

Champaign, Illinois Electoral Board places SEP candidate on ballot

A reporting team
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The Champaign County Electoral Board on Monday officially accepted the withdrawal of challenges filed against the nominating petitions of Socialist Equality Party state legislative candidate Tom Mackaman, and directed the Illinois Board of Elections to place Mackaman's name on the ballot for the November 2 election. The action brought to an end a month-long campaign by the Democratic Party to keep the SEP candidate off of the ballot by disallowing the signatures of hundreds of legally registered voters who signed his nominating petitions.

The electoral board's decision is a victory for the SEP and vindicates the position taken by Mackaman and his supporters since a leading Champaign County Democratic Party official filed an objection against Mackaman's nominating petitions on June 28. Mackaman and the SEP have maintained from the outset that the Democrats' challenge was baseless and lodged in bad faith, and that Mackaman had far more than the requisite number of signatures to qualify for ballot status.

After a month of obstruction, when the Democrats were finally obliged to substantiate their challenges against hundreds of signatures at a hearing of the electoral board on July 27, their representative was unable to do so. The Democrats were forced to withdraw their objection a few days later.

Neither the Democratic officials involved in the effort to bar Mackaman nor their attorneys attended the electoral board hearing on Monday. Convening at 1:00 p.m., the board accepted the motion submitted last week by the attorney representing Geraldine Parr, the vice-chair of the Champaign County Democrats, who initiated the challenge, to withdrawal the objector's petition. Parr had claimed that more than half of the 2,003 signatures on Mackaman's petitions were invalid.

The electoral board then issued an order to the state board of elections to place the SEP candidate's name and

party affiliation on the ballot. Both votes were unanimous, and the hearing was concluded in a matter of minutes, with the electoral board signing the order and giving a copy to Mackaman.

Outside the Champaign County courthouse, Mackaman held a press conference with several television, radio and print journalists, including reporters from the local NBC-TV news affiliate, WILL radio, and the *Daily Illini*, the University of Illinois student newspaper. He read a prepared statement and answered questions about the SEP's policies and its fight to overturn the Democrats' bad-faith challenge.

The reporter from WILL radio asked about the Democratic Party's use of state employees to conduct the challenge against the SEP nominating petitions. Mackaman said the SEP had issued a complaint to the Office of the Inspector General, which turned over the investigation into possible violations of the election code and state ethics laws to the Illinois State Legislature's Ethics Commission.

In his statement, Mackaman explained the significance of the fight the SEP had taken up and the powerful response it evoked from defenders of democratic rights throughout the US and internationally. He said: "This decision is a victory for democratic rights and for the voters of Champaign-Urbana and, by extension, voters everywhere. It is a defeat for the heads of the Illinois Democratic Party machine, including House Speaker Michael Madigan, who thought they could trample on the rights of voters in this district and deny the workers and students of this town a political alternative to the two big-business parties and their shared agenda of war, the rollback of democratic rights, and the destruction of what remains of the social safety net and education in this country.

"The Democratic Party officials failed to understand not only the resolve of the Socialist Equality Party, but also

the powerful democratic convictions felt by working people in Illinois, throughout the US and, indeed, throughout the world. The Democrats had no response to this. They operated in the dark, behind closed doors, always denying the patently clear partisan nature of the whole affair.

“Thousands upon thousands of people followed this story daily on the *World Socialist Web Site*, and more than 150 emails and letters were sent to the Champaign County Clerk demanding that the Democrats’ bogus objections be tossed out. These letters came from Illinois and dozens of other US states, as well as from England, Germany, India, Sri Lanka, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and other countries. I want to thank all those who wrote to the county clerk because this international scrutiny was of decisive importance.

“People everywhere deeply feel that the attack on democracy in the US is a vital *international* question and is inextricably bound up with the danger posed to the world by US militarism. Millions around the world demonstrated to oppose the war in Iraq in 2002. They are opposed to the militarist policies of the US and their own governments, and they see the US government defying the will of the American people in order to continue this criminal war.

“The Democrats wanted me off the ballot in order to deprive working people of a voice to oppose this war and defend their most basic interests. This is because on all of the most fundamental questions the policies of the Democratic Party are virtually indistinguishable from those of Bush and the Republicans. The Democratic Party national convention in Boston was a demonstration to the corporate ruling elite in America that a Kerry administration would continue, if not intensify, its predatory policies of war and social reaction.

“During the convention, serious criticism of Bush and the war were outlawed. Delegates who attempted to unfurl antiwar banners were tossed out. Kerry’s own past as a war protester was excised and the Democratic nominee demonstrated that he could be relied upon to execute the policies of American imperialism every bit as brutally, and more effectively, than the Bush administration.

“Military aggression overseas inevitably requires an intensified assault on democratic rights at home. That is the only way that the human and financial cost of this and future wars can be imposed on an unwilling population.

“Herein lies the significance of the attack on voting rights here in Champaign-Urbana. In Boston, Democratic speakers like Al Gore paid lip service to the importance of

‘counting every vote,’ while here in Illinois the party employed the same anti-democratic methods used by the Republicans in Florida to steal the 2000 election. And the SEP is not the only target. Madigan and the Democrats are also challenging 20,000 of the 32,000 signatures filed by independent presidential candidate Ralph Nader.

“On the surface, the confrontation between the Democratic Party and the SEP would appear to be a mismatch. The Democrats, after all, have a powerful and corrupt political machine at their disposal, millions upon millions of dollars, high-priced lawyers, and even the services of taxpayer-financed state employees—a violation now being investigated by the Legislative Ethics Commission.

“How could the SEP prevail against these odds? We based ourselves on the interests of the vast majority of the population—working people and students around the world, who are politically disenfranchised by parties that speak for big business. We understood that despite their resources, these parties rest on an increasingly narrow social base, and that their support within the general population is being further eroded by their pro-war and pro-business policies.

“The defeat of this anti-democratic attack is a significant step, but it is only one chapter in an ongoing struggle that must be intensified. The experience in Champaign-Urbana shows, in microcosm, the potential to build a broad movement of working people genuinely committed to the defense of democratic rights, peace and social equality. That is what the Socialist Equality Party is dedicated to and that is why I am running in this election.”



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