

Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant declares “apparent victory” in recall election

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The year-long recall campaign against Seattle Councilwoman Kshama Sawant, a member of Socialist Alternative, is coming to a close. The latest results from recall election, which ended December 7, show Sawant with a narrow lead of 50.3 percent opposing the recall. On Friday, Sawant declared an “apparent victory.”

Sawant’s lead is a reversal from earlier in the count, which showed 53 percent of ballots for the recall. At the time, only 32,000 ballots had been counted, less than half of the 77,000 potential voters in Sawant’s district, District 3. Current totals from King County show that now nearly 41,000 ballots have been counted, including many mail-in ballots that hadn’t previously been tallied.

The reversal in the vote count has been attributed largely to late votes coming in from younger voters. During the November general election, voters aged 18 to 34 accounted for only 18 percent of the vote. That number jumped to 32 percent during the recall election, while the second highest age demographic of voters were those 65 years old and above.

Sawant currently leads by only 232 votes, and there are 709 ballots that have been returned but are being challenged. As with the vote itself, a plurality of the challenged ballots are from those aged 18 to 34.

The final results will only be known on December 17, the day after the deadline for signature challenges to be resolved. At that point, if Sawant retains her lead, she will remain in office. If the recall wins, her replacement would simply be appointed by the Seattle City Council by January 6, 2022. Residents will not have a chance to vote on a new councilmember until general elections next November. There is the potential that either side could request a recount if the margin of victory is below 0.5 percent.

The recall has been led by sections of the political

establishment and has targeted Sawant’s involvement in anti-police violence protests that took place in Seattle in the summer of 2020 and her proposal for a meager payroll tax on Amazon’s Seattle headquarters.

The Recall Sawant campaign has received major support from the local ruling class, including investors and large landlords, along with other privileged middle-class layers who occupy the wealthier northeastern parts of her district. Initiated by these layers, primarily aligned with a section of the Democratic Party, the recall effort attracted the support of Republicans and other far-right elements who have launched a xenophobic and anti-communist campaign.

Responding to the growth of militancy and interest in left-wing politics among workers and youth, Seattle corporations and politicians are increasingly shifting toward a more conservative, “law and order” and pro-corporate set of policies. This process lay behind the recent victory of conservative Democrats Bruce Harrell and Sara Nelson against “progressives” in the Seattle general elections. American bourgeois politics is shifting to the right, led by the Biden administration’s support for increased police and military funding, commitment to “unity” with the fascistic Republicans, and the embrace of “herd immunity” policies.

Socialist Alternative is itself entirely oriented toward the Democratic Party. While calling the Democrats “a failed, rotten party” at her press conference on Friday, Sawant has dedicated her entire political career to sowing illusions that “progressive” Democrats can be pressured to the left.

Referring to Democrats on the City Council, including Teresa Mosqueda and Tammy Morales, Sawant said on Friday, “I strongly urge that they and our socialist office act in unity as the City Council’s progressive wing, to fight back against big business

attacks, and go on the offensive for workers.”

She added, “If, in fact, the goal of the liberal Democrats was to fight unambiguously for working people, I would happily join them. I would meet them today and the next day to strategize for how we can go on the offensive for rent control, affordable housing, to fight against institutional racism in this city. But the choice is theirs.”

She continued with demagogic criticisms of “woke progressive liberals,” but the message was clear: Sawant aims to extend her relationship with the Democratic Party.

In terms of what she is proposing, Sawant outlined in her speech the small change of reformist measures she has advocated, including the “Tax Amazon” campaign, which resulted in the imposition of a minor payroll tax of less than 2 percent on Amazon and other corporations, and a proposal to require contractors to pay for construction worker parking.

Sawant did not refer once to the central political issue facing workers and youth: the ruling class response to the pandemic, which has resulted in the death of nearly 800,000 people in the US. The words “COVID” and “pandemic” did not appear in her speech. She did not mention the reopening of schools to in-person learning and the ending of all restrictions to the spread of the virus, which in Seattle and Washington has been spearheaded by the Democratic Party.

Sawant herself recently joined the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which functions as a faction of the Democratic Party, boosting Democrats like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Jamaal Bowman. The DSA National Political Committee last week rejected calls to expel Bowman for voting to finance the Israeli military and visiting with far-right Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett.

Socialist Alternative represents sections of the upper-middle class, not the working class, and thus depends on its relationships with the union bureaucracies and Democratic Party. Of the just under \$1 million donated to her solidarity campaign, the top donors were from unions, including the Service Employees International Union Locals 925 and 6, Washington Federation of State Employees Local 1488, as well as the Seattle DSA.

Whatever the final outcome of the vote, the central task for all workers and youth is the creation of a

genuinely independent political movement of the working class, internationally united in a direct struggle against the capitalist system.



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