

WSWS readers protest Democrats' bid to bar SEP candidate from Illinois ballot

7 July 2006

Below we post letters from WSWS readers protesting the Illinois Democratic Party's effort to exclude Socialist Equality Party state Senate candidate Joe Parnarauskis from the ballot. On July 3, the Illinois Democrats filed an objection to Parnarauskis' nominating petitions, challenging the validity of more than half of the 4,991 signatures submitted by the SEP to the State Board of Elections.

The Democrats are employing the same anti-democratic methods as in their unsuccessful bid to bar SEP candidate for state legislature Tom Mackaman from the ballot in 2004. They have one aim—to exclude as many signatures as possible, using whatever technical discrepancies they can find or invent. A preliminary examination of the Democrats' objections has already revealed that they are seeking to disqualify legally registered voters whose signatures and addresses on petition sheets clearly match the information on their voter registration cards.

In addition to the SEP, the Illinois Democrats are challenging the entire statewide slate of the Illinois Green Party, including its gubernatorial candidate Rich Whitney.

The Socialist Equality Party intends to wage an aggressive legal and political fight to place Joe Parnarauskis on the Illinois ballot. On July 11, a preliminary hearing on the Democrats' challenge 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.

Dear Illinois Board of Elections,

I am writing to protest in the strongest terms the anti-democratic attempt of the Illinois Democratic Party to deny third-party candidates their rightful place on the November ballot.

As you know, on July 3, the Illinois Democratic Party filed a challenge to more than half the signatures collected on nominating petitions for Mr. Joe Parnarauskis, the candidate for state Senate (52nd Legislative District) of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP). This challenge was submitted only a few hours before the deadline for such petition challenges, and is clearly in the mold of the Democratic Party's harassment of SEP candidate Tom Mackaman in 2004 (who ran for a 103rd District state legislature seat). Michael J. Kasper, general counsel and treasurer of the Illinois Democratic Party, submitted to the Chicago Board of Elections the Democrats' objections to ongoing SEP and Illinois Green Party campaigns.

Kasper was a leader of Democrats' efforts in 2004 to keep Ralph Nader off the Illinois ballot. Evidently, Mr. Kasper regards denying ballot status to third-party candidates as a core component of Democratic Party strategy. Yet the Illinois state election code specifically prohibits the use of deception to deny individuals their rights as to the "conduct of elections, voting, or nomination or election of candidates for public or

political party office." In the present Parnarauskis case, the main Democratic objection is that 44 petition sheets 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.") If that's not an example of deception and frivolous harassment, I can't imagine what is.

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." The disgraceful tactics of the Democrats at that time included objecting to the signatures of voters who, for example, were registered as "William" but who signed the petitions as "Bill." Then, as now, the Dems objected to signatures that were printed as opposed to being written in cursive.

I was for many years a registered Democrat, who finally left the party because of its pathological cowardice and abandonment of principle. With a certain irony, I now thank the Illinois Democratic Party for providing me this shining example of the party's utter bankruptcy and corruption—it will be useful for me, in convincing friends and acquaintances to leave the Party as well.

As for you ladies and gentlemen of the Elections Board, I urge you to focus on the root concepts of meaningful democracy, and on your duty as defined by the state elections code to put an end to frivolous harassment challenges. Your responsibility is to the nearly 5,000 citizens who signed the SEP petition, and who want the chance to vote in November for the program the SEP candidate represents.

Sincerely,

Richard Mynick
Berkeley, California
6 July 2006

Below we post an exchange between a WSWS reader and Steve Sturm, a legal counsel for the Illinois State Board of Elections.

To Whom it May Concern:

I am appalled that the Democratic Party not only continues to support the illegal occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, but that it also tries to prevent 3rd parties from offering an alternative program to millions of American men and women that are disgusted with the foreign policy of both the Democrats and Republicans.

As an American citizen and a voter, I demand that the Illinois Board of Elections stop their anti-democratic intimidation and harassment of the Socialist Equality Party and the Illinois Green Party.

Ira W.
Philadelphia, PA
6 July 2006

Steve Sturm replies for the Illinois Board of Elections:

An objection to the candidacy of Mr. Parnarauskis was filed on Monday,

July 3 by two private citizens, Gregory Lietz and John Dreher. Any presumption of a connection to the Democratic Party is conjecture. The State Board of Elections will consider the objection and employ a hearing officer to rule on the issues raised in the objection. That process will take several weeks and may involve checking the validity of the signatures on Mr. Parnauskis' petition. The Board will then determine if Mr. Parnauskis' petitions were filed in compliance with the Election Code. He will remain on the ballot if they were.

