newspaper criticizing an article that analyzed the voter returns of the so-called “non-major” candidates.

The article, by James Rainey and Allison Hoffman, made particular note of John Christopher Burton’s campaign, attempting to downplay the significance of the votes he received on the grounds that his first and last names are the same as those of a well-known Democratic politician in California.

According to the most recent vote results released by state officials, the SEP-endorsed candidate received 6,345 votes, placing him 14th in a field of 135 replacement candidates on the ballot.

Burton wrote to the *Los Angeles Times* on October 9, the same day that Rainey and Hoffman’s piece was published. Below we present the text of Burton’s letter, as it appeared in the *Times*.

“After reporting on Oct. 9 that radio commentator Van Vo finished 15th statewide among the 135 replacement candidates because of a following among the Orange County Vietnamese community, your story ‘For 130, It’s Not Whether You Win or Lose’ commented that ‘John Burton and Edward Kennedy ... managed to finish in the top 25. But there was no way of determining how many of their supporters, if any, might have confused them with their famous namesakes.’

“In the final results, I finished 14th overall—just behind Vo, who finished 13th—because of support for the socialist policies on which I campaigned. Had I

benefited from name confusion, I would certainly have received an inordinate number of votes in San Francisco, where state Sen. John L. Burton and his late brother, Phillip, have been Democratic Party icons for decades. I finished 13th in San Francisco; however, in Los Angeles County, where my campaign was concentrated, I finished 11th. Moreover, I ran as ‘John Christopher Burton’ especially to avoid confusion, and my party listing was ‘independent.’

“In contrast, Edward Thomas Kennedy, who has a far more famous namesake and identifies himself as a Democrat, received less than one-half my vote total. Were our totals caused by name confusion, he would have had a total greater or one at least similar to mine.

“I was endorsed by the Socialist Equality Party. My vote total reflects support for opposition to the policies of militarism, austerity and repression that dominate the programs of both major parties.”

The *Times* editors excised in their published version references made by Burton in his original letter to the extensive campaigning that he and the SEP undertook throughout the election. Over the course of the two-month race, Burton and his representatives spoke on television and radio and at universities and high schools in both southern and northern California.

The *Times* editors also deleted the final sentence in the letter submitted by Burton, which read: “The *Times* did not cover my campaign before the election. It should not unfairly denigrate my vote total afterwards.”

Throughout the recall election, the *Los Angeles Times* and the rest of the major print and broadcast media in the state largely ignored Burton’s campaign. Instead, they focused their attention on the so-called “major candidates” and those minor candidates who had a

certain celebrity persona—child TV star Gary Coleman, pornography publishing mogul Larry Flynt, and adult actress Mary “Carey” Cook.

However, Burton’s campaign was followed by tens of thousand of readers, both nationally and internationally, through the coverage provided by the *World Socialist Web Site*. The decision of the *Times* to publish Burton’s letter is itself a reflection of the important political impact of his campaign.

Burton’s was the only campaign to publish a comprehensive analysis of California’s crisis and outline a detailed political program. Burton out-pollled by far the other two candidates identifying themselves as socialist—Joel Britton of the Socialist Workers Party and C.T. Weber of the Peace and Freedom Party. He gained more votes than a large number of “minor” candidates who ran as Democrats or Republicans.



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