

Illinois Democrats file bogus objection in bid to bar SEP from ballot

Jerome White**4 July 2006**

The Illinois Democratic Party filed a last-minute objection to the nominating petitions of Socialist Equality Party state senatorial candidate Joe Parnarauskis Monday afternoon, less than two hours before the deadline for such challenges.

The objection, filed at the State Board of Elections offices in Chicago by Michael J. Kasper, the general counsel of the Illinois Democratic Party, lays out the most trivial and unjustified criticisms of the nominating petitions in an effort to invalidate the signatures of hundreds or even thousands of legally registered voters and bar Parnarauskis from the ballot.

On June 26, the SEP submitted 4,991 signatures to the board of elections, well above the 2,985 signatures required to place a candidate on the ballot for the state senate in the 52nd Legislative District, which includes Champaign-Urbana in east central Illinois. Within 24 hours of the submission of the petitions, Democratic operatives with close connections to Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan and Senate President Emil Jones began copying and reviewing the signatures in preparation for the challenge.

The Illinois Democrats have also objected to the petitions submitted for the entire statewide slate of the Illinois Green Party, including their gubernatorial candidate, as well as Green Party candidates running in several local races.

Even if the Democrats fail to keep Parnarauskis and others off the ballot, their aim is to impose as large a financial and logistical burden as possible on third party candidates, whose campaigns have a fraction of the resources of the two big business parties. To fight the Democrats' frivolous claims inevitably involves the outlay of legal fees and other expenses, and the waste of many hours that could be devoted to the campaign itself.

While the Democrats crawl before the Bush administration and the Republicans, they will spare no effort to fight their opponents on the left, particularly the Socialist Equality Party, which presents the working class with a socialist alternative to the two parties of war and big business.

The objection to the SEP petitions will be reviewed by the

State Board of Elections—composed of four Democrats and four Republicans, appointed by the governor. The first hearing of the Board will take place simultaneously and by teleconference in Chicago and Springfield on July 11 at 9 a.m. At that preliminary hearing rules for the review will be adopted, attorneys will file to represent their clients, deadlines will be established and oral arguments scheduled. Andrew Spiegel, an expert on ballot access law in Illinois who successfully defeated the Democrats' 2004 objection to SEP state legislative candidate Tom Mackaman's petitions, will represent Parnarauskis.

The objection against the SEP was filed in the name of two Democratic Party precinct committeemen in Danville, Illinois—attorney Gregory Lietz and former city councilman and Community Development Manager for the city of Danville, John Dreher. The document begins with the hypocritical claim that the two objectors are solely "desirous that the laws" of filing nominating petitions are "properly complied with, and that only qualified candidates appear on the ballot."

The details of the objection, however, demonstrate contempt for democratic principles and laws designed to protect voting rights.

The first claim is that petitions include "names of persons who are not registered voters, or who are not registered voters at the addresses shown next to their names." It is a fact that SEP petitioners asked each signer if he or she was registered to vote before accepting his or her signature. If, however, certain signatures do not match the addresses on registration rolls, this only underscores the undemocratic character of the state's "registered at address" rule. This requirement has been struck down in several other states because it disproportionately discriminates against lower-income families and students, who tend to move more often.

The objectors then contend that the petitions include "names of persons who did not sign the papers in their own proper persons, and such signatures are not genuine and are forgeries." This slanderous claim, which is presented without proof, is another effort to arbitrarily exclude legally

registered voters whose signatures, the Democrats assert, differ—even in the slightest manner—from the way their names appear on registration cards made out, in some cases, years earlier.

The petitions sheets, the objectors continue, also contain names of persons “for whom the addresses are given are either missing entirely or are incomplete.” This objection can be leveled against a signer who omitted an apartment number or something as inconsequential as the word “Street” or “Road.”

Underscoring the farcical character of the objection, the Democrats also complain that several signatures were printed instead of signed.

Finally, the Democrats attempt to throw out 44 petition sheets (with as many as 440 signatures) based on the claim that these sheets list under the heading “office” the words “State Senator,” while the remaining 477 sheets circulated by SEP petitioners list the office as “State Senator—52nd District.” By failing to identify the legislative district, the objectors claim, petitioners “mislead [sic] those persons who actually signed said sheets.”

It is true that some sheets do only list “State Senator” under “office.” But it is absurd to claim that voters did not know what district Parnarauskis was running in. Each of the petition sheets—including the 44 allegedly “suspect” sheets—begins with the preamble: “We, the undersigned, qualified voters of the 52nd State Senate Legislative District of the State of Illinois ... do hereby petition that the following named persons shall be candidates for the offices hereinafter specified.” It is therefore self-evident that “State Senator” refers to “State Senator—52nd Legislative District.”

Based on these supposed “irregularities,” the objectors claim, the SEP did not meet the requirement of 2,985 valid signatures. They conclude by requesting that the Board of Elections rule that the nominating petitions “are insufficient in law and fact” and that the “name Joe Parnarauskis shall not appear and not be printed on the ballot for election to the office of State Senator for the 52nd District of the State of Illinois, to be voted for at the General Election to be held on November 7, 2006.”

The objection by the Democrats has nothing to do with the search for the truth, let alone an interest in discerning the *intent* of the voters who signed the SEP petitions to place a political alternative on the ballot. In a manner similar to the dirty tricks operation the Republicans used to stop the recount in Florida in the 2000 presidential election and suppress the vote in Ohio in 2004, the Democrats are deliberately attempting to frustrate the will of thousands of voters in Champaign and Vermilion counties, who placed their names on the Parnarauskis petitions.

Illinois has some of the most burdensome ballot access

laws in the country, with onerous signature requirements and one of the earliest filing deadlines. After imposing these requirements on third party candidates, the two big business parties do everything in their power to obstruct independent candidates from surmounting the legal hurdles. Petitioners are regularly barred from privately owned malls and other locations where large number of voters congregate, and are even harassed in “public” places. During the SEP campaign, for example, library officials in both Champaign and Urbana barred petitioning outside the public libraries and a Champaign police officer threatened an SEP petitioner on a public street near the University of Illinois.

To invalidate the nominating petitions the Democrats would have to disqualify more than 40 percent of the signatures gathered by the SEP. Like the 2004 objection filed by the Illinois Democrats against SEP state legislative candidate Tom Mackaman, the current challenge is largely a fishing expedition that uses minor technicalities to disqualify the signatures of hundreds of legally registered voters. Even after a preliminary examination showed the 2004 challenge was essentially groundless, the Democrats continued to object to signatures that matched voter registration records. They only dropped their bad-faith challenge after a month-long legal battle and after readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* from around the country and the world emailed letters of protest to election officials.

Responding to the Democrats’ objection Joe Parnarauskis told the WSWS, “This is calculated effort to disenfranchise voters in my district and block any independent voice dedicated to the aspirations of the working class. Directed by the machine politicians in Springfield and Chicago, the Democrats are carrying out another bad faith effort to keep the Socialist Equality Party off of the 2006 ballot, just as they tried in 2004. The SEP intends to wage a legal and political fight not only to defend our rights but the rights of thousands of voters who signed petitions to place a socialist candidate on the ballot and oppose the political monopoly of the two capitalist parties. I urge readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* and all those who defend democratic rights to oppose this travesty of justice and email the Illinois State Board of Elections to demand that my name be placed on the ballot in the November elections.”

Email letters of protest to the Illinois State Board of Elections at webmaster@elections.state.il.us.



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