

Scott Walker quits Republican presidential race

Patrick Martin
24 September 2015

Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, once considered a co-frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination, announced Monday that he was quitting the contest. His withdrawal came only 70 days after he formally joined the campaign in early July.

Walker's three-minute statement mirrored his campaign—brief and lacking in substance. He gave little explanation for his pullout, which follows a plunge in national polls of likely Republican voters, from 13 percent to an asterisk (i.e., zero), a decline that coincided with his appearances in two televised debates, August 6 and September 16, to dismal reviews.

The candidate cited financial problems. Because Walker entered the race in early July, just after finance data for the second quarter fundraising was filed, it is not yet known how much his campaign has raised, but press reports suggest that it could not pay its bills and was being refocused exclusively on Iowa, the first state to vote. In the spring, Walker was leading in Iowa polls with 25 percent, but more recently had fallen to 10th place, at less than 3 percent.

Super PACs backing Walker's campaign have raised upwards of \$40 million, much of which remains unspent, but these funds cannot be used to pay for the candidate's campaign organization, only for more generalized support, such as advertising.

With typical sanctimony, Walker presented his withdrawal as an act of political self-sacrifice, perhaps divinely inspired. "Today I believe I am being called to lead by helping to clear the field in this race so that a positive conservative message can rise to the top of the field," he said.

He urged others of the 15 Republicans still in the race to do the same, to allow consolidation of support around someone who can offer "a positive conservative alternative to the current front-runner."

This was a reference to billionaire Donald Trump, whom Walker had refused to criticize previously. On the contrary, he had sought to "out-Trump" Trump on a number of issues, echoing his racist invective against immigrants and rebuking media criticism of Trump's crude and misogynistic language.

A few political conclusions can be drawn from the swift demise of the Walker campaign. Although he shot up in the polls of likely Republican primary voters, placing as high as second or tied for first with Jeb Bush at various points during the spring, Walker never had any genuine, widespread popular support.

In that, Walker does not differ from any of his rivals for the Republican nomination. All of them are frontmen for various billionaires, except in the case of Trump, who is a billionaire himself.

In Walker's case, he was a favorite of the Koch brothers, with David Koch declaring in April that Walker "should be" the Republican nominee. Another major backer was Joe Ricketts, founder of TD Ameritrade, while several lesser billionaires from Wisconsin pumped millions into his super PAC.

Walker gained notoriety in 2011 for pushing through anti-worker legislation in Wisconsin that stripped the public employee unions of many of their bargaining rights, slashed health benefits and pensions, and ended automatic dues checkoff. This was followed by the enactment of a right-to-work law, extending the attack on unions into the private sector.

When tens of thousands of workers mobilized, occupying the state capitol building for several weeks, the unions intervened to block mass sentiment in favor of a general strike and divert popular opposition into the blind alley of a recall campaign that would have replaced the Republican governor with a right-wing Democrat, Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, who has a

record of imposing austerity measures on city workers.

Walker survived the recall campaign with the help of tens of millions of campaign funds from right-wing multi-millionaires from around the country, then won re-election in 2014 over another right-wing Democratic opponent, this time multi-millionaire former corporate CEO Mary Burke.

The Wisconsin governor evidently mistook these victories over the sham opposition of the unions and the Democratic Party as proof of his political prowess. His entire presidential campaign was based on his union-busting record in Wisconsin, which he cited as the cure-all for every public policy issue.

Asked at the Conservative Political Action Conference about the foreign policy challenges facing the next US president, he replied by likening the workers in the streets of Madison to ISIS terrorists, declaring, “If I can take on 100,000 protesters, I can do the same across the world.”

The corporate-controlled media initially fawned over his campaign, suggesting that as the son of a preacher who had beaten down the unions, Walker was well placed to appeal to both Christian fundamentalists and big business, and thus unite key factions of the Republican Party.

The *New York Times* went so far as to publish a cover story in its Sunday magazine section, glorifying Walker’s 2011 role. As the WSWS wrote at the time, “The effort to inflate the significance of this political nobody is connected to the promotion of the myth that he faced down a ferocious struggle by the unions.”

In reality, however, the unions caved in unconditionally, offering to sign any deal to cut their own members wages and benefits, if only Walker would leave intact their ability to collect dues payments. This only underscores their completely parasitic and reactionary role, as the main obstacle to the independent mobilization of the working class to fight for its class interests.

Walker’s deficiencies as a candidate, of course, contributed to the rapidity of his demise. While perfectly willing to bully workers (providing they were delivered up gagged and bound by the unions), he proved to be timid in the face of actual opponents, even of the dubious caliber to be found on the debate stage in Cleveland and Simi Valley.

He invited ridicule both by his inability to articulate a

position—in the space of a week he was for, against and neutral on whether to overturn birthright citizenship, a reactionary demand promoted by Trump—and by embracing such bizarre nostrums as the building of a wall along the 5,500-mile border between the United States and Canada.

There is perhaps a more fundamental reason for the demise of his campaign, which goes beyond Walker’s personal failings, to the overall rationale for his candidacy, which was a call for a nationwide crusade against public employee unions, and against unions as a whole.

The AFL-CIO is not an oppositional force, but a component of the Democratic Party, one of the two main political instruments of the American financial aristocracy. It is wholly devoted to the defense of the interests of American imperialism abroad, and of the corporate establishment at home.

Most of corporate America has dispensed with unions. But in key industries like auto production, General Motors, Ford and Fiat Chrysler could not operate their plants without the industrial police force known as the United Auto Workers (UAW). They would look askance at efforts to eliminate the UAW.

These divisions are represented in capitalist politics, where the Democrats wish to use the unions as an instrument to attack the working class, and the Republicans see the unions as an unnecessary and costly intermediary and would prefer to attack the workers directly.

The differences are purely tactical, however. The US ruling elite does not require the services of a proven union-buster to come to Washington to subdue a powerful and obstreperous labor movement. No such labor movement exists.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact