



Written by [Wallis W. Wood](#) on June 12, 2012

## Wisconsin Vote Stuns the Left

It's been amusing to hear all the liberal talking heads on TV trying to claim that last week's vote in Wisconsin was no big deal. My friends, it was a very big deal indeed. In fact, it just may mark the beginning of the end of union power in this country.

Let's be very clear about what was at stake in this election. It wasn't just about ending collective bargaining for government employees. It wasn't even about how much of their pay union members should contribute for their pensions or their healthcare. While these issues are important, they pale in comparison to what really mattered.



The paramount issue was whether the government could force someone to belong to a union in order to hold a job and deduct union dues from his pay without giving him any say in the matter.

Governor Scott Walker and a Republican majority in the Wisconsin Legislature ended that sweetheart deal for public-sector unions in the state. The results have been catastrophic for the bully boys (and girls) of collective bargaining.

Once the law went into effect, no state employee could be forced to join a union in order to hold a job. Dues would no longer be deducted automatically; employees had to specifically request the deduction of union dues from their paychecks.

Given a choice, guess what happened? Tens of thousands of former union members said "no thanks." As a result, union membership and dues fell like a safe being dropped out of a window.

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) is the second-largest public-sector union in Wisconsin. The largest is the National Education Association.

Prior to the passage of the Walker reforms, AFSCME had 62,818 members in Wisconsin. Six months after the new law took effect, the number had declined to just 28,745 dues-paying members. In other words, once they weren't forced to be union members, more than 50 percent headed for the doors.

Bryan Kennedy, the president of the American Federation of Teachers in Wisconsin, said that failure to recall Walker "spells doom" for his union. Let's hope he's right.

None of this should come as a surprise. Time after time and in state after state, whenever right-to-work laws have replaced compulsory union membership, the results have been the same: More and more workers refuse to support unions. As President Barack Obama's team will tell you, it takes a heck of a lot of "community organizing" to make up the difference.

Fifty years ago, more than half of the blue-collar workers in America were members of a union. Today, only 7 percent of private-sector employees are union members. That is what happens when people are given a choice. A huge percentage of them will choose to keep the money they earn, rather than let



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some ham-fisted organization spend it — allegedly on their behalf.

Get government involved and the results are dramatically different. The percentage of government employees who belong to a union is about 37 percent. The total number of union members has skyrocketed, thanks to the explosive growth of government at federal, state and local levels.

Walker won the Governorship in 2010 by promising to bring some fiscal sanity to Wisconsin, which was facing a \$3 billion deficit. To do that, he said that union members would have to start contributing “their fair share.” (Sound familiar?)

His “5 and 12” plan called for government employees to pay more for their lavish pensions and their generous healthcare plans. Under the Walker proposal, contributions to the pension plans would climb to 5.8 percent of their pay. This was still a sweetheart deal compared to what private-sector workers get. Most of the latter have no pension whatsoever; those who do contribute, on average, a lot more than 5.8 percent of their pay toward their retirement.

Healthcare is even more expensive. The average private-sector worker pays 21 percent of the premiums for his or her coverage; government employees in Wisconsin paid just 6 percent of the costs of their health insurance, or less than one-third as much. The Walker plan would double that figure to 12.6 percent — still a bargain by almost any measure.

Union members in Wisconsin went absolutely ballistic at the thought of having to dig into their own pockets so much. Tens of thousands of them marched on the State Capitol in Madison, in a sort of local “Occupy” movement. When that wasn’t enough to intimidate the Legislature, 14 Democratic Senators fled the State. Yep, they high-tailed it to Illinois, so there wouldn’t be enough voters left in Madison to form a quorum.

That standoff lasted for a while. When a vote was finally taken, the Walker proposals passed handily. Union officials and their Democratic allies launched a highly publicized petition movement to demand a recall of Walker. Thousands of union volunteers poured into the State. They ended up collecting more than 900,000 signatures for the petition — way more than the 400,000 needed to force a special election.

On Tuesday, the unions and their Democratic allies got what they said they wanted: a chance for the public to vote “aye” or “nay” on the Walker reforms. After one of the most costly and divisive campaigns in state history, a record number of voters showed up at the polls.

Bless their hearts! They gave Walker an even bigger victory than they did in 2010, when he defeated Tom Barrett (yes, the same guy) by 5.5 percent of the votes cast. This time his victory was even bigger; he carried the State by 53 percent to 46 percent.

Let’s not forget that other Governors, including Mitch Daniels in Indiana and Chris Christie in New Jersey, have seen their popularity soar the more they have challenged teachers and other union members.

By the way, I suspect Obama’s pollsters had a much better idea of what was going to happen in Wisconsin than the number crunchers at CNN. How else can you explain Obama’s invisibility in what was clearly going to be one of the most important pre-November elections this year?

Oh, sure, Obama issued a lukewarm endorsement of Barrett from the safe confines of the White House. But when it came time to press the flesh and energize the crowds in Wisconsin, the President was nowhere to be seen. Nor was Vice President Joe Biden.



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Remember, Obama and Biden carried the State handily in 2008. Afterwards, the Veep told an enthusiastic crowd of union loyalists, "We owe you!" Sure thing, buddy. But not enough to risk getting some egg on their faces this time around.

Does Walker's stunning victory mean that Wisconsin is "in play" for Romney this fall? Time will tell. But in the meantime, is that a groundswell I hear saying "Walker for VP?"

Until next time, keep some powder dry.

**Chip Wood** was the first news editor of *The Review of the News* and also wrote for *American Opinion*, our two predecessor publications. He is now the geopolitical editor of *Personal Liberty Digest*, where his *Straight Talk* column appears weekly. This article first appeared in *PersonalLiberty.com* and has been reprinted with permission.



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