

Socialist Equality candidate's statement on recall of California governor: "Democratic debacle vindicates fight to build SEP as the socialist alternative"

John Christopher Burton
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The following statement was issued Tuesday evening, October 7, by John Christopher Burton, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for governor in California's special recall election. Burton, a civil rights lawyer in Los Angeles, ran as a replacement candidate in Tuesday's election. While calling for a "no" vote on the recall of Governor Gray Davis, Burton gave no political support to Davis or any of the candidates associated with the Democratic and Republican parties who ran in the replacement contest. He advanced a socialist program in opposition to the policies of both parties of the American corporate establishment.

The substantial majority vote to recall Democratic Governor Gray Davis is more than anything else a vote of no confidence in the Democratic Party. Arnold Schwarzenegger and his right-wing Republican and corporate backers triumphed not because the people of California support their reactionary social agenda—which was kept hidden from the electorate throughout the campaign—but because the broad mass of working people has become thoroughly alienated from the Democrats.

And rightly so! The Davis administration was entirely a creature of big business. During the boom years of the dot.com stock market bubble it presided over an orgy of self-enrichment on the part of the CEOs and big investors, while the conditions of workers stagnated and next to nothing was done to address chronic problems of poverty, decaying schools, homelessness, and lack of health care. The concentration of wealth in the hands of a financial oligarchy became more pronounced, and the chasm between the rich and the

vast majority of people widened.

More and more resources were channeled into prisons and the police, as Davis continued the policy of his Republican predecessors of building up the repressive apparatus of the state.

When the dot.com bubble collapsed and the state budget fell into a deficit, Davis and the Democrats launched a series of massive cuts in education and health care, combined with sharp increases in user fees, such as for auto registration, which fall most heavily on working people. Similarly, when energy giants like Enron manipulated the electricity market to create shortages and jack up prices, the Davis administration placed the burden for their crimes on the general population, raising rates and spending billions to purchase power at exorbitant prices.

The resulting popular anger and discontent were seized on by right-wing Republicans, backed by the corporate elite, who financed the recall as a means of circumventing normal democratic procedures and installing an even more reactionary administration. They ultimately chose the multi-millionaire action film star and real estate speculator Arnold Schwarzenegger as their front man.

As today's election results demonstrated, the Democrats were unable to offer any serious alternative to the working people of California. The campaigns of both Davis and the main Democratic replacement candidate, Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante, were as hollow as they were cynical. No less beholden to big business than Schwarzenegger and the Republicans, they could propose nothing to deal with an acute and

deepening social crisis—with over six million Californians lacking health insurance, housing costs soaring beyond the means of millions of working class families, and decent-paying jobs disappearing every day.

Nor would they expose the deeply reactionary and anti-democratic conspiracy underlying the recall drive, no more than the Democrats seriously opposed the impeachment coup against Clinton and the theft of the 2000 presidential election.

Throughout the recall campaign, the Democrats maintained a cowardly silence on the right-wing cabal under George W. Bush and refused to link the fight against the recall to the fight against the administration in Washington. Above all, they said nothing about the catastrophic imperialist war in Iraq, which is daily costing the lives of American troops and Iraqi civilians and wasting tens of billions of dollars every month—a financial drain that will mean further attacks on medical care, pensions and jobs and a further decline in the basic infrastructure of the country.

Instead, as a pathetic diversion from these critical issues, the Democrats tried to capitalize in the final days of the campaign on the exposure of Schwarzenegger's sexual predations. In the end, they only succeeded in highlighting their own political bankruptcy.

Initial exit polls and voting data indicate the depth of alienation from the Democratic Party. While voter turnout overall was higher than in the 2002 gubernatorial election—although far short of the record rates that had been predicted—it was less intense in working class areas that traditionally vote Democratic than in Republican precincts. And despite the campaign by the trade union bureaucracy for Davis and the Democrats, involving an expenditure of some \$5 million, about half of union members voted in favor of the recall and some 40 percent of voters in union households voted for Schwarzenegger to replace the sitting governor.

The Democrats fared no less disastrously among Hispanic voters, with half supporting Davis' ouster.

This latest debacle for the Democratic Party—following its collapse in the 2002 congressional election, when it lost control of the US Senate and failed to gain seats in the House of Representatives—must serve as the impetus for workers

and young people in California and across the country to recognize the futility of looking toward this political instrument of the ruling elite as a means of defending their social interests and democratic rights.

As I have sought to explain throughout my campaign, the Democratic Party is a party of the ruling elite in America. Whatever its differences with the Republicans, in the end it defends the same oligarchy, which is why it votes for imperialist war abroad and austerity and political repression at home.

The Democratic debacle in California vindicates the call of my campaign and the Socialist Equality Party for a break with the two parties of American capitalism and the building of the SEP as a mass socialist party of the working class. This is the road forward for the struggles that will erupt in the coming weeks and months, as millions of workers learn through bitter experience that the attacks on jobs and living standards will only intensify under Schwarzenegger.

I call on all working people to study the election statement issued by the SEP and make the decision to join and build this party.



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