

SEP election meetings in California

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18 May 2004

On May 15 and 16, the Socialist Equality Party held the first two of four public meetings on the West Coast about the war in Iraq and the party's campaign in the 2004 presidential election as well as in various congressional and state-wide races.

The SEP is running Bill Van Auken, a full-time writer for the WSWS, for president; Jim Lawrence, a retired auto worker from Dayton, Ohio, is the party's vice presidential candidate.

On Saturday, May 15, WSWS Arts Editor David Walsh and John Christopher Burton, the SEP's candidate in 29th Congressional District of Southern California, were warmly received at a meeting held at the University of California at Los Angeles.

The meeting was attended by UCLA students, a truck driver, an engineer, retirees, teachers and workers in the food processing, computer and entertainment industries. The meeting raised \$276 to support the campaign; and \$113 in literature was sold.

The first to speak at the UCLA meeting was Burton, a civil rights attorney and the SEP's candidate in the California recall gubernatorial race last year, where he placed 14th in a field of well over 100 candidates. Burton will run against incumbent Democrat Adam Schiff in an area that includes the large cities of Pasadena, Burbank and Glendale.

Between June 7 and August 6, SEP supporters will be collecting voter signatures throughout the 29th District to place Burton on the ballot. Almost 9,000 valid signatures are required according to California's discriminatory voting requirements.

Burton opened his remarks emphasizing that hundreds of millions of people in the US and internationally were opposed to the eruption of US militarism and its criminal war in Iraq. He drew the link between control over society's resources by a small wealthy elite and this rapacious policy. He said that working people should base their political strategy on

this fundamental assessment, which would require the vast majority to reorganize society in the interests of all.

He exposed the role of the Democrats in supporting the Bush administration's war in Iraq and in attacking social programs and democratic rights. He pointed to Congressman Schiff's record, beginning with his votes for Bush's resolution calling for the use of force in Iraq and the Patriot Act, as a prime example of how the Democratic Party has fundamentally aligned itself with the Bush administration.

At a recent public appearance by Schiff at Pasadena Community College, hundreds of students loudly denounced the congressman for his role in the war drive and budget cuts. The sentiments of these young people, said Burton, are those of the vast majority in this country, yet they can find no outlet in the two-party system.

"There is no shortcut," said Burton. "The only answer to imperialist war and the attacks on the working class is the program of the Socialist Equality Party. In this election campaign, we aim to raise the political consciousness of masses of people. There is an objective historical need to break with the two parties of war and imperialism. The working class must build its own independent political party armed with socialist policies."

On Sunday, May 16, David Walsh addressed a meeting in Sacramento, California's capital, at the McGeorge School of Law, with people traveling from Stockton, the Bay Area, Chico and Pacifica to attend. Some students and immigrant workers from Central America came after reading about the meetings on the *World Socialist Web Site*; \$150 was raised and \$50 in literature sold.

At the outset of his remarks, Walsh highlighted the increasingly disastrous character of the war against Iraq. He compared the current war to earlier colonial

occupations in Algeria and Vietnam, and to apartheid rule in South Africa, as well as to the Nazi conquest of Europe.

After reading out portions of the International Committee of the Red Cross report on prisoner abuse, Walsh said, “Systemic torture, repression, violence meted out against a defenseless population, more than that, the photographic evidence of a type of porno-sadism...all of this reveals the true visage of contemporary American imperialism. The mask has come off and the hideous face grins out at us from these images.”

Walsh placed this trend to barbarism in its historical and social context: “The present eruption of US imperialism in Iraq has brought to the surface the profound decay of American society, the putrefaction working its way through over decades, accelerated by the collapse of the Soviet Union. We have traced out this process, the ascendancy of a criminal element in corporate and public life—the attempted coup d’état against Clinton, the hijacking of the election, the stand-down that made September 11 possible and the cover-up that’s followed, the passage of the Patriot Act, and the rounding up of Middle Eastern immigrants. We are confronted by a government of conspiracy and criminality, unprecedented in US history.”

Citing the remarks made in hearings in Washington by Republican Senator James Inhofe of Oklahoma, who inveighed against liberal Democratic politicians, such as Ted Kennedy, and human rights organizations for expressing concern about Iraq prison abuse, Walsh said, “Two different worlds are represented here. The political establishment is full of the Inhofe type, human trash. Two different Americas have emerged that will not be able, in the long run, to inhabit the same country.”

He compared the level of class tensions in the current situation to those that arose just before the outbreak of American Civil War. “A moral polarization has taken place in America. Behind this moral polarization is a deep social polarization. The level of social decay and crisis is very far advanced in America.... Make no mistake about it. The crimes in Iraq are made in America; they begin in America.” The wealthy will not give back their ill-gotten gains; they will continue to plunder the world, using the US military to accomplish their ends.

Walsh directly took on the “anybody but Bush” argument of those such as Noam Chomsky, Michael Moore and *The Nation* magazine. “In the face of this volcanic eruption of sadism and cruelty in Iraq, to argue that the direction of this society, whose entire political and ideological superstructure is up to its ears in lies, colonialist-style invasion and occupation, war crimes, could be changed by the election of a Kerry, a pro-war Democrat, is reactionary nonsense, wishful thinking or conscious deceit.”

In both meetings, lively discussion followed the speakers’ remarks. In Saturday’s meeting, questions were raised about how a socialist society would be organized, the relationship between conditions in American prisons and those in Iraq, and the cultural and spiritual aspects of the coming revolution.

At Sunday’s meeting, there were questions about the divisions within the ruling class and why they existed, why the Democratic Party did not respond to popular sentiment and take an anti-war stance, and about China’s role in the world economy.

A worker from Guatemala asked how the SEP was planning to reach the Spanish-speaking population in California. He congratulated the party’s efforts, wanting to know if this movement was unique in American history. He suggested that the vacuum of leadership was a worldwide phenomenon, that no one trusted the old parties anywhere. There was interest at both meetings in membership in the Socialist Equality Party.



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