

# Democrats move to keep SEP candidate off Illinois ballot

The Editorial Board  
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Local Democratic Party officials in Champaign County, Illinois have filed an objection to the petitions of Socialist Equality Party candidate Thomas Mackaman in an effort to prevent him from gaining ballot access in the November general election.

Mackaman is challenging Democratic incumbent Naomi Jakobsson and her Republican opponent for a seat in the 103rd District of the Illinois House of Representatives, in the Champaign-Urbana area in the east-central part of the state. On June 21 Mackaman and his supporters submitted 2,032 signatures, far more than the 1,344 required for ballot status as an independent candidate.

The day after the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) filed the petitions with the Board of Elections, two members of the House Democratic Staff at the state legislature in Springfield—Liz Brown and Brendan Hostetler—requested and/or viewed copies of the petitions, as did one Republican Party official. Then just three hours before the deadline for challenges expired on Monday, June 28, Geraldine Parr, the treasurer and former chair of the Champaign County Democratic Party, filed a formal objection alleging that the SEP did not collect enough valid signatures for Mackaman to qualify.

The objection claims that 1,021 signatures collected by SEP supporters—more than half the total—are invalid, because allegedly the signers were not registered voters or residents of the district or their names were illegible or printed instead of signed.

The actions of the state and local Democrats express more than their desire to suppress any electoral alternative to the two-party system, reactionary and anti-democratic as that is. More fundamentally, the Democratic Party is engaged in a desperate effort to block any political discussion in the 2004 elections of the most important issues—the war in Iraq, the ongoing attacks on democratic rights and living standards—on which the Democrats and the Republicans stand together.

The central function of the presidential campaign of John Kerry, as far as the US ruling elite is concerned, has been to

keep out of the general election campaign any challenge to the legitimacy of the war in Iraq. Opinion polls show the majority of the American people oppose the war in Iraq, and 40 percent favor an immediate withdrawal of all American troops. Those tens of millions of people are entirely unrepresented in the contest between Bush and Kerry, two multi-millionaire politicians who are both pledged to maintain the US occupation and suppress Iraqi resistance, no matter what the cost in money and lives.

The SEP campaign inevitably becomes a target for political censorship because our presidential ticket, Bill Van Auken and Jim Lawrence, and our congressional and state legislative candidates, like Tom Mackaman, have placed the war in Iraq at the center of campaigns. We demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all American and other foreign troops from Iraq, the payment of reparations to enable the Iraqi people to rebuild their country, and a war crimes tribunal to judge the US officials responsible for this monstrous act of aggression and conquest, which has already cost tens of thousands of lives.

In a statement to the WSWs, Tom Mackaman said, “The Democratic Party’s efforts to prevent the SEP from gaining ballot access is an attack not only on our party but on the more than two thousand voters who signed petitions to place me on the ballot. It is aimed at frustrating their desire for a political alternative to the two big business parties and their bipartisan policies of war in Iraq and continuing cutbacks in social services, education, housing and healthcare, not only at the local level in District 103, but throughout the state and nation.

“I call on all our supporters in Champaign-Urbana, all the readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* and all those who defend the right to vote and democratic rights in general to protest these un-democratic measures and demand that the Champaign County Clerk’s office overturn this objection.”

Efforts to block third-party and independent candidates from the ballot are standard procedure for the Democratic and Republican political machines in Illinois. In addition to the objections against Mackaman, officials from both the

Illinois Democratic and Republican Parties filed objections against nearly two dozen third-party or independent candidates, including independent presidential candidate Ralph Nader, the Green Party's presidential campaign and other Green candidates and several Libertarian Party candidates.

The determination of both parties to eliminate independent challenges in one of the most populous states in the US is a measure of how narrow the base of support of the two-party system is. Functioning on behalf of the wealthy elite and confronting ever greater opposition to their right-wing policies, neither party can tolerate dissenting viewpoints. It is noteworthy that the Democratic Party has responded to the trampling of voters' rights in the 2000 elections in Florida, not by opposing the criminal methods of Bush and his supporters, but by stepping up efforts to block ballot access to any party that might cost it votes.

There is no doubt that SEP candidates in other states may face similar anti-democratic attacks. Such challenges are already taking place against other third-party campaigns. Last week Democratic Party officials staged provocations in both Oregon and Arizona, attempting to disrupt or shut down the Ralph Nader campaign. In Oregon, where Nader's supporters sought to attract 1,000 people to a convention to make their candidate eligible for a place on the statewide ballot, the Democratic Party sent hundreds of its loyalists into the hall to take up space and try to prevent the Nader campaign from reaching its target.

In Arizona, two Democrats filed a lawsuit last week challenging the petitions submitted by the Nader campaign for ballot status. As in the challenge to the SEP campaign in Illinois, the Democrats made patently ludicrous claims about Nader's petitions, charging that only 6,045 of the 21,512 signatures filed for the independent presidential candidate were valid. Arizona Democratic state chairman Jim Pederson told *Time* magazine last month (referring to Nader), "Our first objective is to keep him off the ballot." Spelling out a remarkable interpretation of democracy, Pederson continued: "This vote is about George Bush and John Kerry, and we think it distorts the entire electoral process to have his [Nader's] name on the ballot."

Andrew Spiegel, an attorney who specializes in Illinois state election law, told the WSWS that the Democratic and Republican parties routinely challenge all third party petitions in Illinois even though the state maintains some of the most restrictive ballot access legislation in the nation. For example, to gain "New Party" ballot access, a party needs to achieve a valid signature minimum of 5 percent of the total number of voters who voted in a political subdivision the last presidential election. For independents it increases to 10-16 percent. To achieve ballot access as a

presidential candidate in Illinois, petitioners must gather a minimum of 25,000 valid signatures and have a complete slate of statewide candidates along with party electors.

Spiegel, who has worked with numerous third parties from across the political spectrum, said that Democrats and Republicans may challenge a signature's validity on several grounds, but that the most frequent objection is that the signature does not closely enough resemble the signature as it appears on the voter's registration card. Spiegel pointed out the difficulty of defending against such objections, "As we all know, every signature changes every time it's written down." Another typical objection is that although the address of the person signing may be current, he or she may be registered at a previous address.

Mackaman and representatives of the SEP will challenge the Democratic Party's objections to his candidacy in Champaign County Court, Courtroom K, on Tuesday, July 6, at 10 a.m. Within 10 days of the local board's decision, the candidate or objector may file a petition for judicial review with the Clerk of the Circuit Court.

The SEP is in contact with the Green Party in Champaign, and welcomes joint action with other third parties seeking to defeat anti-democratic challenges by the Democratic and Republican parties.

The SEP is calling on its supporters and all those who defend democratic rights to email the Champaign County Election Board to demand that it reject the effort of the Democratic Party to keep our candidate off the ballot. Emails should be sent to Champaign County Clerk Mark Shelden's office at: [mail@champaigncountyclerk.com](mailto:mail@champaigncountyclerk.com)



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**