

Protests mount against Democrats' attempt to bar socialist candidate

## Letters express popular commitment to democratic rights

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14 July 2004

*"The Socialist Equality Party represents a return to government by the people, of the people and for the people, but the Democratic Party is seeking to suppress their candidate. What would Thomas Jefferson do?"—Letter of protest to Champaign, Illinois, county clerk.*

The attempt by state and local Democratic Party officials in Illinois to exclude Socialist Equality Party state legislative candidate Thomas Mackaman from the November ballot has evoked a powerful reaction. Letters of protest continue to flood the office of Mark Shelden, county clerk in Champaign, demanding that the county electoral board reject the Democrats' challenge to Mackaman's candidacy.

In response to a campaign initiated on the *World Socialist Web Site*, e-mails have been sent from across the US and around the world, including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Britain, Belgium, Germany, South Africa and Sri Lanka. A wide spectrum of social layers is represented, including workers, teachers, students, attorneys, medical professionals and artists.

Even among those who identify themselves as Democrats, the thuggish and brazenly anti-democratic actions of party officials in Illinois have aroused anger and concern.

"It would be equal to a political public beheading if your office denies access to the ballot for the SEP on the basis of any bureaucratic assault," writes a WSWS reader from Belgium.

Kevin McGuire writes: "In these times of political crisis and political disenfranchisement of working people, we need every voice possible to defend our interests in the political arena, particularly concerning the illegal aggression against Iraq. We have no voice! Why are you trying to prevent us from being heard? This is democracy?"

The letter writers' outrage is an indication of deeply held feelings about democratic traditions and principles. It also points to an increased awareness among wide layers of the US population that the two-party system is incapable of providing political expression to the democratic and social

aspirations of the broad mass of working people.

The Democratic Party's attack on the Socialist Equality Party's campaign, and the determination of the SEP and its supporters to defeat this challenge, have struck a chord among those who oppose the policies of the Bush administration and the entire political establishment—Democrats and Republicans alike.

Alzo David-West writes that the attempt to exclude the SEP candidate from the ballot "is unpardonable precisely because one of the two major parties of big business is clearly manipulating and forcing potential SEP voters to either select a candidate who does not represent their interests or to abstain from the upcoming November election altogether."

Significantly, many writers note that the implications of the Democrats' challenge to the SEP campaign extend far beyond the limits of Illinois's 103rd legislative district. At stake is not only the democratic right of independent and third-party candidates to participate in elections, but the right of working people to have their voices heard—on the theft of the 2000 presidential election, on the war in Iraq, on the erosion of civil liberties in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, on the growing enrichment of a tiny minority at the expense of the vast majority.

A dentist from Florida writes: "The SEP demands an immediate withdrawal of all troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, which is echoed by 40 percent of the electorate as of today. The number will only get bigger as this quagmire worsens."

A WSWS reader from Sri Lanka writes: "The whole world knows about the questionable way Republican President George Bush was elected, which marked the rapid deterioration of democracy in the USA. Under the present circumstances, where US imperialism is becoming the policeman of the world, even the people living in tiny countries like Sri Lanka look forward to the action you take in this regard."

And an SEP supporter from New Jersey elaborates: “Two political parties preside over the largest military in the history of mankind, protecting the wealth of the 1 percent who own 40 percent of the wealth in the United States. These parties rely on war, mass arrests and torture, the death penalty and other forms of brutality, as well as hundreds of millions of dollars in campaign contributions to maintain their hold on power. Their limited political debates can be considered a brutality against the intellect.”

As one letter of protest queried: “The Democrats’ contempt for democratic rights is breathtaking. What are they afraid of?”

A supporter from Australia writes: “There’s a misnomer—the so-called Democratic Party where democracy has long departed. The Democratic Party is hostile to social equality and social justice for workers.”

The Democratic Party has mobilized its political machine not only in Champaign-Urbana, but also in a systematic nationwide effort to block the participation of candidates who offer an alternative to the two big-business parties. The Republicans, for their part, are conducting similar operations against candidates who, they believe, will attract the votes of conservatives.

Representatives of liberal and left-wing tendencies and publications with which the SEP has well-known political differences have also gone on record in support of the SEP campaign. The SEP, for its part, has extended its support to the right of parties and candidates facing anti-democratic ballot challenges, including the Greens and Ralph Nader, to appear on the ballot and contest the November election.

Martin Schreder, chairperson of the Detroit Socialist Party, writes: “Even though I have a number of differences with the political platform of the Socialist Equality Party, I will unconditionally defend their right to present their viewpoint and platform to the voters of this country. To this end, I wish to add my voice to those who have already registered their objection to these patently anti-democratic actions.”

A local membership meeting of the Prairie Greens of East Central Illinois passed a resolution to “support the right of Tom Mackaman to be on the ballot for Illinois State Representative in the 103rd district.” The resolution continued: “We condemn bad faith efforts by members of the Democratic Party to remove third party alternatives from the general election ballot.”

Another letter writer notes: “Please know that your actions on behalf of access to democratic processes as defined by our constitution will be applauded by defenders of democracy regardless of their political stripe.”

The response in defense of the Socialist Equality Party’s right to gain ballot status in Illinois is testament to the

growing influence of the socialist, antiwar perspective of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the SEP. Our campaign in Champaign-Urbana—as well as our campaigns in the presidential, congressional and state races—are committed to the defense of democratic rights and their extension to the broad masses of the population.

These rights can be defended only through the independent political mobilization of the working class on a socialist program. We are intervening in the 2004 elections to fight for this program, and we intend to intensify our efforts to oppose the Democratic Party’s unscrupulous efforts to keep our candidates off the ballot—in Champaign-Urbana and wherever else we may be challenged.

At a July 6 hearing before the Champaign County Electoral Board, the Democrats failed in their initial bid to block ballot status for Tom Mackaman. The board decided to authorize County Clerk Mark Shelden to carry out a line-by-line check of the challenged signatures, in the presence of representatives of both the SEP and the Democratic Party. (See “Illinois election board defers ruling on ballot status for SEP candidate”.)

Efforts must continue to flood the county clerk’s office in Champaign County, Illinois, with protests calling for the Democratic challenge to be thrown out and for Tom Mackaman to be placed on the ballot. Send e-mail to Champaign County Clerk Mark Shelden’s office at: [mail@champaigncountyclerk.com](mailto:mail@champaigncountyclerk.com).

Please send copies of e-mails to the *World Socialist Web Site* at [editor@wsws.org](mailto:editor@wsws.org).

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



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