

SEP candidate on Illinois ballot fight: “A victory for democratic rights”

Joe Parnarauskis, Candidate for Illinois state Senate from 52nd district
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The Socialist Equality Party candidate for Illinois state Senate from the 52nd Legislative District, Joe Parnarauskis, issued the following statement following the successful conclusion of his 170-day fight for ballot status in the November election.

I would like to thank the thousands of voters in Illinois' 52nd Legislative District who signed nominating petitions to place me on the ballot as the Socialist Equality Party candidate. I would also like to thank the scores of people from Illinois, throughout the United States, and around the world who wrote letters to the Illinois election board opposing the anti-democratic operation mounted by the Democratic Party to keep me off of the November ballot. Still more gave generously to the SEP campaign fund, which made possible our legal fight.

This support was critical in defeating an extra-legal effort to exclude from the ballot a socialist opponent of the Iraq war, the attacks on democratic rights, and the assault on working class living standards, and thereby deprive voters of any alternative to the two major parties of American big business. Our ability to beat back this attack reflects the growth of anti-war sentiment and popular interest in an alternative to the two-party system.

Last week, after 90 days of petitioning and 80 days of administrative and legal battles, we won our lawsuit compelling the Illinois State Board of Elections to include my name on the ballot. Local election officials were notified that my name was on the list of certified candidates, and the Democrats have gone on record saying there will be no further objections or appeals.

This fight involved crucial democratic principles. Does an ordinary citizen have the right to run for office to defend the interests of working people, or are only those who are personally wealthy or backed by large amounts of corporate cash eligible? Do the people have the right to vote for a candidate of their choice, or is the right to vote limited to selecting between candidates who belong to two big business parties, with only minor differences between them?

Winning ballot status was a significant victory, not only for my party and the voters of Illinois' 52nd district, but for the working class as a whole. This struggle involved an intense political campaign, whose lessons are important to review.

From the very beginning, we explained that the challenge to the SEP nominating petitions had one and only one purpose: the Democrats were determined to keep off the ballot a candidate who could give voice to the popular opposition to the war in Iraq and the right-wing policies of both major parties. We warned that

while the Democrats were prostrate before Bush and the Republicans, they would be utterly ruthless towards their opponents on the left.

We stressed that the effort to exclude me from the ballot was not simply a local electoral issue. No doubt the Democrats calculated that their candidate for state Senate from the 52nd district would benefit from my exclusion. But they also ran the risk, as a result of their thuggish methods, of repelling voters and harming their candidate's chances.

The intensive effort and considerable resources expended to stop my candidacy can be understood only if one looks at the right-wing strategy the Democrats are pursuing nationally in the 2006 mid-term elections. In defiance of the widespread sentiment of traditional Democratic voters and the electorate as a whole, the Democratic Party is committed to salvaging US imperialist interests in Iraq, even if that means maintaining an extended military presence there.

The party leadership is attempting to present itself as, if anything, more ruthless and effective in prosecuting the so-called “war on terror” than the Bush administration. Hence the column published Monday in the *Wall Street Journal* by John Kerry, the Democratic presidential candidate in 2004, accusing Bush of a policy of “cut and run” in Afghanistan and calling for sending more US troops to that country, while saying nothing about the US occupation of Iraq.

The Democratic Party is pro-war, while the broad masses of the American people are increasingly anti-war. The Democrats would sooner lose the November election than capture the Congress by appealing to this popular anti-war sentiment. This makes them all the more determined to bureaucratically suppress political forces that articulate the real aspirations and interests of working people and youth.

A Democratic majority in Congress would only continue the criminal occupation of Iraq and prepare further bloody adventures to seize Middle Eastern oil reserves. It would, moreover, move to reinstate the draft, in order to dragoon more young people to serve as cannon fodder in wars of aggression.

A policy of militarism and war abroad means a policy of social reaction and repression at home. A Democratic victory would in no way alter the thrust of anti-working class domestic policies under Bush and the Republicans.

