

A letter from Tom Mackaman

SEP candidate in Illinois thanks supporters of ballot access fight

Tom Mackaman
12 August 2004

The following is a letter from Tom Mackaman, Socialist Equality Party candidate for the Illinois state legislature from the 103rd District, thanking the individuals who wrote to the Champaign County Clerk's office to protest the Democratic Party's efforts to bar him from the ballot for the November election. After Mackaman turned in 2,009 signatures of registered voters who had signed nominating petitions to place him on the ballot, far more than the requirement of 1,325 signatures, Democratic officials filed an objection, claiming that over half of the signatures were invalid.

More than 200 letters were sent by readers of the World Socialist Web Site from around the world opposing the attempt by the Democratic Party to disenfranchise hundreds of registered voters who signed Mackaman's petitions and keep a socialist, antiwar candidate off of the ballot. In the course of a detailed check of the petitions by Champaign County officials, it became clear that there was no factual basis for the Democrats' objection, and their effort had been mounted for partisan and anti-democratic purposes. On July 29, the Democratic Party official who had filed the objection withdrew her challenge. On August 2, the Champaign County Electoral Board issued an order for Tom Mackaman's name to be placed on the November 2 ballot.

Dear supporters,

As you likely know, the Socialist Equality Party prevailed in its struggle against the Democratic Party and succeeded in placing my name on the ballot in Illinois. This is a victory for democratic rights and a significant step in our party's fight for the political independence of the working class.

I wish to extend my gratitude to all of you for writing to the Champaign County Clerk to uphold my right and that of the SEP to participate in the November election. Your voices contributed in a major way to defeating the attempt by the Democratic Party machine in Illinois to disenfranchise those voters who signed my nominating petitions and to deprive the electorate of a socialist alternative to the two corporate-

dominated parties.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained throughout, the attempt to remove the SEP from the ballot was aimed at stifling political debate in the US over the most urgent issue facing the working class—the war in Iraq. The two-party system cannot tolerate any debate on this question because the war embodies the consensus policy—imperialist and neo-colonialist—of the US ruling elite, to which both major parties are entirely subordinated. As far as the Democrats, no less than the Republicans, are concerned, the existence of mass popular opposition to the war makes all the more urgent the suppression of any debate on the war in the election campaign.

The Democrats resorted to brazenly anti-democratic measures in an effort to silence the SEP because they fear that our demand for the immediate withdrawal of US troops—as well as our demand for the repeal of the Patriot Act, the Homeland Security Department and related anti-democratic measures, and for the enactment of measures to provide secure and good-paying jobs, health care, housing and education—will resonate deeply among tens of millions of people.

The Democrats are running the most right-wing presidential campaign in the modern history of that party. The spectacle of militarism and chauvinism at the Democratic convention in Boston and the repeated pro-war statements by Kerry are calculated to assure the ruling elite that a Kerry administration can be relied upon to ignore antiwar sentiment and intensify the drive to crush the resistance of the Iraqi masses against the colonial occupation of their country.

In the course of our fight in Illinois, we stressed that the same anti-democratic methods used against the SEP were being employed to exclude all candidates who opposed the war or criticized the two-party monopoly. Despite our principled political differences with both the Green Party and independent candidate Ralph Nader, we defended them

against the efforts of the Democratic Party in Illinois to keep them off the ballot.

The Democrats' drive to bar independent and third party candidates, alongside the pro-war pronouncements of Kerry, demonstrates conclusively that the aspirations of the broad masses of working people can find no outlet within the existing two-party system. It underscores the futile and illusory character of "lesser evil" politics, and all notions that the Democratic Party can be pressured from below to alter its pro-imperialist and pro-corporate policies.

It shows as well that democratic rights cannot be defended by appealing to or relying on the Democratic Party. There is an indissoluble connection between the defense of democratic rights and the struggle for the political independence of the working class and the socialist reorganization of economic life.

Your emails and letters contributed to making the struggle for ballot access in East-Central Illinois an international issue. Protest letters came to the Champaign County Clerk's office from many parts of the US and a number of different countries. Letters arrived from 23 states, and nearly a third of the total were sent from outside the US—from Australia, Sri Lanka, Canada, Germany, Great Britain, South Africa, New Zealand, and France. Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International gathered signatures on a petition in India and mailed it to the county clerk's office.

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 2003. 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.

This outpouring of letters demonstrated to the politicians of Champaign County that their actions were being closely followed by an international audience. When the Democratic Party challenged the SEP, it did not expect to encounter a national and international campaign that exposed and opposed its anti-democratic methods.

On the surface, the confrontation between the Democratic Party and the SEP might have appeared to be a mismatch. The Democrats have a powerful and corrupt political machine at their disposal, millions upon millions of dollars, high-priced lawyers, and, in the case of Illinois, the services of taxpayer-financed state employees.

We based ourselves on the interests of the vast majority of the population—working people and youth 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 their remaining support within the general population is being eroded by their pro-war and pro-corporate policies.

Our victory shows in microcosm the strength that the working class can wield when it bases itself upon a socialist and internationalist program. Your efforts both reflect and accelerate a growing consciousness on the part of working people that the struggle against war and in defense of democratic rights can be waged only as an international struggle. It vindicates the perspective of the SEP, which explained in its 2004 election statement that it intended to wage its election campaign, to the greatest extent possible, as an international campaign.

The defeat of this anti-democratic attack is important, but it is only an initial step in a struggle that must be intensified. The experience in Champaign-Urbana points to the potential for the construction of a broad movement of working people genuinely committed to the defense of democratic rights, peace and social equality. Our candidates are running in the election to encourage a serious discussion of the issues facing working people and establish the political basis for the development of such a movement.

The struggle in Illinois required the expenditure of significant financial resources, and is only one of many fights the SEP will have to undertake in the coming weeks and months, as it seeks to attain ballot status in a number of states and conduct a vigorous political campaign in the weeks leading up to Election Day.

Unlike our political opponents in the Democratic and Republican parties, who receive hundreds of millions of dollars to do the bidding of corporate America, the SEP depends upon the contributions of our supporters to sustain our election campaign. I urge you to donate to the SEP campaign, and support our fight by reading and distributing our election program, joining the petition drive to place our candidates on the ballot, and making the decision to become a member of the Socialist Equality Party.

Fraternally yours,
Tom Mackaman



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