

# More letters protest University of Illinois attack on SEP candidate Tom Mackaman

10 September 2004

*Below we post letters that have been sent to Dr. Richard Traver, the Ethics Officer at the University of Illinois, protesting the university's effort to intimidate and harass SEP state legislative candidate Tom Mackaman. On September 1, Mackaman received a "ticket" from the director of Security Services and Information Privacy threatening him with "disciplinary action" for using his campus e-mail account to send out a press release about his campaign for the state House of Representatives in Illinois District 103.*

*[See SEP statement: "Defend free speech at the University of Illinois! Hands off SEP candidate Tom Mackaman!"]*

*The threat against Mackaman is the latest episode of a months-long campaign by the Democratic Party to obstruct the SEP candidate's campaign. On July 29, a leading official in the Champaign County Democratic Party was forced to withdraw a challenge to Mackaman's nominating petitions after a detailed review of the petitions by the county electoral board showed the vast majority of the signatures challenged by the Democrats were in fact valid, and Mackaman had far more than the 1,325 signatures needed to appear on the ballot in November.*

*We urge students, workers, WSWS readers and all those who defend democratic rights to send letters of protest to Dr. Richard Traver at: rtraver@uillinois.edu*

*Please send copies of letters to: editor@wsws.org*

Dear Mr. Traver,

As an American citizen and former graduate student at the University of Illinois, I was quite disturbed to hear that your office has threatened both the student and employment status of Mr. Tom Mackaman in reaction to his use of his *private student e-mail account* to broadcast constitutionally protected political communications regarding his campaign for the Illinois State Legislature. This appears to be a not-so-subtle attempt to bully Mr. Mackaman in retaliation for his successful fight to gain ballot status against the wishes of the state Democratic Party machine, which has made it their mission to block the candidacies of any and all members of progressive third parties in Illinois. That the state's premier public university has chosen to be complicit in this anti-democratic exercise is truly shameful, and I call on you and your office to immediately rescind the threats made against Mr. Mackaman.

Sincerely,

Jeff Patten

8 September 2004

Dr. Traver,

I note that as ethics officer you have played a key role in trying to restrict the involvement of students in local politics. Politicians and businessmen in Champaign-Urbana have always opposed any interest students have taken in local politics. Fifty-five years ago, we had the same sort of interference, but fortunately we had a president who believed in free speech. The University, in spite of the politicization of the Trustees, has to stand for the freedom to pursue the truth wherever it may lead. It sounds now as though the campus would rather get along with local politicians in order to assure its budget than to stand for the academic

integrity that has led alums to contribute in a major way to the well-being of the campus.

Sincerely,

BS '49 (Class President) MA '51

8 September 2004

Dear Dr. Traver:

As an English master's student in North Carolina and an admirer of the genuine ideals of democracy, I write with serious concern regarding the recent allegation against Tom Mackaman who is enrolled at the University of Illinois. That he is a graduate student, a member of the Socialist Equality Party, and is running for the 103rd District of the Illinois House of Representatives is not an unusual state of affairs. That he submitted a press release to the *Champaign-Urbana News Gazette* with his private student e-mail account and is now being threatened with "disciplinary action" for "abusing university property" compels me to say that this is unfounded and unnerving.

Since you on behalf of the University of Illinois extend the charge of "abusing university property" (misappropriation or theft) to the use of a student's internet account, which is paid for by the student's fees, this reveals a flagrant violation of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution and Article 1 Section 4 of the Illinois Constitution, both of which protect that colossal pillar of political liberty—the right to free speech. The said charge also reflects disdain for the University Code of Conduct, which, among other things, stresses integrity and evenhandedness.

As available at your Ethics Officer website (<http://ethics.audits.uillinois.edu/>), the Code of Conduct states that the stipulation of its guidelines "is not an attempt to define specifically what one should and should not do" and that the terms of professional behavior apply to persons "acting on behalf of the University." While the complementary *Handbook for Good Ethical Practice* defines such individuals as university faculty and staff, as well as temporary, extra help, and student employees, their acting as agents and ambassadors of the University of Illinois is restricted particularly to the scope of duties assigned by the institution.

