

# Teachers union supports SWP disclosure fight in Washington

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Members of AFT Local 1789 organized a walkout in 2016 during contract negotiations at Seattle Central Colleges. The local's executive board wrote to support Socialist Workers Party's fight to stop Washington state officials from publicly disclosing names and addresses of SWP electors. The union has been fighting its own battle against attempts by a notorious anti-labor group to use state disclosure laws to gain access to personal information on campus workers.

The Socialist Workers Party's recent success in preventing disclosure of the names and addresses of its presidential electors in Washington state continues to hold. And additional support for the fight to prevent disclosure keeps coming in.

On Nov. 9 Annette Stofer, president of American Federation of Teachers Seattle Community Colleges Local 1789, wrote the SWP campaign extending the union's support.

"The Executive Board of AFT Seattle Local 1789 wishes to express our support for your efforts to get an exemption from disclosure of personal contact information for your 2020 candidates and campaign personnel," Stofer wrote. "We agree wholeheartedly that you have a right to protect the names and addresses of your members from those who may wish to cause harm. We also understand the necessity of upholding freedom of association and the right to privacy in those choices.

"We wish you success in your legal case. That success is important to all of us who might become the target of attacks on personal freedoms. We must defend the voice of a wide variety of political opinions. It is intolerable that some seek to shut down political participation by threats and intimidation," she said. "Please reach out if there is more that we can do to support you."

Members of this AFT local are familiar with what is at issue. They've been fighting for years efforts by the notoriously anti-union Freedom Foundation to use the state's disclosure laws to force college authorities to turn over names, addresses, ages and other personal information of campus employees. They say they want the information to try and get workers to quit the union.

Government officials in Washington state and in Seattle have a long history of enacting and using campaign and other disclosure laws against the Socialist Workers Party, other third parties and political groups, as well as public unions like the AFT.

The SWP has fought to win exemption from having to disclose the names and personal information of its campaign supporters on the city, state and federal level. Through political and legal efforts, the party has amassed thousands of pages of evidence of threats and attacks against those who've signed petitions, made contributions, campaigned for or otherwise aided its candidates.

During the SWP's successful lawsuit against the FBI in the 1970s and '80s, the spy agency was forced to admit to having used some 1,300 informers against the party, placing wiretaps and carrying out more than 200 burglaries into its offices, and organizing Cointelpro disruption efforts against the SWP and its members.

The SWP's Seattle office was firebombed in 1984. While petitioning and campaigning for the party's 2020 presidential ticket of Alyson Kennedy and Malcolm Jarrett, SWP supporters received death threats, both in person and on the phone. One caller said he would burn their headquarters to the ground and kill everyone in it.

Still, authorities in Seattle and Washington state, long dominated by liberal Democrats, have fought relentlessly against having to grant the party exemption from disclosure, claiming it is necessary for “transparency,” regardless of the attacks it might lead to against the SWP or others.

Even when the Seattle Ethics and Election Commission in 2005 finally granted the SWP an exemption from filing the names and other information on their campaign contributors after an eight-year fight, commission members complained that they were forced to do so by court rulings that “set the bar so low.”

The Socialist Workers Party is the *only* party to ever win exemption from the Federal Election Commission. In a defeat for political rights, the commission voted to revoke that exemption in 2017, claiming attacks against the party were now largely a thing of the past.

## ‘Gov’t has no right to disclose this’

“I find it unbelievable to think that the names and addresses of Socialist Workers Party presidential electors would ever be disclosed!” wrote Dan Coffman, the retired ex-president of International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 21, Nov. 11. Coffman was ILWU president in Longview, Washington, during the union’s bitter struggle against a union-busting drive by megagrain exporter EGT Development.

“The government has no right to disclose this information of these people,” he said. “This Republic we live in gives US freedom from tyrannical overreach. To even suggest disclosure is shameful.”

Support has also come from other political groups. The Green Party affiliate in Oakland, California, wrote Nov. 16 to say it “wishes to inform the Socialist Workers Party that it has our organization’s full support in its legal battle to prevent the State of Washington from disclosing publicly the names and addresses of its presidential electors.”

Writing to the SWP, the Green’s Dale Baum noted his organization is “in complete agreement with its Seattle fight to win political space for the working class to debate, organize, and campaign.”

“The fight here has been an important contribution to winning political space for the working class,” Seattle SWP leader Mary Martin told the *Militant*. “It helps expose these ‘disclosure’ laws for what they are — an attack on political rights aimed at making it more difficult for unions and working-class parties like the SWP to fight effectively.”