

DSA-backed mayoral candidate wins Buffalo, New York Democratic Party primary

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India Walton, a candidate backed by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), is on track to be the next mayor of the western New York city of Buffalo following her defeat of longstanding incumbent Byron Brown in last week's Democratic Party primaries.

Brown, who ran an almost nonexistent political campaign and refused to debate Walton, was defeated by a margin of approximately 1,500 votes. While most local Democratic politicians had backed Brown, the county's Democratic Party leadership has pledged to support Walton moving forward.

With no Republican opponent and barring an unlikely to succeed write-in campaign proposed by Brown's campaign following his loss, Walton will likely assume her position as mayor following the November elections.

Much has been made in the national press of Walton's supposedly improbable win against an entrenched Democrat due to both her working class background and identification as a "democratic socialist." However, Walton was backed by forces within and around the Democratic Party as a means of containing social anger and keeping it confined to the capitalist system.

Walton, who is black, grew up in Buffalo's impoverished East Side. She later lived just south of the city of Buffalo in Lackawanna, the former site of a sprawling Bethlehem Steel factory that once employed thousands of steel workers.

While working as a registered nurse, Walton became a member of SEIU Local 1199 and later a union representative. It appears it is from this point that Walton came into the orbit of the Democratic Party, transitioning into a community "organizer" who spoke at a 2014 women's rights rally in Washington D.C. and later led or co-founded several non-profit organizations.

The defeat of Brown no doubt reflects growing social anger in Buffalo. As with other major "rust belt" cities, such as Baltimore, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Rochester and Minneapolis, Buffalo has long been run by the Democratic Party, which has overseen the unending police violence and the impoverishment of workers and youth.

Last year, Buffalo saw a brutal police crackdown on protests that followed the murder of George Floyd, epitomized in the widely shared video of police pushing 75-year-old protestor Martin Gugino to the ground. Gugino suffered a fractured skull and was unable to walk for several weeks afterwards. Neither officer involved in assaulting Gugino was ever charged.

In addition, Brown has overseen a rapid rise in the Buffalo region's housing prices and the gentrification of city neighborhoods, with the building of luxury apartments backed by large tax breaks for capitalist real estate developers. In contrast, Buffalo is one of the poorest cities in the US, with an official poverty rate of 28.8 percent, compared to a national average of 12.3 percent.

According to the 2019 American Community Survey, 43.4 percent of Buffalo's children live in poverty, a child poverty rate that is exceeded only by the cities of Detroit and Cleveland.

In addition to the national DSA, Walton's campaign was also supported by the Buffalo Teachers Federation, SEIU Local 1199 and the Working Families Party (WFP). Due to the ability of candidates in New York state to run on multiple party lines, the WFP essentially exists as a vehicle for the state's unions to back Democratic Party candidates.

While the WFP regularly supports incumbent Democrats, the organization from time-to-time backs "insurgent" Democrats, such as gubernatorial candidate

and actor Cynthia Nixon in 2018, to prevent workers and youth from breaking with the Democratic Party. Made up of union “organizers” with no real principles, the party has even previously supported Republicans that are friendly with the union bureaucracy.

In the days since her win, Walton has been hailed as the first “socialist” mayor of a large American city since Milwaukee’s Frank Zeidler left office in 1960. Following her win, she received congratulations from Congress members Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and has been covered positively in the *New York Times* as an example of how “progressives” can win in working class cities.

In reality, the DSA has counted a number of mayors of major cities as members of its socialist-in-name-only organization, including Ron Dellums of Oakland and the right-wing Democrat Mayor David Dinkins of New York City. Apparently, the DSA is hoping no one remembers its history of slapping the “socialist” label on candidates who are later exposed to be thoroughly conventional capitalist politicians.

In Walton’s own political program posted on her website, there is no mention of capitalism or socialism. If one were to read her program, one would have no idea that the problems of Buffalo—extreme poverty, low wages, a poor education system, police violence and political corruption—are endemic across capitalist America and the entire world.

Instead, her program is filled with typical left-liberal capitalist reform policies such as prioritizing “small and minority-owned local businesses” and targeting “infrastructure investments to create safe streets, calming traffic and increasing accessibility for people of all ages and abilities.”

The promotion of India Walton by the DSA, the WFP, the union bureaucracy, the *New York Times* and factions of the Democratic Party is in essence an attempt to “rebrand” an increasingly discredited capitalist political party.



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