

Wisconsin primary picks right-wing Democrat for governor

Patrick Martin
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Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett won the Democratic primary in Wisconsin Tuesday and will face Republican Governor Scott Walker in a recall election June 5. The recall election was forced through a petition campaign that collected nearly one million signatures, after Walker and the Republican-controlled state legislature enacted an anti-worker law in March 2011 that slashed collective bargaining rights and imposed drastic cuts in healthcare and other benefits for state and local government employees.

Barrett, who lost the November 2010 general election to Walker as the Democratic candidate for governor, defeated three other candidates for the nomination, winning 58 percent of the vote compared to 34 percent for his principal opponent, former Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk.

Under Wisconsin's procedure, there is no actual vote to recall an elected official. Instead, a successful recall petition forces a new election for the remainder of the scheduled term, in which the recalled official is eligible to run again. Walker won the Republican gubernatorial nomination Tuesday, facing only token opposition in the Republican primary.

AFL-CIO, AFSCME and Wisconsin Education Action Council (WEAC) union officials launched the recall campaigns last year to divert and shut down the mass protests in Madison and other cities, an unprecedented movement in the working class that was heading towards a general strike against the Walker administration and its anti-worker policies.

The unions first organized recall campaigns against a half dozen Republican state senators, but only two of the six were eventually ousted last summer, leaving the Republicans in control of the state senate by a 17-16 margin. In November, they began the campaign to recall Walker and Neefisch, and four more state

senators, getting more than double the required half million signatures to force new elections.

The end result of this protracted process is a contest between Walker and a Democratic politician, Barrett, who largely shares his views on the need for austerity policies directed against the working class, and particularly against public employees. As mayor of Milwaukee, Barrett used the new anti-labor powers provided under Walker's state law to impose \$19 million in concessions on employees of the city of Milwaukee.

In the Democratic primary, the union leaders at first tried to pressure Barrett not to run, concerned that his candidacy would expose the fraud of the entire recall campaign. They backed Falk, who as chief executive in Dane County (Madison) had also imposed concessions on local government workers. Falk, however, was out of office when the Walker law took effect, and she vowed to veto any state budget that did not repeal the anti-worker provisions—a pledge that Barrett refused to make.

Neither candidate called for rescinding Walker's cuts to public services, including \$1.6 billion from public education and the removal of 53,000 people from BadgerCare, the state health care program.

The union leaders spent more than \$4 million to boost Falk's campaign, outspending Barrett by five to one, but Barrett had the overwhelming support of the party establishment, including most of its top elected officials. He won easily, carrying 56 of 72 counties statewide, including Dane County, Falk's home base, and home to tens of thousands of state government workers.

AFL-CIO and other union officials flocked to Barrett's victory party Tuesday night in Milwaukee and declared their support for him in the recall election

June 5. The outcome of that contest is very much in question: polls show a dead even race. The four candidates seeking the Democratic nomination won 665,436 votes Tuesday, while Walker collected 626,538 in a virtually uncontested Republican primary.

Walker has received immense funding from corporate and ultra-right sources, raising a record \$25 million while his opponents were collecting signatures on the recall petitions.

According to press reports, Barrett has stated on several occasions that he opposed Walker's changes in collective bargaining rights but supported the cuts in health and pension benefits.

This is basically the same position as that of the unions. From the beginning of the mass protests last winter, the Wisconsin unions made it clear they were perfectly willing to sacrifice the jobs and living standards of workers. Their chief concern was preserving the institutional interests of the labor apparatus, above all its ability to collect membership dues.

On this basis the unions used the recall campaign to sabotage last year's movement, which included mass protests, the takeover of the state capitol building by anti-Walker demonstrators and demands from the rank-and-file for a general strike.

The result is an election in which the same two right-wing bourgeois candidates face each other as in November 2010—Scott Walker for the Republicans and Tom Barrett for the Democrats.

The outcome of the primary thus demonstrates that the capitalist-controlled two-party system provides no outlet for the working class, no way forward for working people seeking to defend their jobs, living standards and democratic rights. It is a political dead end.



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