

...Recall effort underway in Wisconsin

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state senators who favor stripping public employees of bargaining rights.

Under Wisconsin law, elected representatives can face recall after one year in office. Recall supporters have 60 days to gather signatures from district residents who are eligible to vote. They must gather a number equal to 25 percent of votes the district cast for governor in the most recent election. That works out to 15,000 to 20,000 valid signatures in each district. The campaign filed papers March 3 to begin the recall of all eight Republican senators who have been in office a year.

Five of the eight are in strongly Republican districts, but the other three won office by small voter margins. If just three are recalled, the Republicans would lose their majority in the Senate.

Within days, MoveOn.org and Progressive Change Campaign Committee had collected up to \$2 million to fund the recall. The donations are funding television ads in Wisconsin and paying for a door-to-door signature gathering effort. In every one of the eight districts, recall campaign offices have opened and canvasses are under way. A web site, recalltherepublican8.com, helps coordinate support.

Once the campaigns meet signature-gathering targets, it would take elections officials about a month to check signatures and set an election date. Those seeking the recall will also have to put forward their own candidates. The recall elections would likely occur mid-summer.

Taking back the Senate would be only the first step. It would be enough to

stop Walker from passing more of his agenda, but not enough to reverse whatever Republicans are able to pass before then, because Republicans would still control the state assembly.

Walker himself can be recalled in early 2012, and opponents are already planning for that. That campaign can't start officially until Jan. 26, 2012, but organizers are signing up people now who are willing to sign petition then.

On March 9, Wisconsin Republicans mounted a surprise attack. All along, Gov. Walker and supporters insisted that taking away collective bargaining rights was a measure needed to balance the state budget, because only then could unilateral cuts be made to public employee wages and benefits. Senate rules require a three-fifths quorum to vote on bills that have a fiscal impact, but only a simple majority quorum on bills that don't. Republican leaders stripped the pension and health care cuts from the original bill, and reintroduced just those provisions stripping bargaining rights, saying it didn't have a fiscal impact after all, and therefore didn't require the missing Democratic senators to be present.

Without hearing or public notice, the new bill quickly passed. As many as 7,000 protesters charged to the Capitol by nightfall.

The state assembly would have to vote to concur, but on March 10, they had trouble getting into the Capitol, because it was surrounded by protesters and locked down by police. Eventually, assembly Republicans held the vote, and passed it over howls of protest by Democratic assembly members.

Democratic senators began returning from Illinois. And protests roared back, culminating in the biggest-yet rally in Madison of over 100,000 March 12. About 200 farmers joined in, with 50 tractors parading down the streets of Madison.

Walker signed the legislation. But for it to take effect, it must be published by the Wisconsin secretary of state. Democrat Doug LaFollete has up to 10 business days to do that. It's expected the law will take effect March 25.

When that happens, unions representing nurses at the University of Wisconsin hospital and University of Wisconsin graduate assistants will no longer be legally recognized. Union dues for all public employees will become voluntary. And the state will stop collecting union dues, whether members want to pay them or not. The first annual elections will then be held in April in all 30 state employee bargaining units — to see if workers want to go nonunion. Under the new law, unions will be able to bargain only over wages, and can not bargain increases higher than the increase in the cost-of-living. Up to now, Walker has not engaged in any bargaining with unions.

There's been some talk of general strike, but thus far, there's been no significant call for one. Dominique Paul Noth, editor of the Milwaukee Labor Press, says the concern is that a general strike might play into Walker's hands if it gets too chaotic. The closest thing so far is a call by the president of Communications Workers of America, endorsed by the AFL-CIO Executive Board, for a "movement-wide dramatic action"

April 4, the anniversary of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Readers wishing to support the Wisconsin fightback struggle can make donations online at www.wisafclio.org or

send checks to the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO Defense Fund, 6333 W. Blue Mound Rd., Milwaukee, WI 53213. On the memo line write: STAND WITH WISCONSIN.

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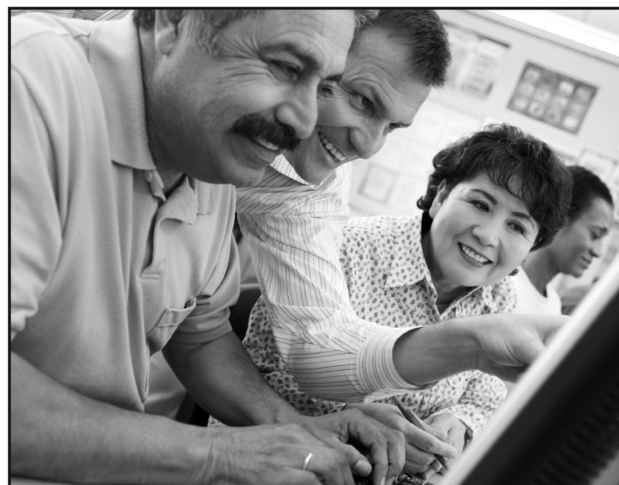
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