

Illinois county clerk's findings vindicate SEP petitions

A reporting team
24 July 2004

The Champaign County Clerk on Friday issued a preliminary judgment on the objections filed by the Democratic Party against the petitions of Socialist Equality Party Illinois state legislative candidate Tom Mackaman. The clerk's analysis vindicates the position of Mackaman and the SEP, and repudiates the Democratic Party's bad-faith effort to disqualify the signatures of hundreds of legally registered voters and remove the SEP candidate from the ballot.

After comparing the signatures with voter registration rolls, County Clerk Mark Shelden threw out 478 of the Democrats' objections and upheld only 174—a ratio of nearly three-to-one in favor of the SEP. Combined with the original 982 signatures not objected to, and the 71 objections conceded by the Democrats during the preliminary examination by his staff last week, Shelden's recommendation would give Mackaman 1,547 signatures—far more than the 1,325 required to place him on the ballot in the November election.

In one case the Democrats objected to 17 out of 20 signatures on a single petition sheet. After the county clerk compared the information on the petition to the signers' voter registration cards he ruled that 16 of the 17 were in fact valid registered voters.

Shelden's findings show that the Democrats employed "shotgun" methods, in which hundreds of signatures were arbitrarily selected to challenge without ever investigating the registration rolls. This confirms that the entire objection process has been an exercise in political deception and intimidation aimed at keeping Mackaman and the SEP off the ballot and excluding any opposition to the Democrats' pro-war and pro-big-business policies.

The county clerk's recommendation that the SEP be placed on the ballot must be ratified by the Champaign County Electoral Board, of which Shelden is one of the

three members. During this proceeding, scheduled for July 27, representatives from both the SEP and the Democratic Party can object to each of the county clerk's determinations and present evidence as to why. The board will make the final determination.

Every indication points to the probability that the Democrats will continue their obstructive methods and use whatever pseudo-legal means they can to maintain their objections to valid signatures.

On Friday, the Democrats arrogantly defied the procedure established by the county clerk's office for determining the validity of their objections. Last week both parties were instructed to be present for the county clerk's final determination. However, the attorney representing the Democrats claimed she was not prepared to argue against the county clerk's findings of fact because her clients had not yet had time to analyze all the evidence. The lawyer asked to review the voter registration cards of the hundreds of voters whose names the Democrats had objected to. This amounted to an admission of the bad-faith character of the whole enterprise: after all, if they have only now begun to look at the facts, what was the basis of their original objections?

When she filed the Objector's Petition on June 28, Geraldine Parr, a vice chair of the Champaign County Democrats, claimed that her only reason for seeking to remove Mackaman from the ballot was that "she was a voter desirous that the laws governing the formation of new political parties and the filing of nominating papers for the [public] office ... are properly complied with, and that only qualified candidates appear on the ballot for said office."

Since Mackaman and his supporters began to collect signatures, however, the SEP has conscientiously followed all the election procedures stipulated by

Illinois state law, even though obviously unfair to third parties. The Democratic Party, on the other hand, has made a mockery of the law and shown utter contempt for voting rights. It has used state employees to view, copy and draw up the original objections against the SEP petitions. The objections themselves were clearly formulated in bad faith, with numerous challenges false on their face.

These bad-faith efforts continued during the “binder check” before employees of the County Clerk’s office. The SEP obtained a copy of instructions for the Democratic “watchers” that stipulated they uphold every original objection, even if signatures and addresses clearly matched those found on the Champaign County voter rolls. These watchers were supervised by Kristen Bauer, the legislative aide to Naomi Jakobsson, the Democratic incumbent being challenged by Mackaman. In that capacity, Bauer is also a state employee, and thereby prohibited from engaging in partisan political activity while being paid by the state.

The effort to exclude the SEP from the ballot has been directed from the top echelons of the Illinois Democratic Party. One of the state employees involved in copying the SEP’s petitions was on the staff of Michael Madigan, the Speaker of the House and one of the most powerful Democrats in the state. Madigan’s spokesman has also gone on record endorsing the effort to remove the SEP from the ballot. Madigan’s office has also been directly involved in the effort to remove independent presidential candidate Ralph Nader from the Illinois ballot.

The attack on the SEP and other opponents of the war in Iraq is an attempt to prevent any political debate on the most pressing issues facing working people, including the bipartisan support for the war in Iraq and the continued assault on the living standards of the working class. Unable to justify its reactionary policies before the people, the Democrats have adopted the same methods used by the Republicans during the theft of the 2000 elections, in a bid to exclude a socialist and antiwar candidate from the ballot.

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 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.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact