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## *The Democrats' "all-out war" on third parties and independent candidates*



President Joe Biden speaks with Vice President Kamala Harris after addressing the Democratic National Committee winter meeting on Friday, February 3, 2023 in Philadelphia. [AP Photo/Patrick Semansky]

The Democratic Party is spending millions of dollars on lawyers, operatives and propaganda to ensure that workers and youth will have no choice in the 2024 US presidential election except Joe Biden, responsible for the genocide in Gaza, and Donald Trump, the aspiring dictator.

In the last two weeks, major articles published in the media have spelled out the Democratic Party's plan to block, to the extent possible, any third party or independent candidates from

appearing on the ballot this November. This includes the Socialist Equality Party campaign of Joseph Kishore and Jerry White.

The media reports employ the language of a military offensive, referring to the “all-out war” the party is preparing, the “army of lawyers” it is mobilizing, the “state-by-state counterinsurgency plan” that it is implementing.

The choice of words is telling. Indeed, the Democratic Party and the ruling class as a whole are waging a “war” against the democratic and social rights of the working class. In a country with 330 million people, the financial oligarchy demands that ballot access be restricted to their corporate-dominated parties.

The extreme contempt for basic democratic principles is glaring. “There are concerns [in the Democratic Party] that giving people more choices on the ballot is more likely to hurt Mr. Biden,” the *New York Times* writes, an argument befitting of a dictatorship. The *Times* quotes Robert Lenhard, an outside lawyer for the Democrats, as stating that the effort to limit ballot access is meant to “ensure that the people who are on the ballot have legitimate bases of support,” by which he means the backing of the corporate-financial oligarchy.

is now as high as at any point in more than two decades.

A Pew Research poll conducted in 2022 found that the disdain for the Democrats and Republicans “is as high as it has been in more than two decades of polling.” Under these conditions, the Democrats’ lawyer tells the *Times*, it is necessary to prevent voters from having “more choice on the ballot,” that is, the ability to vote for candidates they actually support.

It is not broadly understood, including by workers in the United States, how deeply undemocratic the American electoral system actually is.

The number of signatures third parties are required to gather in some states is colossal: 219,403 in California, 145,040 in Florida, 113,151 in Texas, 82,452 in North Carolina, 45,000 in New York, 43,000 in Arizona, 36,944 in Indiana, 25,000 in Illinois, 23,737 in Oregon, and at least 10,000 in Massachusetts, Missouri, Maryland, Michigan, Nevada, South Carolina and Colorado. Collectively, independent candidates and third parties would have to gather over 900,000 signatures to get on the ballot in every state and Washington D.C.

Furthermore, in order to overcome the Democrats’ and Republicans’ ruthless challenges to the signatures collected, third parties are compelled to gather at least 50 percent more than the official requirement, or roughly 1.5 million signatures nationally. In contrast, getting on the ballot nationally in Russia—constantly denounced by the American media as the most

authoritarian and undemocratic country in the world—requires the gathering of 100,000 signatures.

These measures have been implemented by both parties with the specific aim of excluding left-wing opposition to their domination. As ballot access expert Richard Winger has noted, many of the most onerous requirements were enacted after the 1930s, during the Great Depression and in the period that followed, to prevent the Communist Party and other left-wing parties from getting on the ballot.

Between 1929 and 1960, 10 states “drastically” increased ballot restrictions, Winger notes in his essay, “How Ballot Access Laws Affect the U.S. Party System,” while only three states opened up access. Between 1961 and 1983, this process accelerated, with 25 states restricting ballot access.

Despite repeated, and expensive, court challenges by third parties, state and US Supreme Court decisions have frequently upheld anti-democratic ballot access laws, or ruled in such a narrow fashion that legislatures were allowed to re-write laws to achieve the same effect. During the 2020 elections, courts in Michigan and California rejected lawsuits brought by the Socialist Equality Party’s candidates arguing that massive signature requirements were unconstitutional under conditions of a global pandemic.

Beyond the ballot access laws themselves, the state and the media are set up to maintain the institutional control of the Democrats and Republicans. This has been accompanied by other anti-democratic measures, such as the escalating campaign of internet censorship, including the targeting of the *World Socialist Web Site* by Google and every social media outlet, all of which are controlled by billionaire oligarchs.

The present effort of the Democrats to thwart third party and independent campaigns marks a vast acceleration of this process.

The Democrats assert, of course, that their anti-democratic conspiracies are necessary to stop Trump and the Republicans. This is a cynical fraud.

First of all, the response of the Democrats and the Biden administration to the fascistic coup of January 6, 2021 was to insist on the need for a “strong” Republican Party. And while Biden occasionally declares that “democracy is on the ballot” in November, he has repeatedly offered to accept virtually the entire anti-immigrant agenda of his Republican “friends” in exchange for bipartisan agreement to finance the US-NATO war against Russia over Ukraine.

Moreover, the ability of Trump to exploit social grievances is bound up with the systematic exclusion from the political system, enforced by the Democrats, of any genuine expression of the social interests of the broad mass of the working class.

In a statement issued on Twitter/X yesterday, Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Joseph Kishore condemned the Democrats' "all-out war" on third parties and independent candidates, stating:

The SEP supports the right to appear on the ballot for all independent and third party candidates, including the SEP campaign as well as the campaigns of Jill Stein, Cornel West and others.

Kishore added:

The defense of democratic rights is impossible without addressing the root cause of dictatorship: the staggering concentration of wealth in the hands of the capitalist oligarchy. The wealth of the billionaires must be expropriated, and the gigantic corporations must be transformed into publicly controlled utilities, run on the basis of social need, not private profit.

The Democrats' war on third parties and independent candidates is, in fact, a war on the most basic democratic right—the right to vote. It is part of the broader assault on democratic rights and the turn by the ruling class toward authoritarianism and fascism. These rights can only be secured in a political offensive against both the Democrats and Republicans and the capitalist system they defend. The defense of democratic rights is inseparable from the fight for socialism.