Steve Sturm
6 July 2006

Ira W. replies:

As I understand it, the "private citizens" you speak of are two local Democratic Party precinct committeemen from Danville. Their connection to the Democratic Party is anything but conjecture, and I'm sure you are aware of that. If I am wrong about that, I await your response.

Ira W.
6 July 2006
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To whom it may concern,

On July 3, the Illinois Democratic Party filed an objection challenging the validity of more than half the signatures collected on nominating petitions for Parnauskis, the SEP candidate for state Senate from the 52nd Legislative District. The SEP submitted 4,991 signatures, far more than the 2,985 required to place an independent candidate on the ballot.

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

Reflecting the criminality of the US political system, we see M.J. Kasper, general counsel and treasurer of the Illinois Democratic Party, who also teaches courses on Voting Rights, Elections and the Legislative Process, submitting ballot objections to the SEP candidate in an effort to prevent any challenge to the two-party monopoly by the use of clearly anti-democratic and illegal methods.

The word democracy in the US has become a euphemism for the murder of over 100,000 Iraqi citizens, innocent of any crime, and the murder of who knows how many US soldiers. The word democracy in the US has become degraded to mean torture and the fabricated war on terror. Perhaps a new word should be found to define the inviolable right of every individual to freedom, liberty and the right to live in peace without the fear of oppression.

I demand that SEP candidate Joe Parnauskis be placed on the ballot for the state Senate. The egregious tactics employed by the Democrats will only serve to further discredit them (if that's possible). Paradoxically, the actions of the Democrats can only further the cause of SEP by demonstrating to the working classes the absolute necessity of a complete reorganisation of society based on a socialist perspective.

David Dieni
Melbourne, Australia
6 July 2006
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On July 3, the Illinois Democratic Party filed an objection challenging the validity of more than half the signatures collected on nominating petitions for Joe Parnauskis, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for state Senate from the 52nd Legislative District.

As a lawyer and as an ordinary American citizen, I am writing to protest in the strongest terms the dishonest and anti-democratic actions of Democratic Party functionaries Gregory Lietz and John Dreher in their bad-faith objections to voter signatures supporting the placement of Parnauskis on the ballot. I urge the state board of elections to take all appropriate action to oppose these activities by the Democratic Party, which dishonestly aims at keeping the SEP (and other parties) from the

ballot. This is a threat to the very heart of American democracy.

Respectfully submitted,
John J. Tobin
(US citizen, resident of Tokyo, Japan)
6 July 2006
* * *

Sirs:

For a number of years I taught both the US Constitution & the Illinois Constitution at the high school level. Now I find that elements in my own state are trampling on its Constitution in efforts to keep Socialist Equality candidate Joe Parnauskis off the ballot as he runs for state Senator in the Illinois 52nd District. What are we citizens of Illinois to think of a system where paid operatives of the Democratic Party are copying petitions submitted by the SEP? Is this a rehash of their attempts in 2004 to keep Mr. Mackaman off the ballot in the 103rd legislative district? It looks like once again we are getting a harassment challenge to run up the SEP's attorney fees and prevent the voters from having a socialist choice in the upcoming election.

Vicki Doetsch
6 July 2006
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It has come to my attention that the Illinois Democrats have filed a completely bogus objection to the ballot access petitions filed by the SEP for the candidacy of Joe Parnauskis. This action has two purposes, neither of them legitimate:

1. The Democrats are attempting to exclude a rival political party from the ballot, and are attempting to use Illinois election law not as a means of facilitating the democratic participation of broad masses of people in politics, but as a means of excluding all rival political positions and programs.

2. The Democrats are attempting to force the SEP to squander its by comparison meager resources (the SEP receives no corporate donations) on a legal battle that will last for weeks, if not months. This will undoubtedly have an effect on the SEP's ability to conduct a proper political campaign.

Included in the objections is a smear statement accusing the SEP petitioners of falsifying signatures on their petition documents. I helped to circulate petitions for the Parnauskis campaign. I can personally attest to the validity of all of the signatures I gathered, which were gathered in blazing summer heat and drizzling rain at the Farmer's Market in Urbana, at the Taste of Champaign festival, in grocery store parking lots, and on public sidewalks. I asked all people who stopped to sign the petition whether or not they were registered voters in the district, and explained that it was necessary for them to be absolutely confident in their voter registration information, since the SEP anticipated another bad-faith challenge from the Democrats.

