

Open Letter to the workers and students of Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, from SEP candidate

Oppose the Democratic Party's attack on voters' rights

24 July 2004

The following statement is being distributed in the Champaign-Urbana area by SEP candidate Tom Mackaman and his supporters.

My name is Tom Mackaman, and I am the Socialist Equality Party candidate for State House from District 103. Over 2,000 citizens signed petitions to place me on the ballot, many of whom agreed with our uncompromising opposition to the destruction of living standards and the war in Iraq. Others wanted an opponent of the two-party monopoly on the ballot to broaden the political debate during the elections. I want to thank all of you for your support.

As many of you are by now aware, a week after we submitted the petitions bearing your signatures, the Democratic Party began a concerted effort to bar us from the ballot by challenging the legitimacy of more than 1,000 signatures. Geraldine Parr, a vice-chair of the Champaign County Democrats, filed objections to over 1,000 of your signatures, claiming that you are not, in fact, registered voters of Champaign and Urbana.

A preliminary examination of these objections by the County Clerk's office has revealed that the vast majority of these objections are false and that I have more than enough signatures to qualify for ballot status. Nevertheless the Democrats continue to challenge the validity of these signatures even in the face of indisputable evidence that they belong to legally registered voters.

From the very beginning the Democrats have resorted to bad-faith methods to remove me from the ballot. The original objections were filed without even seriously examining the registration cards of the voters the

Democrats sought to disqualify. For example, the Democrats even objected to my signature by claiming that I am not a registered where I live! My voter registration card assures me otherwise. They even objected to the signature of an employee of the County Clerk, even though she happened to be present to verify its authenticity!

In fact, the Democrats' efforts transcend mere obstructionism. They are also illegal. The person who coordinated the recent review of signatures was Kristen Bauer, legislative aide to my opponent State Representative Naomi Jakobsson, and an employee of the House Democratic Staff in that capacity. Even the people who originally requested and copied my petitions are members of the House Democratic staff, including an employee of Michael Madigan, the Speaker of the House and one of the most powerful Democrats in Illinois.

Their work was carried out at times they would be expected to be performing duties as state employees paid with taxpayers' dollars. State and federal law prohibit such partisan political work by state employees. We have filed a complaint against these actions to the Office of the Inspector General and have requested an investigation.

The attempt to remove the Socialist Equality Party from the ballot represents not only an attack on my democratic rights, but the rights of all those registered voters of District 103 who signed our petitions, and by extension, on voters everywhere.

The Democrats claim to oppose President Bush and the Republicans. But the undemocratic methods they are employing to disenfranchise voters in Champaign-

Urbana and remove me from the ballot are no different from those used by the Republicans in the 2000 elections when they trampled on the rights of thousands of Florida voters and stole the election. Moreover the Democrats' effort to intimidate and disqualify voters who signed my petition is reminiscent of the notorious methods used to prevent black voters in the "Jim Crow" South from exercising their most basic democratic rights.

The Illinois Democrats have not only targeted my campaign. They have also sought to toss out 20,000 of the 35,000 signatures filed by Ralph Nader.

Why does the Democratic Party choose bad faith and illegal activity rather than letting voters decide in a fair election?

The truth is they speak for the same wealthy elite as do the Republicans. The Democrats fear my campaign because the Socialist Equality Party places the interests of working people first. We call for an end to the criminal war in Iraq and the squandering of billions of dollars and lives of working class youth to benefit the oil companies. We demand the reorganization of the economy to end social inequality and guarantee decent paying jobs, health care, housing and education for all. Such policies threaten the interest of the plutocracy that runs this county and controls both the Democrats and Republicans.

The effort to exclude me from the ballot is not only aimed at silencing me but preventing any discussion of the most pressing political questions facing working people. What choice will voters have in November? All four candidates on the Kerry-Edwards and Bush-Cheney tickets are multimillionaires who support the war in Iraq and the interests of corporate America.

For these reasons, rather than facing the Socialist Equality Party on the ballot in November, the Democrats resort to nefarious tactics to deny citizens their most basic liberty: the right to vote for a party of their choosing.

Those who think that America is a free and democratic country must assimilate the lesson from this experience. If state officials can declare hundreds upon hundreds of local voters ineligible to vote then democracy in the US is in peril. And now, when voices within the ruling elite are seriously contemplating the postponement of the coming US election under the guise of a 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.

Please send letters demanding the overturn of the Democrats' objections to: mail@champaigncountyclerk.com with a copy to editor@wsws.org.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact