

Socialist Equality Party press conference in Illinois

Green Party, Libertarians join SEP to denounce attack on third party campaigns

A reporting team
17 July 2004

Socialist Equality Party candidate Tom Mackaman held a press conference at the University of Illinois in Urbana to condemn the undemocratic and illegal effort of the Democratic Party to remove him from the ballot in November. He called on the Office of the Illinois Inspector General to investigate the use of state employees in the Democrats' bad faith challenge to Mackaman's nominating petitions.

Mackaman, who is running for the Illinois House of Representatives in District 103, which represents the cities of Champaign and Urbana, was joined by representatives from the Green Party and the Libertarians who denounced the efforts to exclude third parties from the ballot.

The press conference was attended by about 20 people, several of whom had themselves signed the SEP petitions and were challenged by Democratic Party functionaries. A reporter from the radio station WILL interviewed Mackaman about his letter to the Inspector General and his efforts to overturn the Democrats' objections. After the press conference a newspaper reporter from the *News-Gazette* contacted Mackaman's campaign for a story.

In his opening remarks, the SEP candidate reviewed the Democratic Party's obstructionist tactics and warned the audience that the attack on democratic rights was not only directed at him and the SEP, but at the rights of all working people in the district, and, by extension, everywhere.

Mackaman said the effort to exclude him from the ballot had already generated enormous opposition. "Over the last several weeks the Champaign County Clerk's office has been flooded with scores of letters from Illinois, throughout the US and the world demanding the SEP be allowed on the ballot.

"Why does the Democratic Party choose to oppose my campaign through bad faith and illegal activity rather than letting voters decide in a fair election? Because [the Democratic Party] is a political outfit that has no accomplishments to run on and no program to offer the

working people and students of this district. Rather than facing the Socialist Equality Party on the ballot in November—and thereby entering into a debate on the most pressing political questions, including the war in Iraq—they resort to nefarious tactics to deny citizens their most basic liberty: the right to vote for a party of their choosing."

He concluded by pointing out the high stakes of the SEP's intervention in Illinois: "Those who think that America is a free country must assimilate the lesson from this experience. If state officials can declare hundreds upon hundreds of local voters ineligible to vote for the political benefit of one or the other major party, then democracy in the US is in peril. Not since the disputed results of the 2000 presidential election in Florida have we seen such basic disregard for the right to vote. And now, when voices within the ruling elite are seriously contemplating the postponement of the coming US elections under the guise of terrorist threat, the defense of democracy takes on the most urgent importance. I urge you to defend your rights by supporting the Socialist Equality Party's right to appear on the ballot and by opposing the Democratic Party's attempts to remove it."

The chairman of the meeting, Jerry White, the SEP's candidate for US Congress in Michigan's 15th District, then read Mackaman's letter to the Illinois Office of the Inspector General (See text). The letter illustrated the numerous violations of Illinois electoral law, along with the infringements of basic democratic principles, involved in the Democrats' use of state employees to obstruct the SEP campaign.

Also attending the conference were representatives of the Green Party and the Libertarians. Zachary Miller, the Green Party's candidate for Champaign County Board in District 6, said the Prairie Greens of East Central Illinois had voted to support Tom Mackaman's right to be on the ballot and oppose the "bad faith efforts of the Democratic Party to keep third parties off the ballot."

Miller said Democratic operatives were challenging his

nominating petitions in similar ways as they were challenging Mackaman's. "People they freely admit are registered to vote in the district are being challenged because they forgot the 'north', 'south,' 'east' or 'west' in their street address. Or they forgot to put junior or senior next to their name or a hyphen if they were married and retained their maiden name as part of their last name.

"In District 8 and District 9 we're running student candidates who happen to be visiting their parents for the summer. The Democrats are attempting to claim that these candidates who are students in good standing at the university have 'vacated' the district and are ineligible to run. If this ruling is upheld, it will disenfranchise thousands of students here. All the students go home to visit their parents and if they are not able to run for office, they are not able to vote, because it's the same requirements."

Jeff Trigg, the executive director of the Libertarian Party of Illinois, explained that even though "We probably don't agree a lot on policies", the Greens, independents, Socialist Equality Party, Libertarians and other "non-power parties and candidates" can come together on "ballot access and democracy."

"In our case, Republicans like kicking us off the ballot," he said, relating several elections, including in 1998 and 2002, when scores of state employees were mobilized by the Republicans to challenge nominating petitions. "Even though you may beat them they object to your petitions to tie up your time, resources and money in order to keep you from better competing," Trigg said.

Trigg said he was helping with Ralph Nader's fight in Illinois where Democrats were challenging more than 20,000 of the independent presidential candidate's 35,000 signatures. Despite official denials, he said, "Anybody who knows politics in Illinois knows that Michael Madigan, the speaker of the house and the chair of the state Democrats, made the decision to kick Nader off the ballot."

After it was revealed that 10 state employees from Madigan's staff had gone through Ralph Nader's petitions, they began sending 16-year-old interns to do the petition challenge, he said. "Now that's just an abuse of power or even child abuse—teaching kids how to kick opponents off the ballot and snub democracy."

Trigg related how the Democrats had recently made a deal with the Republicans to allow George Bush to be placed on the Illinois ballot after the official deadline to certify candidates in the state expired. Michael Madigan offered the Republicans a deal: 'If you forgive \$1 million in campaign fines against Democrats, we'll change the deadline for President Bush.'

"The Democrats cooperated with the Republicans to put them on the ballot. Doesn't that tell you who their real

enemy is? They had a perfect opportunity to keep the person who they say is their worst enemy off the ballot, but they didn't do it. They willfully went along with it so President Bush could take advantage of the 9/11 anniversary in New York. Yet they are challenging Ralph Nader, the Green Party and Tom Mackaman. That tells you their real enemy is voter choice."

During the question-and-answer period a graduate student at the University of Illinois, one of those whose names were being challenged, expressed outrage at the media for all but boycotting the press conference. "I am disgusted that the media is not covering the effort to deny third parties access to the ballot. We're talking about our civil rights here and you think that would be relevant to the press."

White pointed out the near silence of the corporate-controlled media toward the idea being floated by the Bush administration that the November elections might be postponed indefinitely under the guise of terrorist threat. American democracy, he said, was rotting under the weight of the enormous growth of social inequality. The wealthy elite cannot impose their reactionary program of war and attacks on the working class peacefully. The answer to this, he said, was building a political movement of the working class.

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.



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