

Wisconsin Governor's N.Y. Fundraiser Gets Labor's Bronx Cheer

By DAN ROSENBLUM | Posted: Monday, April 27, 2015 5:00 pm

While being soaked by a heavy downpour, labor activists tried last week to dampen Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker's fundraising stop in New York with shouts and jeers as he spoke to a well-heeled crowd inside a club in Midtown.

More than two dozen poncho-wearing members of District Council 37, Teamsters Local 237 and other members of the AFL-CIO New York City Central Labor Council carried signs to condemn the Republican as he spoke to members of the Empire Club. They booed and blew whistles as billionaire David Koch, former New York gubernatorial candidate Rob Astorino and state Conservative Party Chairman Michael Long showed up for the lunch.

Ducking His Targets

"He ran right in," said André Green, an assistant director of education at Local 237, who watched Mr. Walker enter the Union League earlier that morning. He said a potential 2016 presidential candidate with such anti-labor beliefs should at least take some questions.

"There's a belief that unions are something we need to get rid of," he said. "That's totally wrong: unions are the reason why we have a middle class."

Though he hasn't yet announced his candidacy, polls show Mr. Walker is one of the Republican front-runners for the party's presidential nomination. Also considering a run are former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush as well as U.S. Sens. Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz and Rand Paul, and New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and ex-Govs. Mike Huckabee and George Pataki.

But the Wisconsin leader has cultivated a particularly acrimonious relationship with unions since taking office in 2011, when he pushed through his state's Legislature a package of laws that sharply reduced the rights of public employees and their unions by limiting the length of contracts, capping wage increases, increasing workers' benefit contributions and forcing unions to be recertified annually. In his most recent broadside against labor, in February, he compared standing up against



Raining on His Parade

RAINING ON HIS PARADE: More than two dozen union activists withstood the rain last week to protest a fundraising speech by Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker. "There's a belief that unions are something we need to get rid of. That's totally wrong: unions are the reason why we have a middle class," said one aggrieved member of Teamsters Local 237.

thousands of pro-union protesters who flooded the capital four years ago to taking on the Islamic State in the Middle East.

Go Back to Wisconsin

Chris Policano, a strategist for DC 37, said the Wisconsin economy was performing poorly and that recent polls suggested Mr. Walker was losing popularity in his home state. “What’s he doing coming to New York to talk to folks from the state GOP?” he said. “He should be taking care of business in his own state, and that should not be union-bashing.”

Cara Noel, a CLC spokeswoman, said the controversial Governor’s ideas weren’t welcome in New York. “These are hard-working people who are well-trained in their fields, and they are not going to let someone like Scott Walker ruin all the gains that workers have made,” she said.

But across East 37th St., more-receptive donors praised the Midwest executive as they passed reporters.

“Scott Walker is terrific and I really wish him all the best; he’s a tremendous candidate to be the nominee, in my opinion,” said Mr. Koch, adding that he could easily best Hillary Clinton in the general election. “If enough Republicans have a thing to say, why, he’ll defeat her by a major margin,” he said.

Bankroll That Won’t Quit

The Koch brothers, among the world’s richest people, have pumped millions of dollars into Tea Party and conservative causes and were Mr. Walker’s biggest early donors during his 2010 campaign. They’ve reportedly pledged to raise \$889 million for advertisements, foundations and field operations over the 2016 election cycle. But David Koch shed little light about what the candidate spoke about inside.

“Since I asked a major question of, how do we improve the public-education system, he spent about 15 minutes answering that question, and he did it brilliantly,” he said. “And so obviously, I really liked his point of view.”

Pressed for details, he said, “Well there are so many things, I can’t go into all them, but he’s really good at it, in my opinion.” (Mr. Walker has opposed the Common Core standards and backed charter schools and voucher programs in Wisconsin.)

Others in the state’s conservative circles weighed in. “I think the Governor delivered a very good message about the lack of leadership in our nation, the lack of leadership in our country and I think he’s someone who’s going to have to be seriously looked at,” said Mr. Long, whose party’s endorsement tends to strongly influence the state GOP’s choice.

He said the protesters—who began to depart before many of the attendees left—“have it backwards.”

'He Cares About Families'

“Those very men and women that were across the street demonstrating, they have families,” he said.

“And Mr. Walker, Governor Walker, the only thing he's interested in is making sure all those families can exist and make a living and survive.”

The Governor left from a side door en route to a Fox News interview where he said Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton was “out of touch from everyday Americans.”

Unwittingly caught in the gauntlet outside the Union League was City Comptroller Scott Stringer, who was coincidentally booked at the club to speak to the Municipal Forum of New York. He later said it was good that Mr. Walker realized “that we're a progressive, pro-union town.”