

Michigan community college acknowledges SEP right to petition

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Officials at Oakland Community College in Michigan notified the Socialist Equality Party this week that they would allow petitioners for Jerome White, SEP candidate in the state's 12th Congressional District in suburban Detroit, to collect signatures from students on the college's campuses.

On May 16 and 17, White's supporters were evicted from two separate OCC campuses by security guards, despite being previously told they had the right to petition.

"I loathe calling this a victory," stated Kenneth Mogill, attorney for the SEP, who wrote the letter insisting that OCC uphold First Amendment rights. "Why should you have to go to this extent to have a right that already exists?"

The June 23 letter from OCC legal counsel Kenneth L. Lewis indicated that the school was in the process of reviewing its policies regarding political canvassing. "Once the OCC policy has been finalized, I will forward a copy to your attention. In the meantime, appropriate action has been taken to ensure that Mr. White and all other political canvassers will be allowed to conduct their business on OCC campuses, provided that it does not otherwise interfere with the students' activities or the educational process."

Lewis's communication was a reply to a letter from Mogill, dated June 6, addressed to OCC Chancellor Mary S. Spangler. Mogill's letter was directed toward a meeting the chancellor and her cabinet planned to hold on June 7 to determine whether or not the SEP had the right to collect signatures on campus.

"Activities such as collecting signatures to place a political candidate's name on the ballot are protected by the First Amendment," Mogill wrote in his letter, "subject only to reasonable and non-discriminating regulations such as blocking doors and other

passageways." Mogill pointed out that SEP supporters had attempted to work out an arrangement but had been rebuffed by the college.

In his letter, Mogill provided an account of the experiences of the SEP with the college:

"On May 16, 2006, Larry Roberts, a supporter of Mr. White, spoke to Kimberly Hugelier in her office at the Royal Oak campus. He asked for permission to solicit petition signatures on campus on Mr. White's behalf and was advised that petitioning could not be conducted inside the building but outside the building; Ms. Hugelier also told Mr. Roberts that she was seeking clarification as to college policy on the issue, as it was not written and she was unsure as to what was permitted. The next day, an armed security guard forced Mr. Roberts and another supporter onto the public sidewalk of the Royal Oak campus, dismissing Ms. Hugelier's instructions and informing Mr. Roberts that she would 'straighten out Ms. Hugelier.' At the Southfield campus, petitioners were effectively barred from even speaking with students."

This is the second time White's campaign has faced proscription at a publicly funded community college. Earlier in May, SEP supporters were forced off the campus at Macomb Community College, also north of Detroit. In this case, too, the SEP was originally informed it had the right to petition, but supporters were evicted by a school official. Following a challenge, the administration acknowledged the SEP's right to conduct political canvassing on the campus.

These attempts to restrict the SEP's right to petition are simply one feature of a burdensome process, codified by Republican and Democratic state legislators across the country, aimed at preventing the American population from having a choice at election time. Onerous requirements oblige smaller

parties—systematically excluded from access to the media—to obtain thousands, sometimes tens of thousands, of signatures on petitions in order to have their candidates placed on the ballot.

Forced into this time-consuming undertaking, supporters of these parties then find an array of obstacles placed in their path—private property restrictions and often the actions of police and public officials—as they attempt to comply with the law. This absurd and anti-democratic Catch-22 takes place before each round of elections in the “world’s leading democracy,” unbeknownst to much of the population.

The Socialist Equality Party has made it clear that it will fight each and every attempt to restrict its ability to pursue political activity. The attack on our rights is part of the broader assault against the elementary rights of the entire population.

Jerome White’s opponent in Michigan’s 12th district is Sander Levin, the 12-term Democratic congressman. Levin, who epitomizes the cynicism and decay of American liberalism, voted against the 2002 resolution authorizing the war in Iraq, but has subsequently supported the spending of billions of dollars on the war. He voted for the anti-democratic Patriot Act in October 2001, which helps lay the basis for a police state in the US.

Levin opposes immediate withdrawal from Iraq, instead calling for “a plan regarding completion of our presence in Iraq”—i.e., the establishment of US control over Iraqi energy supplies and a puppet government in Baghdad that will comply with Washington’s wishes. Such a policy will cost thousands of more lives, Iraqi and American.

Levin has close ties to the corrupt bureaucracy of the United Auto Workers (UAW), whose policies have facilitated the decimation of auto workers’ jobs and the systematic lowering of living standards for far broader layers of the working population in Michigan. Levin and the UAW attempt to dilute and divert popular opposition to the Bush administration’s policies through nationalism and chauvinism, with appeals to trade protectionism.

White needs a minimum of 3,000 signatures of registered voters in his district to qualify for ballot status. The campaign has thus far gathered more than 4,000 signatures, but we are making every effort to obtain 5,500 names on petitions within the next two

weeks, as previous experience indicates that challenges from the major parties are entirely possible.

The SEP is running candidates in the 2006 elections to give a voice to the mass opposition to the Iraq war, the vast social inequality in the US and the attacks on democratic rights. We strongly encourage our readers in Michigan and elsewhere to join this campaign. The SEP 2006 election site can be accessed at <http://www.socialequality.com>, and Jerome White can be contacted at white2006@socialequality.com



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