

Democratic operatives aim to bar SEP from Illinois ballot

Who are Jim Rogal and Liz Brown?

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Staffers for the Illinois Democratic Party, with close connections to two of the state's most powerful machine politicians, have copied and reviewed nominating petitions submitted by the Socialist Equality Party in apparent preparation for a challenge aimed at barring SEP candidate Joe Parnarauskis from the ballot. Parnarauskis, who is running for State Senate in Illinois' 52nd Legislative District, which includes the twin cities of Champaign-Urbana, submitted petitions bearing the names of 4,991 voters on Monday, June 26.

In 2004, the Democratic Party filed an objection to the petitions of SEP state legislative candidate Tom Mackaman, claiming that more than half of the signatures were invalid. This contention was proven false in the course of a month-long legal and political battle, in which it became clear that the majority of signatures challenged by the Democrats belonged to legally registered voters and that their bad faith effort had been conducted to disrupt the SEP campaign and force the party to incur large legal fees.

It is becoming clear the Democrats are likely preparing to employ such a dirty tricks operation to once again deprive voters of an opportunity to vote for a socialist candidate who opposes the war and pro-business policies of both major parties. While the Democrats have continuously collaborated with the Bush administration, they will stop at nothing to prevent the emergence of a political party that gives voice to the interests of the mass of working class people and challenges the two-party monopoly and the capitalist system it defends.

Less than 24 hours after the SEP submitted its petitions, Jim Rogal of Springfield, Illinois, copied hundreds of sheets, according to the web site of the State Board of Elections. The following day, June 28 at 8:54 a.m., Liz Brown, also of Springfield, copied the petitions as well. At 9:56 a.m. on June 28, Rogal returned to the board of elections offices to again view the SEP petitions. Rogal and Brown were also involved in checking the petitions submitted by candidates from the Green Party in Illinois.

Searches for the two on the directory of Illinois state employees <http://www.illinois.gov/teledirectory/> list Rogal as

"Assistant Chief of Staff" for the State Senate and Elizabeth Brown as "House Democrat Staff" member at the Illinois House of Representatives. Rogal works for Emil Jones, the Chicago-based president of the State Senate who is one of the most influential power brokers in the Illinois Democratic Party. Known as US Senator Barack Obama's "political godfather," an April 2005 article in *Ebony* magazine noted that Jones has "mastered the art of the wheeler-dealer over the past 40 years to firmly take the helm of his current post. His motto: 'Know your opponent and be solidly prepared.'"

For years Liz Brown has worked for Democratic Speaker of the House Michael Madigan, another one of the "Four Tops" of Illinois politics, who include Jones and the two Republican leaders of the State Senate and House of Representatives. A Chicago-based Democrat, Madigan led the effort to keep independent presidential candidate Ralph Nader off the Illinois ballot in 2004, while members of his staff, including Liz Brown, carried out the effort against SEP candidate Tom Mackaman in Champaign-Urbana.

In the efforts against Nader and the SEP, paid state employees, including Brown, were used to challenge petitions. This is an explicit violation of the state's Election Code and the State Employees Ethics in Government Act, which states: "State employees shall not intentionally perform any prohibited political activity during any compensated time." "Prohibited political activity" includes "circulating, reviewing, or filing any petition on behalf of a candidate for elective office or for or against any referendum in question." Madigan refused requests to release the time sheets of staff members and the state's Attorney General, *his daughter* Lisa Madigan, never pursued the matter.

In an apparent effort to skirt these restrictions this time, Democratic Party staffers are evidently being granted "leave" as state employees and are being hired by various "Political Action Committees" set up by the Democrats, enabling them to continue to collect a pay check while doing the dirty work of their political bosses. A reporter who covers Springfield politics and who asked not to be identified said, "Brown has been on Madigan's staff at least since 2000. A lot of them go on leave

and receive the same pay through some campaign organization. They get the same salary and technically they are not working for the state.”

