

SEP candidate in California denounces politically motivated IRS investigation

## Government probe of Pasadena church: a witch-hunt against Iraq war critics

By John Burton, Socialist Equality Party candidate for Congress from California's 29th District  
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*The following is a statement issued by John Burton, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for US Congress from California's 29th Congressional District, which includes the Los Angeles suburb of Pasadena. The US Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is threatening to revoke the tax-exempt status of Pasadena's All Saints Church on the grounds that an antiwar sermon given in November 2004 violated the requirement that charitable organizations not endorse particular candidates. The church is challenging in court the IRS's demand that it turn over documents to investigators.*

*The following statement is available as a PDF to download and distribute.*

The Internal Revenue Service's probe to strip Pasadena's All Saints Church of tax-exempt status is an act of political censorship aimed at intimidating and suppressing opposition to the war in Iraq and the policies of the Bush administration.

I call for an immediate end to the investigation. There is no legitimate basis for the government's demand that the church turn over documents to IRS investigators.

The IRS action is a transparently political and anti-democratic attack, coming as it does from an administration that has done more to eliminate the separation of church and state than any government in US history. Right-wing Christian fundamentalists exercise an effective veto power over government policy on such issues as stem cell research, abortion and gay rights. Bush repeatedly invokes God as a justification for his policies, including the war in Iraq. The administration funnels millions of dollars to right-

wing religious organizations in the name of Bush's program of "faith-based" initiatives.

Networks headed by professional Christian fundamentalist demagogues such as James Dobson, Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson use their tax-exempt ministries to campaign relentlessly for right-wing politicians of the Republican Party. They are given platforms to spew their backward views by the American media and regularly meet in private with top officials of the Bush administration.

They, however, are given carte blanche by the IRS, while a Pasadena church that voices criticisms of the war and the Bush administration's policies is singled out for supposedly violating proscriptions on political campaigning. It is patently obvious that the All Saints Church is being investigated because of its pacifist and liberal positions.

The sermon seized on as a pretext for the investigation was critical of the war in Iraq and spoke out against the growth of social inequality in the United States. The government's response is to make this church an object lesson for all tax-exempt organizations and for the broader public. The message is clear: Speak out against the war and the government-sponsored plunder of society in the interests of the super-rich, and you will pay for it!

The IRS probe is part of a broader pattern of spying and intimidation. In California, there have been several documented cases of police infiltration and monitoring of antiwar groups. Most recently, it was revealed that a private corporation contracted by the California Department of Homeland Security has kept tabs on

rallies against the war in Iraq. On a national level, the Bush administration has initiated programs to wiretap phone conversations without a warrant and collect massive databases of phone records of all Americans.

Such police state measures expose the real content of the so-called “war on terror.” This phony war is the pretext for the corporate oligarchy’s policy of military aggression and conquest abroad and gutting of democratic rights at home.

On September 18, the Democratic Party incumbent in the 29th District, Congressman Adam Schiff, issued a tepid statement, along with conservative Republican Walter Jones of North Carolina, “questioning” the investigation and asking the IRS to “clarify its rules on political intervention so that tax-exempt organizations know what is and is not allowed.”

While Schiff felt obliged to issue some statement on the investigation, he was careful to do so in collaboration with a Republican right-winger who backs the Bush administration’s attacks on the separation of church and state. This was done to obscure the fundamental democratic issues at stake in the IRS investigation.

Schiff’s response is typical of the spinelessness of the Democratic Party, which has been thoroughly complicit in supporting the war in Iraq and the attack on democratic rights. Schiff himself voted for the invasion of Iraq and he continues to support the occupation. He also voted for the Patriot Act, the first piece of legislation that used fear-mongering about the “war on terror” as an excuse for implementing far-reaching measures curtailing basic democratic rights.

As the candidate of the Socialist Equality Party for the House of Representatives from the 29th District of California, I oppose all of the anti-democratic measures that have been instituted since 9/11—an event that has never been seriously investigated and about which a host of unanswered questions remain, including substantial evidence that the US government itself allowed the attacks to take place. That tragedy was seized on to implement far-reaching plans for military aggression and attacks on democratic rights that had long been sought by the most reactionary sections of the American ruling elite.

I call for the dismantling of the Homeland Security Department, the revocation of the Patriot Act, an end to government spying on the American people, an end to

torture and illegal detentions, and the closing of Guantánamo and all of the other prison camps set up by the US government around the world.

The fight to defend democratic rights requires a break with the corporate-controlled two-party system and the building of an independent socialist party of the working class. I am running in the election to advance the struggle for the building of this party.

Because of the anti-democratic ballot access laws imposed by the Democrats and Republicans, I have been forced to run a write-in campaign, despite collecting nearly 12,000 signatures from area residents who wanted my name on the ballot. I call on all residents of California’s 29th District to write in my name for US Congress on November 7. Join my campaign and help build the Socialist Equality Party!



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