

Republican governor wins recall election in Wisconsin

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Republican Governor Scott Walker won a recall election Tuesday in Wisconsin, defeating Democrat Tom Barrett, the mayor of Milwaukee, by a significant margin. While exit polls initially showed a 50-50 contest, the television networks projected a Walker victory about 9 p.m. local time, only an hour after the polls closed.

Walker was winning heavily Republican areas like the upscale western suburbs of Milwaukee by a margin even greater than in 2010, when he was first elected governor. Walker also led in most of the rural counties, while Barrett had large margins only in the city of Milwaukee and in Dane County, which includes the state capital Madison.

Voter turnout was not significantly higher than in 2010, indicating that the claims of a massive get-out-the-vote operation by the unions and the state Democratic Party were vastly overblown. Barrett's total vote may even fall short of his vote in 2010, when he was also the losing Democratic candidate for governor against Walker.

Walker's victory was the predictable outcome of the deliberate demobilization of the working class revolt provoked by his anti-worker law, pushed through the state legislature in February and March of 2011. The law stripped collective bargaining rights from most public employees in state and local government and set in motion drastic cuts in their wages and benefits.

The passage of the so-called "budget repair" bill came in the face of mass demonstrations involving tens of thousands of workers and youth in Madison and other cities. There was rising sentiment in the working

class for a general strike and a full-scale confrontation with the Walker administration, with workers comparing their own struggle to the protests in Egypt that had just brought down the US-backed dictator Hosni Mubarak.

The unions, the Democratic Party and pseudo-left groups like the International Socialist Organization intervened into this growing mass movement to divert it into the blind alley of big business politics. They did this through a series of recall campaigns, first against a group of state senators, then against Walker and his lieutenant governor, Rebecca Kleefisch. Nearly one million people signed petitions to recall Walker and Kleefisch, forcing the June 5 election.

The entire recall campaign was a fraud, since the Democratic Party supported the cuts in wages and benefits for state and local government workers, objecting only to Walker's exclusion of the unions from participation in the process of determining what would be cut.

Barrett, who won the Democratic primary and became the party's candidate in the June 5 vote, had actually made extensive use of Walker's anti-worker law to impose \$19 million in wage and benefit cuts on city employees in Milwaukee. The Democratic candidate largely downplayed the issue of collective bargaining rights and sought to distance himself from the unions, boasting in one debate that he had not been their choice for the nomination.

In the last week before the vote it was widely reported in the press that the Democrats had decided to drop the issue of Walker's anti-worker measures.

Typical was the June 4 report in *Politico.com* under the headline “Wisconsin Dems Sidestep Labor Debate in Recall.” The article stated: “On the eve of the June 5 recall election, the issue of collective bargaining has become just a footnote in the hard-fought battle for Wisconsin. Democrats gloss over the issue in campaign speeches, political advertisements and debates...”

The national Democratic Party opposed the recall effort, refusing either funds or active campaign support for Barrett until the last week, when there was a flurry of appearances by national Democrats like former president Clinton. This was largely an attempt to disguise the deliberate torpedoing of the campaign.

President Obama never made an appearance in Wisconsin during the recall campaign and barely disguised his hostility to the anti-Walker effort. Last week he attended a fundraiser in Minneapolis and then flew across Wisconsin to another fundraiser in Chicago without bothering to set foot in the state.

Liberal apologists for Obama and the Democrats, like the *Nation* magazine and MSNBC host Rachel Maddow, complained that the Republicans and their billionaire backers raised vast sums for pro-Walker advertising and outspent the Democrats by a margin of 30 to one. Such comments are a deliberate cover-up of the reality that the Democrats had no desire to win and mounted only a token effort.

Nation publisher Katrina vanden Heuvel, in an op-ed column published in the *Washington Post*, claimed that win or lose the recall campaign in Wisconsin “gives progressives something to build on.” That “something,” of course, is the reelection of Barack Obama, who has continued and deepened the right-wing policies of George W. Bush.

The truth is that the Wisconsin recall campaign was a farce from beginning to end. Its sole purpose was to sabotage the struggle against the Walker administration by blocking any independent mobilization of the working class and diverting the energy of workers and young people into the safe channels of the Democratic Party—a party just as committed to the defense of corporate interests as the Republicans.

If Barrett had somehow been victorious, despite his best efforts and those of his fellow Democrats to lose, he would have carried out policies indistinguishable from those of Walker. And the liberals and pseudo-lefts would have hailed the great “people’s victory” and covered up the reactionary consequences.

The debacle in Wisconsin underscores the dimensions of the struggle now facing the working class. The defense of jobs, living standards and social services can go forward only through a mass rebellion against capitalism and the political domination of the financial aristocracy. This requires, first and foremost, a break with the Democratic Party and all its political apologists and defenders and the building of an independent party of the working class, fighting for a socialist program.

This is the perspective for which the Socialist Equality Party is fighting in the 2012 elections. We urge workers and young people in Wisconsin and throughout the United States to support our candidates, Jerry White for president and Phyllis Scherrer for vice president, and to take up the fight for a socialist program. For more information, visit www.socialequality.com.



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