

Support for SEP candidate builds in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois

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Supporters of Socialist Equality Party candidate for Illinois state legislature Tom Mackaman this weekend broadened the campaign against the Democratic Party's efforts to remove his name from the ballot by distributing an open letter from the SEP candidate to the workers and students of Champaign and Urbana, Illinois.

The letter, headlined "Oppose the Democratic Party's attack on voters' rights", explains the bad-faith and illicit methods used by officials from the Champaign County Democrats and state employees working for State Representative Naomi Jakobsson and Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan to disqualify the signatures of hundreds of legally registered voters on Mackaman's nominating petitions.

Declaring that the Democrats had resorted to the same methods used by the Republicans during the theft of the 2000 elections in Florida and by Jim Crow racists against black voters in the Deep South, Mackaman called on working people to stand up for their own rights by opposing the Democrats' dirty tricks and insisting that the SEP be placed on the ballot.

Mackaman and his supporters campaigned on Saturday at the farmers market in Urbana, where they distributed hundreds of open letters and explained that the effort to remove the SEP from the ballot was aimed at depriving the working class of a voice in the election to oppose the war in Iraq and defend their right to decent paying jobs, health care and education.

On Friday, July 23, Champaign County Clerk Mark Sheldon overturned 478 of the remaining 652 objections filed by the Democrats and determined that the SEP had submitted 1,547 valid signatures, far more than the 1,325 needed for the name of our party and candidate to appear on the November ballot. The Democrats, however, continued to maintain their bad-

faith objections. A final determination is scheduled to be made by the Champaign County Electoral Board on Tuesday morning, July 27.

Scores of people—including employees and students at the University of Illinois-Champaign-Urbana, as well as telecommunications, computer, day-care and other workers—stopped by the SEP campaign table. Several bought copies of the SEP election platform or made donations to assist the campaign. Many expressed a deep democratic sentiment that everyone should have the right to be on the ballot and anger over the contempt the Democrats were showing towards voters.

Several people who remembered signing Mackaman's petition expressed outrage over their mistreatment and disrespect by the Democratic Party. "I am a registered voter—they can't tell me I'm not," said one worker. A number said they were willing to sign a legal affidavit declaring that they are registered voters and were offended that anyone would object to them signing a petition for Mackaman.

Many expressed disgust with the war in Iraq, Bush's policies and the worsening conditions confronting working people. At the same time, they were angered over the pro-war and pro-business policies of John Kerry and the Democratic Party.

Campaigners explained that the effort to exclude socialist and antiwar candidates, like Tom Mackaman, coincided with the Democrats' effort to de-legitimize all those opposed to the criminal war in Iraq. This would be made clear at the upcoming Democratic convention in Boston, they said, which organizers said would be a tribute to patriotism and militarism, with little or no criticism of the Bush administration.

A number of people noted that the Illinois Democrats were also trying to exclude from the ballot local Green Party candidates in Champaign, as well as independent

presidential candidate Ralph Nader. Several supporters of the Greens expressed their support and said they were impressed with the way the SEP was fighting for the right to ballot access.

At a nearby booth in the farmers market, several Democratic operatives reacted with dismay over the exposure of their undemocratic methods. County Board member Ralph Langenheim, one of the Democratic checkers at the preliminary examination of Mackaman's petitions, attempted to defend the fact that he upheld every objection even in the face of clear evidence that the signatures belonged to legally registered voters. Langenheim had previously commented that the SEP had not "jumped through enough hoops yet" to get on the ballot.

Another checker said she wouldn't say anything to the SEP because she would find her remarks posted on the Internet the next day—a reference to the regular articles exposing the Democrats that have appeared on the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Despite the efforts of the Democrats to operate in stealth, their efforts have become widely known. On Saturday, July 24, the *Champaign News-Gazette* carried a reply by Tom Mackaman to comments made by a spokesman of Michael Madigan's office.

Under the headline, "Democrats acting very undemocratic," the letter read:

"In the July 17 *News-Gazette*, Speaker of the House Michael Madigan's spokesperson denied that state employees, on state time and at taxpayers' expense, conducted work to remove my name from the ballot. Moreover, he claimed my petitions were 'phony.' This is a crude attempt at a cover-up.

"I have filed a complaint with the state inspector general naming three employees of the House Democratic staff who conducted this unethical political work. In addition to Brendan Hostetler and Elizabeth Brown, Naomi Jakobsson's own legislative aide, Kristen Bauer, organized Democratic 'watchers,' supplied them with instructions to uphold every objection before the county clerk, even if signatures were clearly valid. These activities are explicitly prohibited by the Illinois State Officials and Employees Ethics Act.

"As to the claim our petitions are phony, what has been proven is the Democratic Party has made a bad-faith attempt to disqualify more than 1,000 registered

voters from my nominating petitions. From the beginning, a number of objections were overturned by the electoral board because they were patently bogus. They included objections to blank lines and signatures already deleted by my supporters. In addition, hundreds of registered voters were randomly and indiscriminately removed by the Democrats.

"Rather than face a Socialist Equality Party, antiwar candidate in November, Jakobsson and the Illinois Democratic Party hope to remove me through backhanded measures. Their desperate effort to disenfranchise hundreds of local voters is a warning to millions throughout the United States. It also shows, "once again, the anti-democratic nature of the two-party system."

Tom Mackaman, Champaign

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.

Make a financial contribution to support the SEP campaign—donate online.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact