

Democrats routed in Wisconsin recall elections

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The Democratic Party lost four of six races in the recall election in the US Midwestern state of Wisconsin Tuesday, leaving the Republican Party in control of the state legislature.

The results are a damning indictment of the unions and their pseudo-left allies, which shutdown mass protests against Republican governor Scott Walker last March, claiming workers could halt the attack on workplace rights and social programs through recall votes.

While popular opposition to Walker and the Republicans is widespread, the effort to present the Democrats as a “pro-worker” alternative fell flat, particularly a week after President Obama and congressional Democrats voted for trillions in spending cuts on a federal level.

Despite the multi-million dollar campaign by the unions and election-eve predictions by liberal publications like the *Nation* and other media outlets that there would be “presidential level” turnouts in some areas, the Democrats failed to generate popular support. Around 43 percent of voting-age adults turned out, compared to 69 percent in the 2008 presidential election and 50 percent for last fall’s gubernatorial race.

In two districts, where Republican incumbents Luther Olsen and Robert Cowles retained their seats—in central Wisconsin and the Green Bay area—the turnout was even lower, with 39 and 34 percent of voting age adults turning out respectively.

In the end, the recall campaign boosted the fortunes of the Republicans in Wisconsin and nationally, along with their right-wing corporate backers who flooded the state with millions in campaign funding. Going into another recall vote next Tuesday—this time for two Democrats—the Republicans could extend their majority

in the state senate, which is currently 17-16.

Even if the Democrats had won the election, workers in the state would have seen no fundamental change. Like the Republicans, the Democrats on every level of government have insisted that the working class must pay for the economic crisis, tax cuts for the wealthy and other supposedly “job-creating” incentives for big business.

In Wisconsin, the Democrats boasted that they had made the deepest cuts in state history, including public employee furloughs and other concessions, under Walker’s Democratic predecessor, Governor Jim Doyle.

In an interview with the *Third Coast Digest* on the eve of the recall election, Democratic challenger Sandy Pasch—who would go on to lose to the Republican incumbent in the suburban Milwaukee district by a 54 to 46 percent margin—pointed to “her work on the 2009-11 state budget, which also cut K-12 education, but by only \$300 million, not \$800 million over two years,” the web site noted.

“We knew cuts had to be made and we asked for across the board cuts of 5 to 10 percent,” she explained. “But, we prioritized education and only made a 3 percent cut.”

Far from opposing the attack on public workers, the Democrats backed Walker’s demand for a sharp increase in contributions for health care and retirement benefits, a measure that is costing workers thousands of dollars each year.

Their difference with the Republican governor was over how best to achieve these cuts. Rather than cripple the unions permanently—as Walker sought to do by ending the automatic deduction of union dues and forcing annual recertification votes—the Democrats saw the labor apparatus as a critical asset to slash spending

and impose the budget crisis on the backs of public workers.

This proved to be the case, as the unions stifled the mass protests. Before Walker's bill went into effect, the unions signed dozens of contract extensions that destroyed the living standards and workplace rights of teachers, nurses and other public employees—while guaranteeing the continued deduction of union dues.

From the beginning the unions were opposed to a mass movement against Walker and sought only the collaboration of the Republican governor in imposing concessions on their members.

After Walker's "Budget Repair" bill was announced last February, they only called for token protests. However, this generated an outpouring of popular opposition that quickly got out of the control of the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). Walkouts by high school students were followed by a statewide job action by teachers and the occupation of the state capitol in Madison. Mass protests, reaching 100,000 or more, went on from mid-February to mid-March.

While condemning the attack on "collective bargaining rights"—by which they meant not the rights of workers to defend their living standards but the preservation of the dues check off and other narrow institutional interests of the union apparatus—the unions agreed to impose \$330 million in wage and benefit concessions and complained that Walker was never interested in working with them.

With popular sentiment for a general strike erupting after the Republicans unilaterally imposed the anti-worker bill on March 9, the unions, working with the Democrats, moved quickly to quash the protests and channel anger through the toothless recall campaign.

Hours after the Assembly voted for the bill, the Wisconsin AFL-CIO and the Democrats organized a rally outside the capitol. In an effort to dissuade workers from taking any serious action against Walker, Democratic state representative, Peter Barca told them to take the "moral high ground" and "channel it into the ballot boxes." The "fire in the eyes" of the workers, he said, should be used to get out the vote for the Democrats.

In an effort to put a good face on the humiliating defeat of the Democrats they supported, WEAC

President Mary Bell hailed the "flipping" of two Senate districts to the Republicans, saying, "The historic recall elections represent a movement to elect leaders who represent Wisconsin values" and expresses "frustration at the direction this state has been heading under the leadership and extreme agenda of Scott Walker."

Calling for the recall campaign to be extended to the Republican governor next year, *Nation* writer John Nichols tried to assure his readers that the one-vote majority for the Republicans might indeed turn into a "17-16 pro-labor" majority in the state legislature.

"That's because one Republican senator, Dale Schultz, voted against the governor's assault on collective bargaining," Nichols wrote, adding that by working with Democrats he "could tip the balance on labor, education and public services issues where the moderate Schultz has differed with his fellow Republicans."

Schultz, Nichols said on *Democracy Now*, "was a maverick" who could stop public school privatization and "temper his party."

Nichols, the unions and their pseudo-left backers continue to perpetrate a monumental fraud against the working class. After working diligently to suppress the resistance of the working class, they are now promoting the recall campaign as a "template" to get out the vote for the Democrats in 2012.

These organizations are allied with the Democratic Party because they speak for a privileged upper middle class layer that directly profits from the destruction of the jobs and living standards of the working class being carried out by both big business parties.

The whole experience underscores the fact that the working class can only defend its basic social rights by breaking with the unions and the corporate-backed Democrats and building a mass political party to fight for the socialist reorganization of society.



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