These Democrats have nothing but contempt for the wishes of the voters in the 52nd Senate district, and for democratic elections in general!

Throw out this bogus objection! Uphold free, open, and fair elections in the state of Illinois! Award the SEP legal fees to fight this phony challenge!

Sincerely,
TS
5 July 2006
* * *

The word "democracy" means of the people, by the people and for the people. It does not mean "of the Democratic Party, by the Jacks-in-Office, and for the corporations."

The people, in this case registered voters in the State of Illinois, are pursuing their rights under the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, to support the candidacy of a party that they see as representing their interests, as opposed to the interests of corporations and multi-

millionaires. It is not only their enshrined legal right to do so, but it is their obligation to do so, to maintain the freedoms being celebrated this Fourth of July.

Beyond the fireworks, parades and barbecues that are the extent of the celebration of American Independence for most people, the people of Illinois who signed the petition to place Joe Parnarauskis on the ballot for state Senate in the 52nd Legislative District are actively celebrating the rights and responsibilities enumerated by the Founding Fathers by expressing their dissatisfaction with the current government, and are fulfilling the true responsibilities of citizens by taking part in the political process of the country and giving their support to change.

The same cannot be said, I'm afraid, for the Democratic Party machine in the State of Illinois. On the contrary, the Democrats, by their bogus challenges to legitimate signatures of registered voters and their express aim of destroying any attempt by third parties to express the will of the people of their state, are going against everything this country was founded for and everything that subsequent generations have struggled and died for.

The entrenched powers of the two big-business parties, the Republicans and Democrats, are supporting a tyranny over the people by working to eliminate all challenges to their policies of making the rich richer and forcing the remainder of the population to live in a state of poverty and injustice.

The Democrats of Illinois must cease and desist from their gangster tactics of subverting the ability of the people to place on the ballot and vote for a candidate of their choosing. I beseech the Board of Elections not to allow this to happen.

C. Zaremba
San Francisco, CA
4 July 2006
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To whom it may concern:

It seems the Democratic Party in Illinois believes that they along with the Republican Party have a franchise on standing candidates in elections. They apparently will brook no contenders from any other party for any office.

This seems to be a recurring theme in Illinois, and I am left to wonder just how party officials rationalize things to themselves when they tell their constituents and their children that they are "bringing democracy" to Iraq. (Or Afghanistan, Venezuela, Somalia, Bosnia, Guatemala, Panama, Nicaragua, El Salvador, etc., etc. ad nauseam).

That the oldest party in the Republic feels so threatened by this young upstart party of socialists that they feel they need to challenge the nominating petitions (yet again,) for candidacy to the office of state Senate says quite a bit about how tenuous support for the two major parties is in Illinois. But, putting that aside, the fact that Illinois allows the Democrats to repeatedly get away with their bad-faith, (and costly) challenges to third party candidates without suffering any punitive measures puts the lie to the claim that we are living in a democracy. (I understand that the Democrats have also challenged the entire Green Party ticket.)

I demand that the challenges put forth by the Democrats be dismissed immediately, and, at the very least, those who put forth the challenges be censured in some way, so that this does not happen again during the next election cycle.

Herman Rogers Jr.
Las Vegas, NV
4 July 2006
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To the State Board of Elections:

It is the duty of the Illinois State Board of Elections to put an immediate stop to the illegal and unethical deprivation of the rights to run for office

of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and its candidate for state Senate in the 52nd Legislative District, Joe Parnarauskis, as well as other political opponents of those in power.

The reports of the wholesale challenges being prepared against the more than sufficient signatures collected by the SEP to obtain ballot status are without merit and are nothing but a fishing expedition to deny democratic rights. Perhaps it is time for the Democratic Party to end the charade it carries out with the use of its name. How is this different than the actions by which the Republican Party is generally considered to have stolen recent presidential elections.

The possible involvement of key Democratic Party activists while still Illinois state employees—Jim Rogal, who has worked as Assistant Chief of Staff for State Senate President Emil Jones, and Elizabeth Brown, a House Staff member for Democratic Speaker of the House Michael Madigan—should be investigated for their illegally "acting under color of state law" to interfere with constitutional rights.

Although I am a resident of New York, we are all aware of the broader national implications of local elections. As a teacher of history and government, I am aware of the corrupt reputation of Democratic Party politics in Illinois. It is time to give a chance for the voice of all people to be heard in the elections necessary for democracy.

Sincerely,
Harvey Lichtman
New York, N.Y.
30 June 2006



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact