

War on third parties continues

# North Carolina Democrats strike three campaigns from the ballot, including Cornel West and RFK Jr.

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Terrified at the prospect of workers and youth breaking with the two parties of capital, the ruling class, through the Biden administration, Democratic Party and its adjuncts, is spearheading an anti-democratic campaign in many states to block third parties from appearing on the presidential ballot this November.

Last Wednesday, in three separate 3-2 party line votes, the Democratic majority on the North Carolina State Board of Elections (NCSBE) voted to block the We the People Party, the Justice for All Party and the Constitution Party of North Carolina from appearing on the presidential ballot this November. The Democratic majority voted to block the three parties from appearing on the ballot despite each one claiming to have submitted the required number of signatures by the June 1 deadline.

Right-wing independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is running on the We the People Party line, while liberal Democrat and former Biden endorser Dr. Cornel West is the candidate of the Justice for All Party. The Constitution Party, an ultra-right party that up until 1999 was known as the US Taxpayers' Party, is running anti-abortion zealot Randall Terry.

In North Carolina, the signature requirement for a presidential candidate is much lower if they are running on a third-party line rather than as an independent but still a significant obstacle. Each third party needed to gather and submit at least 13,865 valid signatures from registered voters by June 1. An independent candidate without a party line would have had to submit a petition signed by 1.5 percent of registered North Carolina voters, over 83,000 people.

Democrats on the board voted to block access based on a complaint that was brought forward by state Democrats and a Biden-allied Super PAC called Clear Choice Action. In a 29-page complaint, lawyers for Clear Choice Action alleged Justice for All (JFA) was a "sham political party" and its petition was "littered with unregistered voters, illegible and missing signatures, blatant statutory violations, and other indicia of fraud."

In the course of the meeting, Democratic members of the board pointed to complaints raised by Clear Choice Action, such as

ineligible and duplicate signatures, as reasons for further investigations into the party's petition. Notably, at least one of the lawyers for Clear Choice Action is employed by the Elias Law Group, which was founded by Democratic election lawyer Marc Elias.

According to *Politico*, as of 2022 the Elias law firm represented "950 clients, which include the Democratic National Committee; the Democratic campaigning committees helping to elect senators, representatives, governors, secretaries of state, and attorneys general; and at least 150 House and Senate campaigns and members of Congress."

The vote to block the third parties was held on June 26 following a nearly three-hour meeting between the board, representatives from Clear Choice and party representatives. The board will meet again later this month after state and county election administrators have investigated the complaints to either reaffirm or reverse their decisions.

In a statement issued the day of the vote, the West campaign wrote: "While there are legitimate inquiries regarding a small number of signatures and an independent circulator, for which [Justice For All] has cooperated fully with the Board's investigation, there is no evidence to suggest that such issues are extensive enough to deem the entire petition effort invalid. Nonetheless, the Democrats on the Board have prolonged the investigation under the guise of legality. This unwarranted scrutiny comes after a sufficient three-week review period, suggesting a deliberate stalling tactic rather than any genuine need for further validation."

The West campaign characterized the Board's actions as a "transparent attempt" to suppress voter choice and "protect their interests, as their presumptive nominee continues to demonstrate a lack of popularity and alignment with the working class's needs."

After Democrats on the NCSBE voted to bar all the third parties from the ballot, Republican board member Kevin Lewis apologized to the third-party representatives.

"I'm afraid that you're probably a victim of a political hit job, and

I'm sorry that if we wasted your time today," Lewis said, as quoted by the *Carolina Journal*. "These allegations," Lewis continued, "are coming from outside the board of elections, and so the political hit job I'm talking about is arising from outside the state board of elections."

Democratic board member Jeff Carmon attempted to refute Lewis's attack by claiming the Democrats were blocking the three campaigns from appearing on the ballot in the interest of protecting voters. He said, "What I want to make sure happens is what you guys said you want to do, is what's actually happening, and people are not being misled. That's what I need to know, that the people that signed knew what they were signing up for."

Far from protecting voters from being "misled," the entire purpose of the Democrats' witch-hunt is to block the emergence of an independent movement in the working class that will sweep away the political domination of the two parties and the capitalist system they defend. Biden and the Democrats' central priority is not "defending democracy" but defending the wealth of the financial oligarchy while prosecuting imperialist war against Russia and the genocide in Gaza.

As "Genocide Joe" continues to deteriorate and decline in the polls, Democratic Party elites and donors are convinced that the only chance they have of defeating ex-President Donald Trump is if the population is denied any choice beyond the fascist thug or the senescent warmonger.

While the Socialist Equality Party has vast and unbridgeable political differences with all the capitalist parties and "independent" political figures barred by the NCSBE's ruling, the SEP unequivocally denounces the board's decision and defends the democratic rights of all parties and candidates to appear on the ballot.

Revealing the anti-democratic character of the board's decision, a week before the vote was held, the NCSBE sent inquisitorial letters to each of the campaigns demanding information about the parties and their petitioners.

In their letter the NCSBE requested information on each "new party's general purpose and intent" and whether or not a "signature-gathering firm" was used. If a firm was not used, the board requested that the parties provide a list of "petition circulators" that includes "their name, address and contact information."

The board also requested "sample signature collecting scripts" and "instructions for collection signatures," as well as "any other scripts or talking points provided to petition circulators regarding the general purpose and intent of the new party."

In addition to citing concerns raised in Clear Choice Action's complaint to justify blocking the third parties from appearing on the ballot, Democratic board members pointed to an article written by NBC News reporter Alex Seitz-Wald which alleged that the West campaign used "operatives" with ties to the Republican Party to get on the ballot. In the article, Seitz-Wald quoted favorably from Pete Kavanaugh, founder of Clear Choice Action.

seSeitz-Waldarticles has the writtast m third-party opponents of Biden, including West, Dr. Jill Stein (Green Party) and Kennedy. Commenting on the role of Seitz-Wald, Jason Call, campaign manager for Stein, wrote, "Seitz-Wald is an establishment attack dog, and attempted to sully the Stein campaign for using a paid petitioner in NY, Steve Kramer, who was indicted for implementing 'deepfake' robocalls on behalf of Democratic presidential candidate Dean Phillips in New Hampshire."

Call explained that "NBC's Seitz-Wald wrote an article that headlined our hiring of Kramer, even while my conversation with him indicated we could not have possibly known about his illegal activity, to which he acceded."

Turning to the North Carolina Board of Elections, Call noted that in 2022, this same board "improperly barred Green Party Senate candidate Matt Hoh from the ballot ...after Matt had collected thousands of signatures more than the requirement. The [NCSBE] and the [Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee] were taken to court, and Matt was ruled eligible for the ballot. After, the Hoh campaign sued for redress and court costs (of which they got roughly \$6,500 of the nearly \$60,000 spent on fighting to be on the ballot), the judge ruled that the Democratic Party had acted in bad faith and had 'unclean hands.'"

Despite gathering nearly three times as many signatures as required, the Green Party in Nevada is still not on the ballot due to a lawsuit filed by the Democrats. Call told this reporter the campaign has now "retained legal counsel at a minimum \$20,000 retainer, and likely to be substantially more as the case proceeds. It is a case the Democrats will lose, we have the evidence in our favor.

"People need to understand that Democrats are using 'lawfare,'" Call explained. "They are trying to bleed our resources and waste our time, both of which are limited on a grassroots campaign. Their resources and time are unlimited. It is a WalMart approach to suffocate their competition, and it is anything but a democratic approach to a healthy political system. They should be ashamed, but as per usual, they have no shame."



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