

Pennsylvania judge postpones enforcement of anti-democratic voter ID law

Samuel Davidson
4 October 2012

A Pennsylvania judge on Tuesday ordered a postponement of sections of the state's new voter ID law, which would have blocked tens of thousands of registered voters from casting ballots in the November elections. Commonwealth Court Judge Robert Simpson did not reject the law as unconstitutional, however, leaving open its application in future elections.

The judge also allowed election officials to demand to see a photo ID from voters. However, he ruled that officials will not be allowed to block people from voting who do not have the proper type of identification.

It is still the case that thousands may be discouraged from going to the polls because they are unaware of the judge's decision and wrongly assume they will not be allowed to vote. In addition, the extra step of demanding that voters produce a photo ID will result in longer lines at polling stations, lengthening the time it takes people to cast their ballots, particularly in large urban areas.

Expressing his intent to push the law forward, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett, a Republican, told the Associated Press, "We'll continue our efforts for the next election and all future elections."

Showing his disdain for the ruling and for voting rights in general, Republican State Representative Daryl Metcalfe, chief sponsor of the law, said, "[T]his judicial activist decision is skewed in favor of the lazy who refuse to exercise the necessary work ethic to meet the commonsense requirements to obtain an acceptable photo ID."

The Pennsylvania voter ID law, considered one of the most onerous such laws in the country, was passed and signed into law this past March by Governor Corbett. The law requires all voters to show a valid government-

issued photo ID with an expiration date, such as a driver's license or passport. County voter registration cards, birth certificates and employee IDs are not considered valid.

The law was a Republican attempt to disenfranchise tens of thousands of voters—mostly poor, elderly or immigrant—considered likely to vote for Obama and the Democrats in November. A video surfaced this summer of Pennsylvania House Majority Leader Mike Turzai, a Republican, bragging to a meeting of GOP activists and fundraisers: "Voter ID—which is going to allow Governor Romney to win the state of Pennsylvania—done."

Judge Simpson upheld the law this past summer. He issued his new ruling Tuesday after the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled that he had to review his decision and suspend enforcement of the law unless it could be proven that its application would not prevent a single registered voter from casting a ballot.

Simpson stated that the state had not made sufficient progress in getting valid IDs to those who lacked them. He did not strike down the entire law, leaving open the possibility that it could be enforced in future elections.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and others opposed to the law presented evidence at the summer hearing that hundreds of thousands of legitimate Pennsylvanian voters could be blocked from voting. They argued that those disenfranchised would be largely African Americans, elderly people, students, and low-income citizens.

One comparison of voting rolls and state driver's license data showed that over 700,000 registered voters lacked a driver's license or state ID, more than 9 percent of all voters. Taking into consideration expired driver's licenses, the number rose to nearly 1.5 million, or about 15 percent of voters.

Pennsylvania is just one of 31 states that have some form of voter ID law in place. Legal challenges are underway in several states and a three-judge panel has blocked the law in Texas from taking effect this year. However, the US Supreme court in 2008 upheld the Indiana law, creating a precedent that says such laws are in principle constitutional.

In addition to voter ID laws, other means of disenfranchising voters are being employed. An Advancement Project report estimates that nearly 10 million Latino citizens could be deterred or prevented from registering and voting in 23 states due to what it calls “voter suppression policies.”

In addition to the effect of photo ID laws, efforts to purge rolls of non-citizen voters will wrongly remove many citizens, and many states are requiring additional proof of citizenship for voter registration, which will deter many Latino voters from registering.

The state of Florida has sent out letters to thousands of registered voters asking them to prove their citizenship or be purged from the voting rolls.

While most of these laws have been pushed by Republican governors and lawmakers, the Democratic Party has refused to make the attack on voting rights a major issue in the elections. The Obama administration’s Justice Department has approved New Hampshire’s photo ID law.

The Democrats, for their own electoral and political purposes, work no less unscrupulously than the Republicans to keep third party and independent candidates off of the ballot where their presence threatens to detract from the Democratic vote.

Four years ago, the Democratic Party joined a Republican-inspired witch-hunt against the community action group ACORN over allegations of fraudulent voter registration. As a result, many states passed laws making it more difficult for organizations to conduct voter registration drives and increasing the penalties against organizations that turn in invalid voter registration forms.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact