

A travesty of democracy in Illinois

Democrats conspire against voters in bid to remove SEP from ballot

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Anyone who wants to understand the real state of democracy in America should have witnessed the travesty which took place in the county clerk's office of Champaign County, Illinois this week. Over the past several days functionaries of the state and local Democratic Party have used lies, obstruction and intimidation in an effort to throw Tom Mackaman, the state legislative candidate of the Socialist Equality Party, off the ballot.

Last month Mackaman and his supporters submitted 2,003 signatures, far more than the 1,325 required to attain ballot status in the 103rd District, which includes the twin cities of Champaign and Urbana. Within one week Democratic officials filed an objection against more than half of Mackaman's signatures. On July 6, the Champaign County Electoral Board ordered a line-by-line review of the challenged signatures.

After a week of a painstaking review of the 1,003 challenged signatures the board's staff was able to find the voter identification numbers of nearly 700 persons—the vast majority which perfectly matched the names and addresses of the signers on the SEP petitions. Nevertheless representatives of the Democratic Party continued to object to 611 signatures, accepting only 71 as valid registered voters.

The events of this week expose the inner workings of a party that claims to oppose the Bush administration, but relies on the same anti-democratic and heavy-handed methods employed by the Republicans to disenfranchise voters in Florida and steal the 2000 elections. For the Democrats no serious political debate on the war, social inequality and falling living standards is to be permitted.

According to the ground rules set by the electoral board, an employee of the County Clerk's office compared each signature on the petition with a database of registered voters, while one representative each from the SEP and the Democratic Party observed. If the opposing parties agreed the signer was a registered voter the objection was overturned. The objection was upheld if the two parties agreed the signer was not registered. Finally, if the two parties could not agree on a determination the clerk's staff recorded "no agreement" for the signature.

It was clear, however, from the stream of party hacks and officials that were sent to "check" the signatures that this would not be an exercise in searching for the truth. The 10 different petition checkers included a county-level elected official who laughed as he objected to the signatures of clearly registered voters, the head of the college Democrats, an aspiring careerist running for county coroner who declared he had no problem "helping to keep the communists off the ballot" and a low-level representative from the academic professionals union.

For the most part the only people who actually bothered to look at the registration rolls and allow the overturn of bogus objections were a few retirees who volunteer as polling officials during elections. They were not even told whose signatures they were reviewing (one person thought she was checking petitions submitted by Ralph Nader's supporters or the Greens).

Largely for this reason on the first day, Monday, July 12, the Democratic checkers allowed 54 of 218 objections to be overturned. This alarmed the Democratic officials behind the scenes, who immediately sent explicit instructions for checkers the next day to uphold every objection, no matter how transparently false they were.

Each checker on the second day was armed with a paper entitled "Guideline" that said the following:

- 1) *You will sit next to the employees of the county clerk's office.*
- 2) *Don't help them figure out who it is that signed the petition, just watch.*
- 3) *After the employee either a. finds the voter card or b. doesn't find the voter's card they will make a ruling. They will either: "sustain" our objection, which means we win that objection or they will "overrule" our objection, which means we lost that objection.*
- 4) *Each time they "overrule" our objection, for the record you must let them know that you "object" to their ruling. It is very important that you tell them you*

object to their ruling and that they record your objection.

5) On our worksheets in the booklet we provide to you, record next to each line whether our objection was “sustained” or “overruled.”

Even these explicit instructions—which don’t include a word about actually finding out whether the voter really exists or not—caused some problems with the first checker Tuesday. The woman, a registered nurse, initially expressed some sympathy towards third party campaigns and allowed three out of the first eight objections to be overturned.

Her entire demeanor changed radically after taking a phone call from a woman named “Kristen,” who several checkers later said had recruited them for the effort. From that point on she repeated “I object” to every signature, without bothering to even look at the voter’s information on the computer screen.

“Kristen” turned out to be Kristen Bauer, the legislative aide of State Representative Naomi Jakobsson, the Democratic incumbent whom Mackaman is challenging in the November election. Bauer, like Liz Brown and Brendan Hostetler, two other House Democratic staffers who previously copied and reviewed the SEP petitions on behalf of the Democrats, is a state employee. Like Brown and Hostetler, if she engaged in partisan political activity during working hours, it was in violation of the Illinois Governmental Ethics Act and the provisions of the state’s election code.

This pattern of obstruction was repeated by every subsequent Democratic checker. Over the next two days of checking—which took some 15 hours of work—the Democrats conceded only 17 signatures out of 785 objections.

That the Democratic checkers resorted to lying was made patently clear when, by chance, the employee of the county clerk’s office who was checking the petition realized the name she was looking at was her own. “That’s me,” she said, realizing she had signed Mackaman’s nominating petition. Nevertheless, the Democratic checker, County Board member Ralph Langenheim, said, “I object. That’s not a good address.” When pressed to explain how he could reject the signature of a person sitting right in front of him and after seeing that her voter information matched perfectly, Langenheim, chuckled and said, “I don’t have to tell you why. I have my orders.”

With the same cynicism Langenheim rejected the signature of Tom Mackaman himself, who had signed one of his own nominating petitions. When the SEP observer pointed out that not only was Mackaman’s name and address correctly written on that particular line but, by law, it was printed on every petition sheet circulated in the District, Langenheim again laughed it off.

When it was time for Langenheim to be relieved by another Democratic Party functionary he informed the new man, “No matter what, uphold the objection, unless they accept the

objection. I only let them have one.”

There is increasing evidence that the effort to bar Mackaman from the ballot is being directed by leading Democratic figures in Illinois. One of the state employees involved in reviewing Mackaman’s petitions is on the staff of Mike Madigan, the Speaker of the House and one of the most powerful Democrats in Illinois. Another is the legislative aide and campaign manager of State Representative Jakobsson, who has refused to return calls from a WSWs reporter who has asked her office if she condones the dirty tricks operation by her supporters to remove Mackaman from the ballot.

The Illinois Democrats—who oppose any challenge to the political monopoly of the two corporate-controlled parties—are also seeking to toss out more than 20,000 signatures of the more than 35,000 submitted by supporters of independent presidential candidate Ralph Nader.

The next phase in the SEP’s ballot access fight in Champaign will be a review by the County Clerk of the information gathered during the preliminary investigation by his office. In all, a total of 688 voter identifications were found and a very high percentage of those will prove to be valid voters. The SEP needs the overturning of another 258 objections to achieve ballot status.

We once again urge the readers of the WSWs and all those who defend democratic rights to call on the Champaign County Electoral Board to throw out the objection 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.

See Also:

Stop the Democratic Party's attack on third-party campaigns!
Place SEP candidate Tom Mackaman on the ballot in Illinois!

[8 July 2004]

Statement of SEP candidate Tom Mackaman to Champaign County, Illinois Election Board

[7 July 2004]

Illinois Democratic officials use legislative staffers to attack third-party campaigns

[6 July 2004]

More letters oppose Democrats' attempt to bar SEP candidate from Illinois ballot

[16 July 2004]



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