

# Wisconsin gubernatorial recall election set for June 5

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A special election that could lead to the removal of Republican Governor Scott Walker has been set for June 5 in the Midwestern US state of Wisconsin. Recall elections for Walker's lieutenant governor and four state senate seats will also be held that day.

Between November 2011 and January 2012 approximately one million signatures were collected for the recall of Walker, well above the 540,208 signatures needed to trigger a new election. The vote June 5 is not strictly speaking a recall—an up-or-down vote on Walker—but a rather a new contest pitting Walker against a Democrat, in which the only choices are to vote for one or the other capitalist candidate. The overwhelming response was a sign of the deep hostility to Walker, whose austerity measures and attacks on public sector workers provoked mass protests during the winter of 2011.

From the outset, however, the trade union and liberal and “left” supporters of the recall campaign have used it to divert popular opposition and keep workers tied to the Democratic Party. They have promoted the Wisconsin Democrats as “pro-labor” even as Democratic-controlled state governments throughout the country and the Obama administration have pursued an unrelenting attack on social programs and the jobs, living standards and workplace rights of teachers and other public sector workers.

In February and March of last year tens of thousands of workers and students turned out day after day to protest Walker's “Budget Repair Bill.” The measure stripped state, county and municipal employees of collective bargaining rights while forcing them to pay thousands of dollars in additional out-of-pocket health care costs. The protests—which erupted largely outside of the control of the unions—became the largest movement of American workers in decades, with more

than 100,000 workers converging on the capitol building in Madison.

Fearing they could lose control, the state and national unions called off the protests right at the point when sentiment was growing for a general strike against Walker. Officials from the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) then sought to conceal this betrayal by claiming the recall was the “next stage” of the struggle.

The shutdown of the protests allowed Walker to sign Act 10 into law on March 11, 2011. The measure barred public employees from bargaining over benefits and working conditions and limited negotiations to wages. It also ended the automatic dues deduction from workers' paychecks—making payment voluntary—and required that unions hold annual votes to be recertified as bargaining agent.

The Democrats are holding a May 8 primary to select a challenger to Walker. While promising to restore collective bargaining rights, all of the candidates are committed to continuing the austerity measures, which have slashed billions from K-12 and higher education, health care and other programs. They have also made no proposals to rescind the imposition of massive health care costs on public employees.

There are currently four Democrats in the running to challenge Walker: the current Mayor of Milwaukee Tom Barrett, former Dane County (Madison) Executive Kathleen Falk, secretary of state Doug La Follette, and state senator Kathleen Vinehout.

Barrett lost to Walker in the 2010 race for governor. He has voiced his support for the wage and benefit cuts enacted by the Walker administration. Barrett has the backing of the Democratic Party establishment, receiving endorsements from long serving Senator Herb

Kohl and former Congressman David Obey. Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel stumped for Barrett at a fundraiser late last month.

Falk has received the majority of public and private sector union support. During her time as County Executive she extracted more than \$10 million in concessions from union workers. She has been endorsed by the state service unions including AFSCME and Service Employees International Union; the state teachers unions WEAC and the Wisconsin Federation of Teachers and the AFL-CIO.

Vinehout and La Follette have yet to receive any significant endorsements from the unions or Democratic Party establishment giving them little chance of winning the primary. Vinehout was one of the 14 Democratic State Senators who fled the capitol in order to delay a vote on the budget bill during the height of the protests. La Follette has served as Wisconsin's Secretary of State since 1983.

The election of a Democrat will produce no substantive change for the working class. The differences between Walker and the Democrats are entirely tactical. During the course of last year's mass protests, the Democrats argued that Walker's predecessor, Democratic Governor Jim Doyle, had imposed the deepest cuts in Wisconsin history—*without a social explosion*—precisely because he worked with the unions.

Workers saw Walker's attack on collective bargaining rights as an effort to criminalize any organized resistance to the attack on living standards and working conditions. It was an entirely different matter for the unions, however, which abandoned any meaningful right to collective bargaining by agreeing to Walker's demands for \$300 million in health care concessions. Instead, the union limited their demands to protecting the institutional interests of the labor bureaucracy, above all the ability to continue to deduct union dues from workers' paychecks.

In addition to pushing for the recall of Walker and other Republican politicians the unions have been challenging the legality of Act 10 in court. On March 30, a federal judge appointed by Obama ruled unconstitutional those portions of the act which required mandatory recertification votes and restrictions on union dues check offs. At the same time, US District Judge William M. Conley upheld

restrictions limiting collective bargaining rights to wages. The unions—which will be able to resume the collection of dues at the end of May barring appeals or a higher court ruling—praised the judge's decision as a major victory.

The court's order came just hours after state election officials ordered a recall election for Walker.

It is expected that tens of millions of dollars will be expended by all sides in an attempt to win the recall election. Unions spent more than \$12 million dollars in last year's recall elections, and they are expected to spend just as much in this cycle. Governor Scott Walker's campaign—which has the support of major right-wing financial backers—has already raised more than \$12 million to defend the governorship.

A Marquette University Law School poll from March 27 showed Barrett leading the primary with 36 percent, followed by Falk with 29 percent, and La Follette and Vinehout both with 8 percent. Seventeen percent of Democratic voters remained undecided. The poll revealed that all four candidates currently trail Walker among prospective voters.



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