Although Mr. Mackaman is a graduate student and teaching assistant, he did not act as a university representative when he e-mailed the now-contested press release through his student account, as *World Socialist Web Site* news reports have noted. Furthermore, his membership in the SEP and his campaigning as an independent anti-war socialist candidate have, evidently, neither taken advantage of nor benefited as such from his enrollment in the university. For your office and the school to fault Mr. Mackaman's use of a private student e-mail account is an arbitrary and biased act that also ignores the elaborate activities of various political associations on University of Illinois campuses whose use of the student e-mail system is well documented.

Perhaps it need be stated that the aforementioned *Handbook for Good Ethical Practice* makes no reference whatsoever to institutional censorship of students' or student employees' electronic correspondence,

only the following: “Faculty, staff, and students are expected to exercise responsible, ethical behavior when using the University’s computers, networks, or other resources. These responsibilities include the proper storage, access, control, and disposal of private and confidential data presented to the user in any form” (10).

Should the University of Illinois, however, desire to be consistent in its case against Mr. Mackaman, then it must either carry out its threat of “disciplinary action” with absolute impartiality by banning all political activities on its campuses—beginning with the dissolution of such student organizations as the College Democrats and College Republicans—or discontinue the insidious and unsavory restrictions of freedom of speech forthwith. This must be emphasized because what is presently occurring is a distorted and anti-democratic application of justice.

As a public institution, the University of Illinois is open to public scrutiny. Pursuit of discriminatory and unprincipled aims shall blight its fine reputation on a regional, national, and international scale. Thank you for your understanding in this matter.

Sincerely yours,  
Alzo David-West  
8 September 2004  
Dear Dr. Traver,

I am writing to protest against your blatantly unfair treatment of Tom Mackaman, a graduate student and teaching assistant at your university. Mr. Mackaman has every right to use his student e-mail account—paid for with his own money—in order to engage in activities related to his campaign for state representative in the 103rd district. I am both saddened and made angry by the fact that you and various other figures in the Illinois state establishment have tried your best to stop Mr. Mackaman—an eloquent advocate of peace, social equality and the preservation and expansion of democratic rights—from exercising his basic right to stand for election as a member of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP).

As you may know, higher-level officials in the Illinois State Democratic Party have already attempted—without any valid proof whatsoever—to claim that Mr. Mackaman did not receive enough signatures to appear on the ballot. After the SEP—which, unlike the two major parties of big business, the Democrats and Republicans, does not receive any contributions from large corporations—spent their precious time and money fighting the blatantly undemocratic attempt of the Illinois State Democratic Party to keep Mr. Mackaman off the ballot, his candidacy confronted another obstacle, this time in the form of a libelous article penned by one Phil Bloomer in the *Champaign-Urbana News-Gazette*. It appears that you have thrown your support to forces that are quite willing to trample on the basic democratic rights of the people as a means to preserve the absolute dominance of the reactionary and intellectually deadening two-party system in this country. As you are the “Ethics Officer” of your university, I demand that you cease your politically motivated persecution of Mr. Mackaman immediately.

Sincerely,  
Ari Weinstein  
9 September 2004  
To Dr. Traver:

I am an alumna of the University of Illinois (LAS '02) and I was quite alarmed to hear of the action taken against Tom Mackman in light of his state representative campaign. It seems that he is being singled out because of his unconventional political stances, even though his behavior is very commonplace on a politically active campus such as the University of Illinois.

Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of my University of Illinois experience was the ability to participate in a wide variety of political activity. I was active in the College Democrats during that time, and I often used my student e-mail account and student organization e-mail account to advocate for candidates, as well as myself, as when I ran for

student government. In addition, it is common practice for various political student groups to campaign during Quad Day. Politically active students such as myself often utilized “University premises and facilities for private purposes, including political campaigning”—engaging in such commonplace activities as handing out fliers on the Quad, getting signatures for petitions in front of the Illini Union, and going to student organization meetings (held in University premises and facilities) to advocate for our various candidates. Incidentally, I was also employed by the University the whole time I was also an undergraduate student. It is quite disturbing to hear that my alma mater, to which I have great loyalty, is no longer allowing for political freedom and expression to its students and employees.

Please reconsider your actions and allow for greater freedom of speech at the University of Illinois. When alumni hear about questionable activities such as this, it truly hinders any desire to contribute funding to our alma mater.

