Stop the Democratic Party's attack on third-party campaigns! Place SEP candidate Joe Parnarauskis on the ballot in Illinois!

Socialist Equality Party
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The Socialist Equality Party calls on all our supporters and all those who defend democratic rights, in the United States and throughout the world, to flood the Illinois Board of Elections with protests against the attempt by the Democratic Party to keep SEP state Senate candidate Joe Parnarauskis off the November ballot.

The SEP calls for joint action with other third parties, including the Green Party of Illinois, whose gubernatorial and other statewide candidates are also being challenged, to defeat the efforts of the Democratic and Republican parties to deny citizens the right to vote for a candidate of their choice.

On July 3, the Illinois Democratic Party filed an objection challenging the validity of more than half the signatures collected on nominating petitions for Parnarauskis, the SEP candidate for state Senate from the 52nd Legislative District, which includes Champaign, Urbana and Danville in east central Illinois. Parnarauskis is running against Democrat Michael Frerichs and Republican Judy Meyers.

The SEP submitted 4,991 signatures, far more than the 2,985 required to place an independent candidate on the ballot.

The objection was filed by two local Democratic Party precinct committeemen from Danville—Gregory Lietz and John Dreher. Behind these party functionaries, however, stands the full weight of the Illinois Democratic Party machine, which is determined to prevent any challenge to the two-party monopoly.

The objections to the SEP and the Illinois Green Party were submitted to the Board of Elections office in Chicago by Michael J. Kasper, the general counsel and treasurer of the Illinois Democratic Party. Kasper's past clients include President Clinton, the Gore-Lieberman campaign in 2004, US Senator Dick Durbin, and scores of Democratic politicians in Chicago and the state capital of Springfield, including Illinois House Speaker Michael J. Madigan, one of the state's most powerful machine politicians.

Kasper led the legal effort to bar independent presidential candidate Ralph Nader from the Illinois ballot in 2004. Notwithstanding such anti-democratic activities, Kasper teaches courses on Voting Rights and on Elections and the Legislative Process at the John Marshall Law School.

Illinois already has some of the most onerous ballot access laws in the US, with large signature requirements and early filing deadlines. Despite these obstacles, SEP supporters collected nearly 5,000 signatures in Champaign and Vermilion counties—a testimony to widespread dissatisfaction with the two-party system and the desire of large numbers of working people for a socialist alternative to the pro-war and pro-corporate policies of the Democrats and Republicans.

The effort to bar our candidate from the ballot is not only an attack on the SEP, it is an attempt to disenfranchise those who signed our petitions and prevent citizens from having the opportunity to vote for an alternative to the two corporate-controlled parties.

The thuggish methods being employed by the Democrats should put to rest any illusions that this is a party "of the people" or one that defends democratic rights. The Democrats cower before the Bush administration, but they act ruthlessly and employ all means, fair or foul, to keep socialist and antiwar political opponents off the ballot.

The Democrats intend to employ the same unscrupulous methods against Parnarauskis that they used in 2004 against Tom Mackaman, who ran as the SEP candidate for state legislature from the 103rd District in Champaign County.

Champaign County Clerk Mark Shelden recently stated on the web site *Illinipundit.com*, "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... Those of us who reviewed them would have awarded attorney's fees to Mackaman if there had been a legal provision to do so."

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The Democrats' challenge to Mackaman's nominating petitions began with Michael Madigan using paid legislative staffers to review the SEP petitions, along with those of the Greens, the Libertarians and Ralph Nader. This was a direct violation of the state's Election Code and the State Employees Ethics in Government Act, which forbid state employees from engaging in partisan political activity during working hours.

Madigan blocked any investigation into this illegal activity by refusing to release the timesheets of his employees, and the matter was quashed by the state's attorney general, Lisa Madigan, daughter of Michael Madigan.

When Democratic Party petition checkers were presented by Champaign County officials with voter rolls proving that the signers of Mackaman's petitions were legally registered, they refused to withdraw their objections. They had been given written instructions to uphold every objection, now matter how transparently false. Meanwhile, a spokesman for Madigan accused the SEP of submitting "phony petitions."

The Democrats dropped their challenge only after a month-long legal and political fight by the SEP, in the course of which scores of protest letters from throughout the US and around the world were sent to the county clerk's office.

In reprising the same gutter methods against SEP candidate Parnarauskis, the Democrats calculate that, at the very least, they can impose enormous financial and logistical burdens on our party, which will have to divert manpower and resources from our campaign to fight the challenge.

The Democrats have objected to 2,537 signatures, or 51 percent of the 4,991 signatures submitted by the SEP. They claim that the SEP is 531 signatures below the minimum (2,985), and therefore Parnarauskis' name should not be placed on the ballot.

The Democrats have no interest in discerning the intent of the voters who signed the SEP petitions. They have one aim—to exclude as many signatures as possible, using whatever technical discrepancies they can find, or invent. These include signers printing their names instead of writing them in cursive, or leaving out an apartment number.

They are demanding that 44 petition sheets, bearing the names of some 440 voters who want to see the SEP on the ballot, be thrown out. Why? Because under the heading "Office" they say "State Senator" instead of "State Senator—52nd District!" (This despite the fact that every petition sheet speaks of "qualified voters of the 52nd State Senate Legislative District.")

What is the difference between such methods and the dirty tricks employed by the Republicans to stop the Florida recount in 2000 and suppress the vote in Ohio in 2004? Trampling on voting rights and political expression is a bipartisan policy of America's two big business parties.

These methods violate the spirit and letter of US and state voting rights laws, including the Illinois State Constitution, which declares, "All elections shall be free and equal." The state's election code also prohibits the use of "deception, forgery and bribery" to deprive individuals of their rights in relation to the "conduct of elections, voting, or nomination or election of candidates for public or political party office."

The more the base of popular support for the two-party system narrows, the more the Democrats and Republicans conspire to deprive the mass of working people of any political channel through which they can express their aspirations and demands.

The Socialist Equality Party intends to wage an aggressive legal and political fight to place our candidate, Joe Parnarauskis, on the Illinois ballot. On July 11, a preliminary hearing on the Democrats' objection will be held by the Illinois Board of Elections—a body made up of four Democrats and four Republicans. We call on all of our supporters and all readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* to send letters of protest to the State Board of Elections at webmaster@elections.state.il.us.

This fight will require a considerable expenditure of funds. We appeal to all of our readers and supporters, and all those who defend democratic rights, to send contributions to the SEP election fund.

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