SEP defends ballot status for third-party candidates

Press conference denounces Illinois Democrats‘ effort to remove Nader from ballot

Jerry White
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The Socialist Equality Party broadened its campaign against the Illinois Democratic Party’s effort to deny ballot status to Tom Mackaman—its candidate for State Representative in the 103rd District in Champaign-Urbana—by participating in a joint press conference Monday denouncing similar efforts by the Democrats against independent presidential candidate Ralph Nader.

In line with the nationwide campaign being waged by the Democrats to exclude Nader from the ballot, the Illinois Democrats have challenged the validity of some 20,000 of the 35,000 signatures submitted by his supporters. A time-consuming check of all the objections began last week at the Board of Elections in Chicago and is expected to continue for two more weeks.

The press conference was called by the Free and Equal Election Coalition, an newly organized coalition to fight for ballot access in Illinois, which includes representatives from the Nader campaign, the Greens and the Libertarians. The news conference was covered by several television stations, including the Chicago affiliates of ABC TV and Fox News, as well as WBBM News and other radio stations.

As has been the case with the effort to toss Tom Mackaman off the ballot, the Illinois Democrats have used state employees to scrutinize and mount the objections to Nader’s nominating petitions. The use of state employees for such partisan activity is explicitly prohibited under the provisions of the Illinois 2003 Governmental Ethics Act and the state’s election code.

Christian Tobin, a local coordinator for the Nader for President campaign, said: “We’ve already identified no less than 10 Democrat state employees working on this challenge, most coming directly from Speaker Michael Madigan’s staff. I’ve requested the relevant payroll records to verify these state employees are not on the clock, but Madigan’s staff is acting like they’ve got something to hide. If that isn’t enough, Madigan is sending over his 16-year-old interns that have no business being put into the middle of this legal process.”

“In light of all this information,” Tobin concluded, “we call on Mike Madigan to explain why state employees worked on the objections to Mr. Nader’s petitions, and if these employees were on taxpayers’ dollars while impeding democracy.”

Madigan, the head of the state Democratic Party and a long-time Chicago machine politician, is also directly involved in the effort against Mackaman. A member of Madigan’s staff—Brendan Hostetler—copied Mackaman’s nominating petitions the day after they were filed. Madigan’s spokesman, Steve Brown, reiterated the demand that the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) be removed from the ballot in an interview Saturday in the Champaign *News-Gazette*. He claims the use of state employees is not the “core issue” and repeats the slander that the SEP submitted “phony petitions.”

A supporter of the SEP read a statement expressing solidarity with the fight against the undemocratic methods being used against the Nader campaign. “Despite our political differences with Ralph Nader,” it read, “the Socialist Equality Party condemns the

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Illinois Democratic Party's efforts to exclude him from the ballot. We support the fight for fair and equal access to the ballot for all political parties."

"The campaign to exclude Nader, like the bad-faith effort to toss out more than half the signatures filed on behalf of Thomas Mackaman, the SEP's candidate for State Representative in the 103rd District in Champaign-Urbana, is aimed at silencing any dissident voices who oppose the two-party system. This takes place as ever-larger segments of the population seek an alternative to the Democrats and Republicans and their policies of war, attacks on democratic rights and the assault on working people.

"We welcome the opportunity to take part in a common fight with all those present at today's press conference for ballot access and in defense of basic democratic rights."

Also speaking at the press conference was Jeff Trigg, the executive director of the Libertarian Party of Illinois, which has faced several attacks by the Republican Party. "We may not agree on other policies, but we are unifying against these ridiculous ballot access laws in Illinois," Trigg told the press conference. "The facts are that Illinois Democrats are challenging Nader, but they bent over backwards to let President Bush blatantly ignore deadlines in election law. This Bush favoritism shows you who the Democrats think their political enemies are, and it isn't the Republicans. Their enemy is voter choice, and that is wrong," said Trigg.

In his comments to the press conference, Andy Spiegel, the general counsel of the Libertarian Party, who is representing both Nader and the Socialist Equality Party, outlined the arbitrary and bogus character of the Democrats' challenge to Mackaman's nominating petitions:

"The Democrats filed their objections in bad faith, probably without even checking the signatures against voter registration records. The SEP submitted 2,003 and the Democrats challenged all but 972 of them. In our preliminary examination we found that most of these objections are false on the face of it. In one case, they objected to Tom Mackaman's own signature, claiming he was not registered at the address on the petition. They apparently didn't look too closely because the same address was printed on the top of all 105 petition sheets circulated in the district.

"In another case, the Democrats challenged the validity of the signature of a clerk working in the office that was checking the petitions. She was there to verify the correctness of her name and address and the Democrats still objected to her signature."

Spiegel said he was preparing a motion to dismiss the Democrats' objections based on their bad faith and also because of their use of state employees to challenge the signatures. He passed out a letter sent by Tom Mackaman to the Illinois Office of Inspector General demanding an investigation into the role of at least three state employees, including Hostetler, Liz Brown, another member of the House Democrats' staff, and Kristen Bauer, a legislative aide of State Representative Naomi Jakobsson, the incumbent Democrat being challenged by Mackaman in the election.

"These are violations of the election code and the state's ethics laws. If they used state employees paid at tax-payers expense we insist that criminal penalties be imposed," Spiegel said.

The SEP urges readers of the WSWS and all those who defend democratic rights to call on the Champaign County Electoral Board to throw out the objections by the Democratic Party and place Tom Mackaman on the ballot. Please send all emails to: mail@champaigncountyclerk.com

Please send copies of emails to the *World Socialist Web Site* at editor@wsws.org.

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