

SEP submits petitions to qualify for Illinois State House campaign

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On Monday, June 21, Socialist Equality Party candidate Thomas Mackaman turned in signatures to obtain ballot status for state house in Illinois' 103rd representative district, which includes the cities of Champaign and Urbana and is home to the University of Illinois. In order to ensure the candidacy against potential Democratic or Republican challenges, SEP supporters collected over 2,000 signatures—far more than the 1,344 required. According to the Illinois State Board of Elections, any challenge to the petition must be submitted within five days of the petition filing.

The success of the petition drive demonstrates that growing numbers of workers and youth are prepared to support a socialist alternative to imperialist war abroad and the further destruction of living standards in the US. Against difficult odds—Illinois maintains among the most restrictive ballot access legislation in the country—the petitioning work of SEP supporters was warmly received.

Numerous conversations during the course of petitioning revealed a thoroughgoing hostility to the Iraq war and the Bush administration, as well as a growing awareness that John Kerry and the Democratic Party have acted as accomplices in the drive to war and occupation of Iraq.

Many signers lent their names either as a means to ensure as broad a choice as possible on November 2, or in order to register their disgust with the Democrats and Republicans. Typical was the comment of one signer, “Any new party is better than the two we’ve got.” Indeed, very few residents of this East Central Illinois district of more than 100,000 people identified themselves with either established party. By distributing hundreds of leaflets and encouraging residents to read the *World Socialist Web Site*, petitioners worked to channel this disenchantment and

anger behind the only political party that unequivocally opposes the occupation of Iraq, the SEP.

The campaign has attracted substantial attention locally. Mackaman has been interviewed by the local newspaper, the *Champaign News-Gazette*, and has been offered a radio interview as well. In the *News-Gazette* article, he pointed out the basis of the SEP campaign: “We’re trying to offer an alternative to both the Democrats and Republicans. Practically, what that means is a political alternative to war and the destruction of living standards in this country. Mackaman is challenging the Democratic Party incumbent, Naomi Jakobsson, and her Republican opponent, Deborah Feinen.

The Democratic Party has responded to the independent socialist challenge with particular hostility. In the *News-Gazette* article, Jakobsson reacted to the SEP campaign by suggesting that its aim is to undermine University of Illinois funding, a patently absurd accusation. In another instance, a local Democratic Party official harassed one SEP petitioner at an Urbana farmer’s market, accusing the campaign of “stealing votes” from the Democrats—as if Democrats have an unquestionable proprietary claim to votes!

Both the Democrats and Republicans have presided over a deepening social crisis nationwide, brought on by a relentless attack on workers’ living standards in the US and militarism abroad. The ramifications of this crisis are to be found in many facets of life in Champaign and Urbana. Thousands of residents do not have access to adequate health care. There has been a marked rise in poverty over the past 10 years, and a corresponding increase in crime statistics and juvenile imprisonment. Numerous soldiers from East Central Illinois, for the most part economic conscripts, are now

deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan, where they put in the position of attacking the civilian population and face the prospects of death, injury and psychological trauma.

At the University of Illinois, students have seen their tuition rise again and again, a phenomenon which is straining the budgets of the state's middle class families, and which is limiting access to the town's poor and working class students, who often attend the local community college. Graduate teaching assistants and adjunct faculty now find themselves trapped in low-paid positions with few benefits and limited prospects for improving their tenuous situations. International students face new hurdles to their ability to study in the US put in place since the 9/11 attacks.

The Democratic and Republican parties not only fail to offer solutions to these problems, they bear political responsibility for their existence. The success of the SEP campaign in Champaign and Urbana, Illinois, shows that more and more workers and students are beginning to draw the same conclusion, and are seeking out an alternative.



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