

SEP candidate answers smear by Champaign, Illinois, newspaper

A WSWWS reporter
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Below we post a letter from Socialist Equality Party Illinois legislative candidate Tom Mackaman to the editor of the Champaign (Illinois) News-Gazette, which appeared in the newspaper's August 29 edition.

Mackaman's letter came in response to an August 23 article by News-Gazette reporter Phil Bloomer that contained unfounded and libelous accusations against the SEP candidate. [See WSWWS article "Champaign newspaper publishes smear against SEP candidate Tom Mackaman"]

The article, published in the newspaper's "Reporter's Notebook" column, alleged that Mackaman, a graduate student and teaching assistant at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, violated university rules and state ethics laws by using his university e-mail account to send a press release to the News-Gazette in July.

The press release concerned Mackaman's fight against the efforts by state and local Democratic Party officials to bar him from the ballot by challenging the SEP candidate's nominating petitions. In the course of a successful five-week struggle Mackaman and the SEP exposed the challenge as baseless and filed in bad faith.

A detailed review conducted by the Champaign County Electoral Board of the 2,009 signatures gathered by Mackaman's supporters showed that a large majority challenged by Democratic officials were, in fact, valid signatures of registered voters and that the SEP candidate had far more valid signatures than the 1,325 required to gain ballot status. On July 29 the Democrats withdrew their objection, and on August 2 the electoral board officially placed Mackaman on the ballot as the SEP candidate.

At the center of Bloomer's article was the suggestion that Mackaman was guilty of the same ethical and legal breaches that the SEP maintains Democratic Party officials committed when state employees on the staff of House Speaker Michael Madigan copied and reviewed

Mackaman's nominating petitions.

Bloomer's contention is spurious on two counts. First, Mackaman has every right to use his student e-mail account for political activity. If the university censored what students communicated in their private emails it would be a blatant violation of their privacy rights and constitutionally-protected freedom of speech.

Second, it is absurd to equate Mackaman's effort to defend his democratic right to participate in the elections and the rights of those who signed his petitions, on the one hand, with a brazenly anti-democratic attempt by the Democratic Party machine to exclude him, on the other—an effort that is part of a nationwide drive to keep independent and third-party candidates who oppose the Iraq war and the policies of the two big business parties off the November ballot.

Below Mackaman's letter to the editor we post a second letter sent by a Champaign resident in his support. To date the editors of the News-Gazette have refused to reply to Mackaman's letter.

Published under the headline, "Using private email account no violation," the SEP candidate's letter read:

To the editor,

Phil Bloomer's August 23 "Reporter's Notebook" is a political smear of my candidacy for Illinois' House District 103 on the Socialist Equality Party ticket.

Bloomer charges that I have used my University of Illinois e-mail account for political purposes and I am forbidden to do so as a University of Illinois employee. In point of fact, as a graduate student my email is on the student cluster and is paid for out of my student service fees.

Bloomer was well aware of this because I told him so when he was researching his article and he could have verified it by taking the elementary journalistic step of calling the university or looking it up on the web.

Even though I have violated no rule or law by sending

the *News-Gazette* an e-mail from my own account Bloomer argues that I am guilty of an ethics violation equivalent to that which my campaign and the campaign of Ralph Nader have charged members of the Illinois House Democratic staff.

In Bloomer's bizarre view of ethics dozens of House legislative aides directed by Speaker Michael Madigan to remove third party candidates from the ballot by poring through literally thousands of pages of petitions is the same thing as my sending the *News-Gazette* an email from my private student account.

Bloomer's allegations of illegality and ethics violations are clearly baseless and slanderous. I demand a full retraction and apology from the *News-Gazette*.

Tom Mackaman
Champaign

Another letter sent in support of Mackaman, published under the headline "Candidate Target of Vicious Lies," was published on September 1.

To the editor:

On Aug. 23, The *News-Gazette* libelously printed a story from Phil Bloomer.

Bloomer claims that Thomas Mackaman's status at the University of Illinois is listed as faculty and staff.

Actually, his listing is "Pre-Doc Fellow," as anyone can verify on the following Web site: <http://www.uiuc.edu/ricker/PH> (enter "Mackaman" in the search window). Bloomer proceeds to indict Mackaman for violating election laws on the basis of his "faculty and staff" status.

This is not an error of oversight, but a vicious lie designed to further Bloomer's partisan politics. Even if the *News-Gazette* sought truth and objectivity, nothing excuses its duplicity in Bloomer's libelous claims.

Part of responsible editing is the verification of facts, even for editorials. Shame on Bloomer and the *News-Gazette*.

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