

# SEP California campaign: Elections board declares nearly one half of signatures invalid

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The Los Angeles County Registrar's Office announced on August 8 its determination that of the nearly 7,600 signatures collected by the Socialist Equality Party through July 25 to place John Burton on the ballot for US Congress from California's 29th Congressional District, only 4,000 are valid.

This ruling is flagrantly antidemocratic, because it involves the rejection of hundreds of signatures of legally registered voters in the district. If it stands, it will make much more difficult the effort to collect by the August 11 deadline the 8,442 signatures of registered voters required to place Burton on the ballot.

The SEP intends to challenge the Registrar Office's determination.

The election laws and ballot access provisions are in themselves undemocratic. They entail highly onerous petitioning requirements designed to prevent independent candidates from achieving ballot status.

The SEP campaign is issuing a strong and urgent appeal for all supporters and readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* in the Los Angeles area to contact us at <http://www3.wsws.org/dd-formmailer/dd-formmailer.php> and help petition in the remaining days. We also urge supporters to donate to the campaign at <http://www.socialequality.com/donate.html> so as to help meet the legal expenses involved in challenging the decision of the election authorities.

Representatives of the SEP spoke with Raymond Olander, a supervisor at the elections office, who explained the reasons for rejecting signatures. This information makes clear that many of the signatures ruled invalid are, in fact, those of registered voters in the district.

Of the 3,600 signatures ruled invalid, 1,300 were determined to be registered in the wrong district. Because of the extremely irregular character of the

district's borders, there were no doubt some people who were eager to sign the petition and believed they were registered in the 29th CD, but who actually were registered in other congressional districts. However, this figure is very high, and even if it is correct, there remain 2,300 signatures that were declared invalid for other reasons.

Of these, Olander said 1,342 were "not registered." Olander indicated that a person was considered to be not registered if his name did not yield any results in the database of registered voters. Thus, if an election official entered a name incorrectly, a registered voter might be considered unregistered.

Among these "not registered" signers, Olander said many were rejected because the name was considered to be illegible. Such a judgment inevitably has a subjective component. A valid signature may be thrown out simply because the petition checker has difficulty deciphering the name and is unable or unwilling to spend sufficient time to identify the voter.

It is known that California's 29th Congressional District has a relatively high proportion of registered voters. It is extremely unlikely that so many individuals who signed the petition are not registered, particularly since SEP supporters ask all signers whether they are registered to vote.

Another 497 signers were said to be registered at a different address from that which was given on the petition. Many people move often and some do not remember the address at which they registered. It is highly prejudicial and undemocratic to exclude the signatures of these legally registered voters.

An additional 210 signatures were declared invalid because the signers had signed petitions for candidates running in the primary elections held in June for officially recognized parties. According to California

election law, an individual can sign only one petition to place a candidate on the ballot. This requirement is itself antidemocratic and limits the number of independent candidates who can contest a given election. The SEP plans to argue that the primary election is separate from the general election and therefore all of these signatures should be considered valid.

Since turning in the initial batch of 7,600 signatures, the SEP campaign has collected over 4,000 additional signatures. If the same percentage were declared invalid, the SEP campaign would end up with approximately 6,000 of the 8,442 signatures required.

Responding to the announcement by the Registrar's Office, SEP candidate John Burton said the SEP would conduct a tenacious fight to challenge the decision of the election officials and at the same time gather as many signatures as possible in the remaining days before the August 11 deadline.

"This decision is outrageous," Burton said. "It is, however, in line with the experiences of the SEP nationally. Independent and third party candidates face extraordinary obstacles to obtaining ballot status. Even when they meet the often arbitrary legal requirements, a hundred reasons are generated for denying their right to run in the elections. Our political opponents in the Democratic and Republican parties make these rules, and they have a vested interest in preventing any challenges, particularly from the left."

"Thousands of people have reacted very warmly to our campaign here," Burton continued, "and the number of signatures we have been able to gather on the basis of limited resources is a testament to the deep discontent among the population in the United States. These people are being told that their desire to have a socialist candidate on the ballot does not matter. It is through such means that the de facto political disenfranchisement of working people in the US is maintained."

*To help in the SEP campaign, click here.*

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