Respectfully,  
Susan L. Kang Class of 2002  
8 September 2004  
Dear Dr. Traver,

Is it ok with you if Tom Mackaman, the SEP candidate, uses his private pen? How about his hairbrush? Will he need to wear university-issue clothes? This is the fourth e-mail I have had to send in defence of democracy in your country. The USA is fast becoming the undemocratic states of America! I can't see the problem with the use of a private e-mail account, which he has paid for himself! Which party are you supporting in the coming election? It would be interesting to find out. As far as I can see, the November election will be a fraud. There is no free debate in the media. Now it's also coming down to dirty tricks to try and keep Tom Mackaman occupied, fending off false accusations, while the Democrats and others get to say what they like. I am politely asking you to uphold the democratic principle in your country. The American people are the final judges in the election. Stand up for the democratic rights of your fellow Americans.

Many thanks for your time in reading this e-mail,  
Best regards,  
Trevor Dargue  
Great Britain  
9 September 2004

Mr. Travers,  
The recent issuing of a “ticket” to Tom Mackaman, Socialist Equality Party candidate, under the auspices of your office, constitutes a threat to free speech by student and scholars as well as a dangerous precedent for our academic community. Mr. Mackman is a student, a registered voter in the state of Illinois and a citizen with full rights. As such, Mr. Mackaman’s payment of his student fees garners him access to and the right of freedom of speech, the right to privacy, and equal access. He shares this right with other faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students as well as other student organizations. As you will note below, there are other “political messages” being disseminated through UIUC student accounts that would also seemingly fulfill the mandate of email limitation based on political campaigning.

Political: (available from:  
<http://www.uiuc.edu/regorgs/category.html#Political>)

Academy, The President: Easter Smith  
307 E. Healey Apt. #11 Champaign, IL 61820  
(217) 344-1571, [esmith5@uiuc.edu](mailto:esmith5@uiuc.edu)

Purpose: To facilitate an environment conducive to open debates on controversial issues.

Campus Greens of UIUC  
President: Susan Rodgers  
1005 W. Stoughton St. Urbana, IL 61801

619-985-3553, srrodger@uiuc.edu

Purpose: To promote a variety of progressive causes that have a direct impact on the environment, economy, and social and political landscape.

College Democrats

President: Erin Janulis

701 W. Elm #9 Urbana, IL 61801

ejanulis@uiuc.edu

Purpose: To promote and extend the ideas of the Democratic Party on the University of Illinois campus

College Libertarians

President: Justin Doran

508 E. Clark Street Champaign, IL 61820-4499

847-917-0603, jmdoran@uiuc.edu

Purpose: To educate the campus body about the Libertarian philosophy and support local Libertarian candidates.

Illinois-Israel Public Affairs Committee

President: David Johnson

608 E. Chalmers St. #103 Champaign, IL 61820

217-621-2057, dajohnso@uiuc.edu

Purpose: To support Israel through education about the importance of a strong US-Israel relationship.

National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, UIUC

Chapter

President: Matthew King

IL

mdking@uiuc.edu

Purpose: To educate about the negative effects of the Drug War and work to legalize marijuana.

Orange and Blue Observer

President: Leo Buchignani

2804 Chesapeake Bloomington, IL 61704

309-661-9182, buchigna@uiuc.edu

Purpose: Conservative Journal

Rock the Vote

President: Kelly Ritchie

48 E. John Apt 201 Champaign, IL 61820

708-439-4151, kritchier@uiuc.edu

Purpose: Rock the Vote is dedicated to protecting freedom of expression and empowering young people to change their world by encouraging students to register to vote.

Students for David Cobb

President: Jennifer Walling

809 W. Main Urbana, IL 61801

217-384-8392, jwalling@uiuc.edu

Purpose: To aid David Cobb, Green Party presidential candidate, in his efforts to build the Green Party and to promote the Ten Key Values of the Green Party.

Further, as the University itself provides a database of all student e-mail and contact information on its internationally available website, all e-mail addresses can be collected and disseminated from any point of origin.

I urge you to withdraw this threat to academic freedom and the integrity of the university as a space for open dialogue, discussion, and the embracing of diverse views. It is vitally important that our University of Illinois community keep open the dialogues of political, social, and cultural debate.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Guiliano

8 September 2004

Registered Voter, Illinois

Graduate Student

Department of History

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

407 West White #11

Champaign, Illinois 61820

217-356-3775

guiliano@uiuc.edu



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**