

Socialist Equality Party challenges undemocratic ballot access laws in Michigan

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On Thursday, the Socialist Equality Party presidential election campaign filed a lawsuit in Michigan challenging the state's ballot access requirements for independent candidates. The lawsuit, *Kishore v. Whitmer* (Gretchen Whitmer, the governor of Michigan), challenges the ballot requirements “on the grounds that these requirements are literally impossible... to fulfill during the ongoing global coronavirus pandemic.”

“For the past three months,” the lawsuit states, “anyone attempting to collect such signatures in Michigan would have risked infection and death from the coronavirus, which continues to spread in the community, and also would have faced possible criminal prosecution.” Not only would campaigners be at risk, the lawsuit states, the process of collecting signatures would threaten the health of the community at large.

As a result, the attempt to enforce these requirements is a violation of the constitutional rights of the SEP candidates as well as the constitutional rights of workers and youth in Michigan to vote for the candidate of their choice.

No ruling class is more frightened than the American ruling class of the expression of political opposition outside of the control of the established capitalist parties. Depending on the state, candidates must gather tens of thousands or even more than one hundred thousand signatures just to have their names appear on the ballot.

In Michigan, 30,000 signatures are required to get on the ballot. Due to the inevitable challenges to the validity of individual signatures, the actual number one must gather is twice this amount.

The ballot access laws are part of a broader electoral system—dominated by massive sums of money and

manipulated by the corporate media—designed to exclude any challenge to the two capitalist parties, the Democrats and the Republicans.

In the 2020 presidential elections, the Socialist Equality Party campaign is the only campaign advancing a socialist program that addresses the life-and-death issues confronting the working class, the vast majority of the population.

The campaign between Trump and Biden is a campaign between two reactionary representatives of the ruling class. On the one hand, Trump is the personification of oligarchic rule in America, dedicated to the destruction of democratic rights. Terrified of the growth of opposition in the working class, the Trump administration is continuing its conspiracies to dismantle what remains of bourgeois democracy and implement a military dictatorship, backed by far-right and fascist elements, including within the police.

The Democrats' differences with Trump are not over social policy at home or the basic international strategic imperatives of the ruling class. From the beginning of the Trump government, the Democrats have sought to channel mass social discontent behind the demands of the military and intelligence agencies for a more aggressive foreign policy against Russia.

As for Bernie Sanders, who pitched his appeal to anger over social inequality, he has packed in his “political revolution,” endorsed Biden and largely disappeared from the political scene.

The 2020 election is being held under extraordinary political conditions, dominated by the expanding coronavirus pandemic. After handing trillions of dollars to itself in late March—authorized by the so-called CARES Act, passed unanimously in the Senate and with only token opposition in the House—the ruling class, spearheaded by the Trump administration and

implemented by governors of both parties, launched its “back-to-work” campaign. Restraints on economic activity and social gatherings have been systematically dismantled throughout the country.

The consequences are now evident. The number of new cases of the coronavirus is spiking sharply in states throughout the country. It is spreading rapidly in factories and workplaces that have opened up, including in Michigan auto plants that have resumed production under Whitmer.

Nearly 1,000 people are dying *every day* in the United States, and the official death toll is now over 120,000. Conservative estimates project that the number of deaths by October will surpass 200,000, but the actual figure will be far higher.

The physical impact of the coronavirus pandemic is combined with a massive social catastrophe for millions of workers. Joblessness in the United States surpasses anything seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s. This week, more than 1.5 million more people filed for unemployment benefits, the 13th straight week that filings topped one million. The previous record for one week was 695,000. More than 40 million people have filed claims since the pandemic began.

The ruling class has made clear that there will be neither a return of economic restraints and social distancing measures to save lives nor any relief to address the social crisis. Rather, the crisis will be used to massively restructure class relations, increase exploitation, enforce evictions and impose austerity measures, including slashing education and other social services.

The pandemic is igniting a new stage of the class struggle. The wellspring of social anger in the United States and throughout the world has erupted in the mass demonstrations over the police murder of George Floyd. However, the protests over police violence, politically dominated by sections of the upper-middle class, are only an initial expression of the social convulsions to come.

Workers and young people, in the United States and throughout the world, are moving to the left. There is growing interest and support for socialism and hostility to capitalism. The efforts of the ruling class to enforce its policies will encounter mass opposition and revolutionary convulsions.

This objective movement of the working class must be armed with a socialist program and leadership.

We intend to use the election campaign to raise the political consciousness of the working class and rally support, in the United States and internationally, for the development of a revolutionary socialist movement to fight for political power. The devastation wrought by the pandemic and the response of the financial oligarchs to it underscore how urgent this political task is. Hundreds of thousands of lives are at stake.

This lawsuit in Michigan is a critical initiative in this campaign. We call on all workers to rally behind it and demand that the SEP be placed on the ballot. The SEP is also taking measures to get on the ballot in other states. In Illinois, courts have already ruled that candidates can collect signatures electronically, and supporters are circulating an online petition. Further actions will be announced in the coming days and weeks.

We call on all workers, young people and those committed to the fight for socialism: Support the SEP election campaign! Sign up today at socialism2020.org! If you are a US citizen or permanent resident, make a donation to the campaign to help finance the legal battle in Michigan. If you do not live in the US, join or build a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International in your country.



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