

One million signatures filed to recall Wisconsin governor

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Officials of United Wisconsin, the recall campaign against Governor Scott Walker backed by union officials and the state Democratic Party, filed petitions Tuesday afternoon with more than one million signatures to force a new election.

The group filed another 845,000 signatures to force a recall of Lieutenant Governor Rebecca Kleefish, Walker's running mate in 2010, effectively ensuring that both of the two top state officials will face an election by late spring. Recall petitions were also filed against four Republican state senators, including the Senate's Republican leader, Scott Fitzgerald.

The total number of signatures filed against Walker was nearly double the legal requirement of 540,000, and exceeded the number of votes cast for his Democratic opponent in the 2010 election. It approached the 1,128,900 votes Walker received in winning that contest.

The massive signature total shocked the Walker administration and state Republican Party officials, compelling them to drop suggestions that the petition drive could be challenged in court. After the filing, Walker conceded that there would be a recall election, for which he has already raised more than \$5 million, mainly from wealthy corporate interests.

Walker was actually out of the state on the day the petitions were filed, raising money from multimillionaire right-wing backers in New York City. He was holding a fundraiser hosted by Maurice Greenberg, the founder of the financial services corporation American International Group, whose failure in 2008 was one of the major episodes of the Wall Street crash. AIG was ultimately bailed out with more than \$150 billion from the US Treasury.

The state Government Accountability Board has 31 days to review the petitions and certify that the

campaign met the 540,000 signature requirement. After that, a date for the recall election will be set, likely including a primary campaign to select Walker's Democratic opponent. The recall election will be the first of a governor in the history of Wisconsin, and only the third in US history.

Significantly, the national media sought to downplay the popular hostility to Walker. None of the three broadcast networks, NBC, ABC and CBS, reported the filing of the recall petition in their evening news programs on Tuesday night, and there was no film of two tons of petitions being unloaded from trucks and filed with state officials in Madison.

The signatures of nearly one-quarter of the state's eligible voters demonstrate the mass opposition to Walker's onslaught against the jobs, living standards and democratic rights of public employees and the entire working class in Wisconsin, which triggered weeks of demonstrations and the occupation of the state capitol building in Madison last winter.

The recall campaign itself, however, is a deliberate political diversion, engineered by the unions, to shut down the protest campaign and block any independent action by the working class, including a general strike.

The officials of the AFL-CIO, the state and local government workers union AFSCME and the teachers union WEAC called off the protests after the Republican-controlled state legislature passed Walker's anti-worker legislation and he signed it into law. They told workers to put their faith in court challenges and a recall campaign against six Republican state senators who had voted for the bill. Two of the six were ultimately recalled, leaving the Republicans a one-vote majority in the state senate.

Throughout the summer and fall, the unions held out the prospect of an upcoming recall campaign against

Walker himself. Under state law, no official can be recalled until after a full year in office, so the petition could not be filed until mid-January, a year after Walker took the oath as governor.

Once launched in mid-November, the recall petition drive tapped into enormous hatred for the governor and his right-wing policies. But the recall process only forces a new election in which Walker will face off against a candidate nominated by the Democratic Party, which is equally committed to policies of budget cutting at the expense of the working class.

The most likely Democratic candidate, according to media polls published in recent days, is Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, who was the Democratic candidate for governor defeated by Walker in 2010. After the petition was filed, Barrett issued a statement saying, "I stand with the hundreds of thousands of ordinary Wisconsin citizens who have had enough of Walker's cynical politics that try to divide the people of our state. It's time for a new direction that will heal our fractured state and move Wisconsin forward again."

Despite this lip service to the popular opposition to Walker's measures, Barrett has actually put them into practice in his capacity as chief executive of the city of Milwaukee.

The changes in collective bargaining apply to all public employees in the state, including local government, and Barrett followed suit from Walker, requiring city workers to pay more for their pension and health care benefits.

Last month the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reported that some union officials were trying to prevent Barrett from becoming a candidate. It cited a letter from Mary Bell, president of the Wisconsin Education Association Council, the main state teachers union, to other WEAC officials, noting that union leaders had met with Barrett, but "did not convince Mayor Barrett that he should not run in a potential recall election.

Another top union official, Marty Beil, executive director of the state AFSCME affiliate, told the *Capital Times* newspaper in Madison, "It is clear that Barrett is an unacceptable candidate. From our perspective, Barrett has been doing the bidding of Walker."

These well-placed leaks are only aimed at giving the union officials political cover, since they clearly fear that a Barrett candidacy will explode the pretense that the recall campaign is a genuine effort to overturn the

anti-worker laws and fatally discredit both the unions and the Democratic Party.

There is rising discontent with both the Democrats and the union leaders who serve them. This is reflected in one stark statistic: the number of state employees choosing to retire nearly doubled last year, from an average of 10,500 during the previous seven years to 18,780, according to the state Department of Employee Trust Funds. Nearly 8,000 workers left public employment during the April through June quarter, after the passage of the anti-worker legislation. The decline of 10 percent was the biggest percentage drop for any American state.

Whether Barrett or some other equally right-wing capitalist politician becomes the Democratic candidate against Walker, such a two-party recall contest will offer no choice whatsoever for the working class in Wisconsin. Only the independent mobilization of the working class against both parties, and against the corporate elite they both serve, offers a way forward.



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