

SEP candidate in California speaks at public forums

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The Socialist Equality Party's candidate for the US House of Representatives from California's 29th District, John Burton, addressed meetings during the past week in Pasadena and Altadena, speaking on the Iraq war and the policies and program of the Socialist Equality Party.

On October 13, Burton participated with other congressional candidates at the Pasadena Senior Citizens Center. The audience of around 50 people heard contributions from the Libertarian Party, the Peace and Freedom Party and the Republican Party, in addition to Burton.

Notably absent was the Democratic incumbent in the 29th District, Adam Schiff, whose offices are across the street. Schiff sent a letter suggesting that he did not consider the forum important enough to attend, as he had participated in one the previous June.

Also not in attendance was the Green Party candidate, former Pasadena mayor Bill Papparian.

Burton began by explaining the anti-democratic nature of the election process and the reason he has been forced to run as a write-in-candidate. He showed the audience a large stack consisting of the 12,000 signatures obtained to get him on the ballot. This, he said, was an indication of widespread support for a socialist candidate, however it was not enough to entitle him to ballot status.

Burton said, "These restrictive ballot-access laws were put in place in order to prevent third party and independent candidates from getting a hearing, and to maintain the domination of the two parties of big business, the Republicans and Democrats."

Burton focused his comments on the recently published study in the British medical journal *Lancet*, which estimated that the US invasion and occupation had led to the deaths of 655,000 Iraqi citizens. To illustrate the scale of the killing, Burton noted that the number "represents two and a half percent of the Iraqi population. This is equivalent to the entire population of the 29th Congressional District—every man, woman and child—wiped out."

"This crime of enormous proportions is the direct

responsibility of the Democratic and Republican Parties, including the incumbent, Adam Schiff, who voted for the war," Burton said. He explained that this study barely rated a mention in major newspapers in the United States, an attempt to prevent the American people from realizing the devastating consequences of the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Burton emphasized that the huge number of dead exposed as fraudulent the claim that the United States was "liberating" Iraq. "The US has laid waste to an entire country and has killed and left maimed, homeless and destitute a large portion of Iraq's population in order to seize and control Iraq's oil resources and establish a dominant position in the Middle East and throughout Central Asia," Burton said.

Burton explained how Republicans and Democrats at all levels of government were responsible for the collapse of social services and the declining living standards of the working class, while a small layer of the population accumulates ever greater sums of wealth. The same forces were carrying out escalating attacks on democratic rights, including the sanctioning of torture and wholesale spying on the population. In concluding his comments, Burton posed the question: "In a country of 300 million, how can the views of so many people be represented by two parties that are both controlled by a financial oligarchy?"

"What is required," Burton continued, "is a break from the entire political superstructure and the building of a mass independent socialist party of the working class in the United States and internationally." He called on those in attendance to follow the analysis of the SEP and the *World Socialist Web Site* and to vote for him as a write-in candidate.

Also speaking on the panel was Republican candidate Bill Bodell, whose report consisted mainly of a chauvinistic tirade against immigrants. He also voiced support for what amounted to a theocratic state, denouncing gay marriage, the teaching of evolution and a woman's right to abortion. He wondered aloud why more black voters do not support the

Republican Party, given that “anyone who reads the Bible should vote Republican.”

Libertarian Party candidate Jim Keller’s comments focused on the war in Iraq, which he said was costing the US too much. He urged that the task of occupying Iraq be turned over to the United Nations. As a Libertarian, Keller is a fervent defender of the capitalist system and in his remarks he argued for privatization of social services and against raising the minimum wage.

Peace and Freedom Party candidate Lynda Llamas described herself and her party as socialist. However, her report consisted of a plea to have people sign a “no war pledge,” which she hoped that Schiff would sign as well. On her web site, Llamas includes a form letter for writing to Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein, indicating her basic perspective of appealing to Democrats to oppose the war.

Referring to the campaigns of both Llamas and Papparian, who displays prominently on his web site pictures of himself with Bill Clinton and Jesse Jackson, Burton said, “I am the only candidate running for office whose aim is not to pressure the Democratic Party, but to break with the two-party capitalist regime and provide a genuine alternative based on the interests of the working class.”

On October 16, the SEP held a public meeting at the Altadena Public Library attended by residents of the area and SEP campaign supporters. Burton’s campaign manager, Joe Kay, made introductory remarks explaining that the dominant issue in the 2006 elections was the war in Iraq.

Kay outlined the deep divisions and conflicts that have emerged among the US ruling class, the military and the political establishment over the escalating disaster in Iraq. However, he noted, the Republicans and Democrats were united in the belief that the occupation of Iraq must continue.

Kay explained that within the political superstructure and the corporate-controlled mass media there was no expression of the overwhelming opposition to the war. He referred to a number of recent books published by Democratic Party mouthpieces outlining not only their support for the militarist policies of the US ruling elite, but also their thinly disguised support for the re-introduction of the military draft.

One book, *The Plan*, written by Rahm Emanuel, US Congressman and chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, and Bruce Reed, president of the Democratic Leadership Council, states, “If we’re serious about winning a long war, we must put first things first: We need a bigger, better-equipped army. And we need to recognize military service as the highest calling a nation can ask.”

They advocate a plan in which, Kay said, “all Americans between the ages of 18 and 25 will be asked to ‘serve their

country’ by going through three months of basic training, civil defense preparation, and community service.”

Kay added that, far from representing opposition to the war or a major change of course in US foreign policy, if the Democrats were to gain control of the House and Senate after the November elections they would continue to pursue a program of US militarism and US domination.

SEP congressional candidate John Burton, referring to the *Lancet* report on Iraqi casualties, explained that the death toll in Iraq exposed the current lie of the Bush administration that the war was aimed at liberating the Iraqi people and bringing freedom and democracy to the Middle East.

Burton went on to refer to the case of Jose Padilla, a US citizen who was arrested, detained and tortured in a US military prison in South Carolina for three-and-a-half years. Padilla’s lawyers recently submitted a motion to have his case dismissed on the grounds that by torturing him, the government has forfeited its ability to prosecute.

Burton explained that these criminal and repressive measures used against Padilla were being put in place to contain the inevitable mass opposition which will emerge to the program of the US ruling class: continued war abroad as well as war against the working and living conditions of the US population.

Burton explained that the aim of the election intervention of all the SEP candidates was to raise and develop socialist consciousness in the working class—to raise the understanding in the working class and the broadest layers in society of the need for a socialist transformation in the United States and internationally.

A lively discussion followed the two reports with questions raised on the historical role of the working class, consumerism and capitalist propaganda, and the Marxist analysis of globalization.



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