The effort to bar me from the ballot was directed by the top leaders of the Illinois Democratic Party, including powerbrokers

such as state House Speaker Michael Madigan and state Senate President Emil Jones. They, in turn, were undoubtedly working in tandem with national Democratic Party officials, such as Illinois Congressman Rahm Emanuel, a former Clinton aide who is heading up the Democratic election effort in the US House of Representatives.

On the surface, the confrontation between the Democratic Party and the SEP might have appeared to be a mismatch. The Democrats have a powerful political machine at their disposal, millions upon millions of dollars, and high-priced lawyers.

In conducting our fight we based ourselves on the interests of the vast majority of the population—working people and youth in Illinois, the US and around the world, who are politically disenfranchised by parties that speak for big business. We understood that despite their resources, these parties rest on an increasingly narrow social base, and their remaining support within the general population is being eroded by their pro-war and pro-corporate policies.

We made a political appeal to the working class and exposed the real character of the Democratic Party. Far from being the “lesser of two evils,” the Democrats, like their Republican counterparts, are hostile to most elementary political and social rights of working people.

Our victory shows in microcosm the strength that the working class can wield when it bases itself upon a socialist and internationalist program. In the course of this fight, scores of protest letters were sent from Illinois, more than a dozen other states and countries, such as Britain, Singapore, Australia, Taiwan, Japan, Canada, Germany and Sri Lanka. This outpouring of letters demonstrated to the politicians of Illinois that their actions were being closely followed by an international audience. When the Democratic Party challenged the SEP, it did not expect to encounter a national and international campaign that exposed and opposed its anti-democratic methods.

The Socialist Equality Party is not a “third party” pressure group on one or another of the two big business parties. We aim to lay the programmatic foundations for a genuine mass socialist movement of workers and youth fighting against the entire entrenched corporate-financial oligarchy and all of its political representatives. Only such a movement can defend and extend democratic rights, end imperialist war, overcome poverty and deprivation, and achieve social equality.

I am unequivocally opposed to the so-called “war on terror,” including the invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as any future military actions against countries such as Iran or Syria. I call for the immediate withdrawal of US troops, the drawing up of criminal charges against those who plotted and launched this illegal war, and the payment of full compensation to the Iraqi people and to the families of US troops killed or wounded in the wars. I also oppose the plans, floated by both the Democrats and Republicans, for the reintroduction of the draft.

I call for measures to increase the democratic input of the people in the electoral system, including proportional representation, the abolition of the Electoral College, and the elimination of arbitrary and undemocratic barriers to parties and individuals seeking to participate as candidates in local, state and national elections.

Finally, I consider a comfortable standard of living, job security, retirement, health care, housing, and education to be basic social rights. I demand the democratic reorganization of social and economic life to guarantee these rights to all people, native born and immigrant.

There are plenty of resources, given today’s level of productivity and technology—in Illinois, in the US, and in the world—to meet all social needs and dramatically raise living standards. The priorities of economic life must be radically changed, from the further enrichment of the top 1 percent to the satisfaction of human needs, and that requires transforming the basic levers of the economy into public utilities under the democratic control of the working people.

I have lived in the 52nd district all my life, and have watched the Democrats and Republicans take turns devastating it. My hometown, in the Danville area, has been particularly hard hit. Once one of the major cities and industrial centers of east-central Illinois, where Abraham Lincoln practiced law from 1841 to 1859, Danville is now a crumbling city with a downtown of boarded-up buildings and broken glass.

Officially, unemployment is at 8.4 percent, but in reality it is much higher. The median household income is a mere \$30,000, and the high school graduation rate is barely above 70 percent. Loan sharks and military recruiters circle the ruins like vultures. At least two young people from my district have been killed, out of the 116 soldiers from Illinois—mostly from the depressed industrial and rural areas—who have died in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The two corporate parties have no answer to any of these concerns, which are foremost in the minds of the voters in my district and nationwide.

I strongly urge voters in my district to support my campaign and vote for me in November. Unlike our political opponents in the Democratic and Republican parties, who receive hundreds of millions of dollars to do the bidding of corporate America, the SEP depends upon the contributions of our supporters to sustain our election campaign. I urge you to donate to the SEP campaign and support our fight by reading and distributing our election program and making the decision to become a member of the Socialist Equality Party.



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