

NORTHWESTnews

LESBIAN activist Jordana Sardo is a passionate, dedicated woman who has found herself in a tedious court battle with the state of Oregon.

BALLOT BATTLE

Freedom Socialist Party fights to run lesbian candidate in 2002

by Sarah Leimert

She is attempting to land a spot on the ballot as a Freedom Socialist Party candidate for state representative in 2002. However, her campaign is being thwarted by a 95-year-old law championed by Oregon Attorney General Hardy Meyers and Secretary of State Bill Bradbury.

The Freedom Socialists, founded in 1965, have been struggling for years to be listed on the ballot. Until recently, the party was stopped by Oregon Revised Statute 248.010 from running candidates because its name contains the word "socialist."

The law states that an existing party has exclusive rights to the use of all words in its name and prohibits another party with even one word in common from qualifying for ballot access. The Freedom Socialists had a brief victory in February when the law was declared unconstitutional by Multnomah County Circuit Court Judge Robert Redding.

However, the state filed an appeal in March, effectively keeping the party off the ballot until the case is settled. Meanwhile, the Freedom Socialists are gathering an impressive list of endorsements and building a constituency in the community, and leaders have no intention of giving up.

Although the state claims the law exists to prevent voter confusion, Sardo believes it is merely another tool used to keep minor parties off the ballot.

"Minor parties pose a particular threat to the twin parties or solo parties, and we think they are

basically working for the same boss," she says. "It's not...so much that they are protecting the Socialist Party. What they claim to be doing is protecting voters who would be evidently confused by having a Socialist Party candidate and a Freedom Socialist Party candidate. That's assuming that the voting community is pretty stupid, which we think is very condescending."

According to Sardo, the Socialist Party gives full support to the Freedom Socialist Party's efforts to be legitimized.

"They actually told us about the law," she says. "When we filed our lawsuit ... they signed on as supporters. In their opinion, we need more socialist candidates, and it's not about one party being better than the other. It's about trying to get more socialists on the ballot."

Sardo distinguishes the Freedom Socialists from the Socialists: "FSP is what we call a vanguard party. It's a leadership party, and it has as its program a socialist-feminist approach to...global liberation. We say that feminism and socialism are interconnected and that you cannot get one without the other."



PHOTO BY MARY DAVIS

A 95-year-old law is keeping Jordana Sardo from launching her campaign for the Oregon Legislature

the big corporations that buy everybody off," Sardo says. Oregon needs someone "to go into that office knowing that whatever kind of reform that we are able to win as a community has to be a combination of state operations and building a movement."

As a lesbian, Sardo feels she is naturally inclined to represent those who have been discriminated against.

Sardo would like to see a candidate elected to create a multi-issue movement. One of her main criticisms of existing parties is that although they might be passionate about a single topic, other important matters typically fall by the wayside. "I think we need someone in there who is going to be willing to really stand up and fight for gay rights, equal rights, health care, child care, a civilian police review board—to really take an open, militant and multi-issue stand on these issues," she says.

According to Sardo, a unified front is the only way to create change in a capitalist society that leaves many people behind. Her party works with labor unions on improving worker rights and emphasizes leadership training for those most oppressed under capitalism.

"One of the things that I want to do is address the fact that the sexual minority community does not have any representatives in the state Legislature who are willing to go up against

To the outside observer, it might seem she is being kept off the ballot specifically for that reason.

However, Sardo thinks the state is more opposed to a strong minor party entering the race, especially if it espouses socialism. Although she believes all discrimination is interconnected, she does not think she is being targeted specifically because she is a lesbian.

Sardo places great faith in her community's ability to think and vote for itself and hopes to present herself as an option for reform in 2002. Unfortunately, that goal might not be attained because of the court case, which could take many months to resolve. **J**

JORDANA SARDO can be reached at 503-240-4462 or jsardo60@hotmail.com.

SARAH LEIMERT is a Portland free-lance writer. E-mail her at sleimert@earthlink.net.

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