Washington state Supreme Court allows right-wing recall campaign to proceed against Kshama Sawant

Claude Delphian, Julio Patron
5 April 2021

Last Thursday, the Washington state supreme court allowed the right-wing recall petition against Seattle City Council member and Socialist Alternative member Kshama Sawant to move forward. The recall campaign was launched by a section of the Democratic Party with the support of far-right forces last summer to oust Sawant from elected office on spurious grounds.

Ernest Lou, a Seattle business executive and long-time supporter of the Democratic Party, filed the recall initiative in September and included six charges. The charges include using city resources to carry out the Tax Amazon ballot initiative and failing to comply with public disclosure requirements, allowing Socialist Alternative to make employment decisions regarding her City Council office, leading protesters to Democratic Mayor Jenny Durkan's private residence, and letting anti-police violence demonstrators into Seattle City Hall on one occasion while it was closed to the public for COVID-19.

There are also two charges regarding her support for the Capitol Hill Occupied Protest (CHOP), which were subsequently dismissed by Judge Jim Rogers in the King County Superior Court on September 16th.

The petition has received financial backing from Jeannie Nordstrom (the wife of the former chairman and CEO of Nordstrom department stores), art gallery owner Stacey Levitan, web hosting firm Sound Strategies and other upper-middle class and capitalist layers. When asked about the recall effort's chances, their campaign manager Henry Bridger expressed his confidence and said that their backers were like most people in District 3, "Democrat or liberal."

Now that the state Supreme Court has given the legal green light for the recall drive to proceed, the lower King County Superior Court must finalize the summary of the recall charges. Recall petitioners have 180 days to collect more than 10,000 signatures from District 3, which Sawant represents. The number of signatures represents 25 percent of the almost 43,000 votes cast in the November 2019 race.

If the signatures are collected, a recall election would commence, with the hopes of it being added to the August primary elections ballot. Henry Bridger said that campaign backers don't want to appear on the General Election ballot due to the question possibly bringing a higher turnout and influencing other electoral races. "This is about her, not about electing someone," Bridger said Thursday.

If Sawant is recalled, District 3 voters will not be choosing a replacement until the next regular election in 2023. That undemocratic privilege lies with the City Council, which would appoint a replacement within 20 days of the vacancy.

The *World Socialist Web Site* does not politically support Sawant, but the campaign to undemocratically remove her from office is an attempt by the local Democratic Party establishment to intimidate and suppress social opposition to police violence, racism, and social inequality which was aggravated by the Trump administration's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and which continues to deepen under the Biden administration.

Ernest Lou, the petition's original applicant, supported Pete Buttigieg in the 2020 Democratic Party primary elections. In the fall, Lou described himself as a "big bleeding heart liberal," later adding that, "She [Sawant] is the leftist version of the right-wing version of Trump. She's a cancer in Seattle."

© World Socialist Web Site

Sawant is the target of this reaction due to her association with police violence protests and the “Tax Amazon” campaign, which imposed a minuscule payroll tax of less than 2 percent on Amazon and other large corporations. Jeff Bezos publicly opposed the payroll tax increase and supported Sawant’s political opponent in the 2019 City Council election.

To give a sense of the political motivations behind the campaign, it is worth comparing the way the state supreme court treated the recall petition with another recent recall initiative against Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan. The latter was launched on a left-wing basis to oppose Durkan’s excessive use of force against peaceful protesters during the anti-police violence movement last year. However, the supreme court did not allow the anti-Durkan petition to move forward in October.

Despite its origins in the Democratic Party, the recall petition has garnered considerable right-wing and Republican support. On the “Recall Kshama Sawant” Facebook page, supporters wrote: “Good riddance to the American hating socialist,” “If she wants change why doesn’t she go work at the Red Light District in India?” “Get that Marxist out of city government NOW!!” “This woman should be deported,” and “behead her.”

More recently, Sawant received death threats from a Seattle Fire Department email address. The Socialist Equality Party (US) issued a public statement calling on the city to launch an immediate investigation and provide protection for Sawant, her staff and their families.

“If you need help leaving, try jumping head first off the top floor of your building, I’ll even come push you,” the individual wrote as early as December 2020. After a delayed response from the city to carry out an investigation, Seattle police finally arrested 42-year-old Andrew Thomas Finseth on charges of “cyberstalking, computer trespass, and identity theft.”

The events in Seattle illustrate the rightward trajectory of the entire political establishment, with the Democratic Party extending the “bipartisan” olive branch to the far right as the ruling class becomes increasingly concerned over left-wing social opposition from below.

On a national level, the Democratic Party has repeatedly attempted to downplay the coup attempt in Washington, D.C. on January 6, as well as the fascist plot to kidnap and murder their own Democratic governors Ralph Northam (Virginia) and Gretchen Whitmer (Michigan) last fall. President Biden has himself characterized protesters as “violent” while praising police.

The entire record of the Democratic Party, in Seattle and across the country, exposes the fantasy promoted by Socialist Alternative and other pseudo-left organizations that the Democratic Party can be pressured to the left and carry out progressive reforms. The Democratic Party’s involvement in the recall campaign illustrates how it is a blind alley for any genuine socialist movement of the working class. It is a party of Wall Street, the CIA and the military. It is a capitalist party that acts based on its class character, attempting to block any social opposition to the capitalist system it represents.

Despite fundamental political differences, the Socialist Equality Party upholds the democratic right of Sawant to complete her term in the office to which she was twice elected. Her democratic election must not be overturned on the basis of absurd and legally baseless charges.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site