

Wisconsin's Recall Election

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Winter 2011 witnessed an epic worker rights battle. Wisconsin public workers challenged Republican Governor Scott Walker.

He won round one. Workers get another chance. On June 5, they'll choose between him and Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett. Neither offers much choice. More on that below. Lieutenant governor and four senate seats are also up for grabs.

On June 1, the [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) headlined "Barrett, Walker bring out political stars," saying:

Barrett lured Bill Clinton. Republican party spokesman Ben Sparks asked why him and not Obama. Walker countered with South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley, "a rising star of the Republican Party."

In late 2011 and early 2012, around one million recall signatures were collected. It was nearly double the required amount.

Walker represents union-busting and eroding collective bargaining rights en route to ending them altogether. He also imposed draconian wage and benefit cuts on public workers.

Both candidates support monied, not popular interests. Wisconsin Democrats aren't much better choices than Republicans. Regardless of who wins on Tuesday, labor rights lose. Wisconsin reflects what's happening across America. It's bad and getting worse.

Bipartisan force-fed austerity means lower living standards, increased layoffs, fewer jobs, mostly low pay/poor benefit part-time ones, and private workers harmed like public ones.

In February and March 2011, Wisconsin public workers and students protested daily against Walker's so-called "Budget Repair Bill."

It was a corporate coup d'etat. It eroded state, county and municipal worker collective bargaining rights. It forced them to pay thousands of dollars in health and pension benefit costs. It pitted workers against politicians allied with corporate bosses. They battled on their

own without union help.

It was the most impressive worker struggle in decades. It didn't end when Walker's budget passed. It won't on Tuesday. Wisconsin public workers are energized. They won't yield easily. They haven't so far. They face long odds but won't quit.

On March 10, 2011, Wisconsin's legislature passed Walker's Budget Repair Bill (Wisconsin Act 10). On March 11, he signed it into law.

The same day, Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk sued to stop what she called unconstitutional.

On March 18, Dane County Circuit Court Judge Maryann Sumi issued a temporary restraining order. She said passage violated Wisconsin's Open Meetings Law.

Attorney General Steven Means appealed. On March 29, Sumi extended her restraining order.

On June 14, Wisconsin's Supreme Court overruled her. Voting 4 - 3, the majority said it "exceeded its jurisdiction, invaded the legislature's constitutional powers....and erred in enjoining the publication and further implementation of the act."

Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson disagreed. In a stinging dissent, she rebuked her colleagues. She said:

The Court unjustifiably "reached a predetermined conclusion not based on the fact(s) and the law, which undermines the majority's ultimate decision."

Majority justices "make their own findings of fact, mischaracterize the parties' arguments, misinterpret statutes, minimize (if not eliminate) Wisconsin constitutional guarantees, and misstate case law, appearing to silently overrule case law dating back to at least 1891."

Nonetheless, pro-business, anti-worker rights triumphed. In March 2011, a protracted Senate battle ended when hard-line Republicans violated Wisconsin's open meetings law. It requires 24 hours prior notice for special sessions unless giving it is impossible or impractical.

Workers never had a chance. Walker got his way. Things won't change no matter who wins on Tuesday. It's the same across America at the federal, state and local levels.

Walker's budget bill prohibits workers from bargaining on benefits and working conditions. It

provides limited negotiation rights on wages. It also ended automatic union dues deductions. Payments became voluntary. Unions must vote annually to be recertified as bargaining representatives.

Democrats promised to restore collective bargaining rights, but won't reinstate former health and benefit rights. Both sides support austerity and other pro-business priorities.

In 2010, Barrett lost to Walker. He supports wage and benefit cuts. So do Democrat party bosses and corrupt union officials. Walker's predecessor, Jim Doyle, imposed the most draconian cuts in Wisconsin history. Workers were hardest hit. Union heads supported him.

Backing Democrats, they challenged Act 10 in federal court. On March 30, 2012, US District Court Judge William Conley ruled portions of the measure requiring mandatory recertification votes and restrictions on union dues check offs unconstitutional.

At the same time, he upheld limited collective bargaining rights on wages.

On April 5, Walker signed Senate Bill 202. It reversed Wisconsin's Equal Pay for Equal Work Act (Act 20).

According to the Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health, (WAWH) Act 20 sought, "to secure equal pay for the thousands of working families who are denied fair pay due to wage discrimination based on race and gender."

SB 202 removed Act 20 compensatory and punitive damage violations.

It's more than about women. It's also about affording minorities, the disabled, and other marginalized groups equal pay rights. Walker called the law a "gravy train" for trial lawyers. WAWH's Sara Finger called SB 202 a "demoralizing attack on women's rights, health, and well-being."

On June 5, Wisconsin voters hope their say will make a difference. Reality suggests otherwise. Two new polls reflect a dead heat. One has Walker and Barrett even with each getting 49% support. The other has Walker leading 50 - 48%. Within the margin of error, it's too close to call.

Walker's campaign war chest outspent Barrett around 25 to 1. Billionaire Koch brothers and other corporate bosses support him.

In a late May debate, Barrett didn't contest Walker's anti-worker laws. Throughout the campaign he hardly mentioned them. The issue at most was secondary. Worker rights hardly matter.

As Milwaukee mayor, Barrett used Act 10 provisions to cut city worker benefits. Union bosses concurred. Disingenuously they claim Barrett's on their side.

Union officials want their own privileges protected. Rank and file worker rights don't matter. Lip service only supports them. Barrett differs from Walker mainly by collaborating with unions for his own benefit.

Democrat National Committee (DNC) chairwoman Debbie Wasserman said "(t)here aren't going to be any (national) repercussions" if Walker wins.

Earlier she claimed his "attacks on workers' and women's rights are the definition of a fireable offense." She added that recalling him would send "a powerful message to the far-right extremists."

Wisconsin Democrats are upset by lack of DNC financial support. Not helping expresses tacit defeat. When economic conditions are dire, losing anywhere has national implications.

Hoped for change never arrives. Voters never learn until too late. Barrett or Walker winning hardly matters.

Few differences separate Obama and Romney. None on issues mattering most. Whoever wins, voters lose. So will Wisconsinites and ordinary people across America.

Expect nothing post-election to change. Ordinary people lose out across America, Europe and elsewhere. Elections won't correct injustices. Addressing them matters most. Radicalized activism has the best chance.

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