When this reporter called Illinois Senate President Emil Jones’s office the receptionist confirmed that Rogal was indeed a staff member. After I explained I wanted to talk to Rogal about his role in checking the SEP petitions, I was put on hold. Soon thereafter, the receptionist said she had made a “mistake” and that Rogal did not work there after all. She directed me to a spokesperson who claimed Rogal had not been employed on Jones’s staff for nearly three years and didn’t I know there was a state ethics law prohibiting state employees from such activities.

A Google search for “Jim Rogal” reveals information that suggests that Rogal was still employed by Jones last year. During a July 3, 2005 session of the State Senate, Democratic Senator George Shadid speaks of a successful college football player from his district named James “Boomer” Grigsby. Introducing the athlete’s family to Senate President Jones, Shadid says, “[Joining] Boomer today is his sister and brother-in-law Jim and Jenni Grisby-Rogal. Which I’m sure you know Jim Rogal, Mr. President. He works for you on your staff.”

Rogal told this reporter that he is no longer employed on Jones’s staff but has been employed by the Illinois Democrat Senate Fund for “several years.” The fund is a political action committee set up by the Illinois Democrats to finance state election campaigns. According to the Center for Public Integrity, Rogal was paid thousands of dollars by the Illinois Democrat Senate fund in 2003-2004, a period during which it raised \$4,243,471 for its candidates from law firms, labor unions, electric power utilities, telecommunications companies, banks, casino interests and food and tobacco companies.

It is hard to determine the exact status of Rogal in the shadowy network of Democratic Party politics. Nevertheless, it is clear that both Rogal and Brown are working to prevent any political challenge to the Democrats’ right-wing policies. In addition to the SEP and the Greens, the Democrats are apparently also targeting Bill Scheurer, a former Democrat, who is running as an independent antiwar candidate for US Congress in Illinois’ 8th Congressional District, challenging Democratic incumbent Melissa Bean.

In May, Scheurer was contacted by a man named Anthony Constantine of AR Consulting, who offered his services to help collect signatures for Scheurer. It turns out that Constantine works in the Chicago office of Democratic Congressman Dan Lipinski. With the July 3 deadline approaching to submit petitions, the thousands of signatures the man said he had been collecting never materialized. Constantine denies he ever contacted Scheurer.

The Democrats’ campaign in 2004 to remove SEP candidate Tom Mackaman from the ballot revealed the modus operandi it employs against political opponents. Madigan’s office slandered the SEP with the false accusation that Mackaman had

submitted “phony petitions.” In fact, their objection had no basis in reality and had been made in bad faith. This was underscored by the comments of Mark Shelden, the Champaign county clerk, whose office supervised the process of verifying signatures that were challenged by the Democrats.

Writing on a blog on the Illinipundit.com web site, Shelden wrote on June 28, “If you were involved at all in the Mackaman case two years ago, you would have seen that the challenge was purely a harassment challenge. Fewer than half the signatures challenged by Democratic Party Chairman Gerrie Parr were actually tossed. Those of us who reviewed them would have awarded attorney’s fees to Mackaman if there had been a legal provision to do so.”

For months activists in Chicago and other cities have reported that Michael Madigan has been training a “small army” of campaign workers on how to challenge third-party petitions for the 2006 elections. The State of Illinois already has among the worst ballot access laws in the nation, with onerous signature requirements and some of the earliest filing deadlines in the US. Even after overcoming these undemocratic obstacles, challengers face a continued conspiracy by the two parties to keep them off the ballot.

According to the Illinois State Constitution, “All elections shall be free and equal.” The filing of an objection which the Illinois Democrats know is without merit is a violation of the Illinois Election Code, which prohibits the use of “deception, forgery or bribery” to carry out activities whereby another is “deprived of having or exercising any right, privilege or immunity secured by the Constitution or laws of the US or state of Illinois relating to the conduct of elections, voting, or nomination or election of candidates for public or political party office.” It is furthermore a violation of federal voting rights laws that prohibit anyone “acting under color of state law” from interfering with constitutional rights.

The Socialist Equality Party calls on the readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* and all those who defend democratic rights to oppose this travesty of democracy and email letters of protest to the Illinois State Board of Elections at webmaster@elections.state.il.us.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact