

# Socialists Should Advance Our Own Politics in 2024

July 8, 2024



*This article was written for an internal debate in Solidarity: A Socialist, Feminist, Anti-Racist Organization. - Eds.*

As socialists, how should we approach the 2024 presidential election? The two major parties, ideologically capitalist to their cores, present us with a choice between a neoliberal corporate militarist and a neofascist criminal maniac.

As I write this (July 7), Democratic leaders and donors are fighting over whether to stick with Biden or replace him after his shockingly bad debate performance on June 27. Even if the physically and mentally declining Joe Biden is replaced by a younger, more vigorous candidate, he or she will still be a tribune for the neoliberal and imperialist policies of the Democratic Party and its big donors in the corporate power elite.

The answer to the question of who is the lesser evil is easy. The Democratic corporate centrist is the lesser evil to Trump, the wannabe rightwing dictator. But does that mean socialists should support the Democratic candidate to stop Trump?

I think Hal Draper had the right answer the lesser evil question in his 1967 essay "Who will be the lesser evil in 1968?" Looking at the cases of progressives who voted for the lesser evil conservative Von Hindenburg to stop the fascist Hitler in 1932 Germany or for the liberal cold warrior Johnson to defeat the conservative cold warrior Goldwater in 1964 America, Draper said, "The point is that it is the question which is a disaster, not the answer. In setups where the choice is between one capitalist politician and another, the defeat comes in accepting the limitation to this choice."

In both cases, the lesser evil carried out what progressive voters for the lesser evil feared that the greater evil candidate would do. Von Hindenburg put Hitler in power by appointing him German Chancellor. Johnson massively escalated the war in Vietnam that his progressive voters feared Goldwater would do. Draper advised socialists that "you can't fight the victory of the rightmost forces by sacrificing your own independent strength to support elements just the next step away from them."

Biden beat Trump in 2020, but that didn't beat Trumpism. Instead, Biden has normalized and legitimized Trumpism. He has constantly pursued bipartisanship with the party that tried to overthrow his 2020 election. Instead of fighting the far right, exposing their lies, and ridiculing their extremist policies, Biden and other Democratic leaders have compromised with them. They have embraced many of the racist and repressive anti-immigrant policies of Trump and the MAGA Republicans. Biden approved 50% more oil and gas drilling permits on public lands than Trump did in the first three years of both administrations. On international affairs, Biden has expanded Trump's trade war with China, continued Trump's Cuba policies of tighter economic sanctions and designating it a state sponsor of terrorism, and continued Trump's anti-Palestinian policies, including moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, closing the Palestinian consulate in Jerusalem, promoting the Abraham Accords to normalize relations between the Arab kingdoms and Israel without justice for the Palestinians, and no consequences for Israel's continual expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank. The expanded weapons supply and intelligence coordination with Israel for its war on Gaza makes Genocide Joe a full partner in the ongoing genocide.

Yes, Trump would be even worse. But I contend that the best way for socialists to use their vote is to support the most positive independent alternative to this madness that is on the ballot. The best way in the presidential campaign to fight the right is to build progressive social movements and independent left politics by voting for the Green Party's Jill Stein campaign for President. The risk that Stein votes will "spoil" the election for Biden and elect Trump exists, but is very low. Whatever happens in the presidential election, we should prioritize going forward working to change the electoral system to ranked choice voting and proportional representation to enable the independent left to win its fair and proportional share of representation and power in government. If Trump is elected, it is vital that we mount a visible and vigorous public opposition to the repression and reactionary social, economic, environmental, and foreign policies that Trump and his Project 2025 playbook have promised.

### **The Green Party's Jill Stein Campaign**

Jill Stein's campaign is giving voice to the demands of the social movements we want to build. Her leading issue now is calling for a ceasefire and an end to US arms to Israel until Israel stops its war on Gaza and moves away from apartheid and occupation and toward a political accord with Palestine. Stein was arrested on April 28 supporting the students at the pro-Palestinian encampment at Washington University in St. Louis. Her campaign is where Palestinian solidarity supporters who won't vote for who they call Genocide Joe can use their vote as their voice of dissent.

Stein's campaign gives voice to the most progressive demands of popular social movements and conveys to activists in those movements that the Green Party is with them while the Democratic Party is not. In the climate movement Stein is expressing the demand of the climate movement's leftwing, including the Green Party, for an Ecosocialist Green New Deal featuring the large measure of the public ownership and planning that is needed coordinate and execute the complexities of a rapid transition to 100% clean energy and zero carbon emissions.

Stein is also supporting a socialist program for universal health care. She is calling for National Health Service that fully socializes health care assets and democratizes the delivery system, going well beyond only socializing payments through National Health Insurance, or Medicare for All.

These kinds of progressive and socialist positions on domestic policy are throughout her online platform, which is consistent with the Green Party platform that defines the party as ecosocialist.

I believe our support for Stein should be critical, however, principally due to her position on Ukraine, which is as hypocritical as Biden's is on Israel. Both talk about supporting human rights, democracy,

and international law, but Stein makes an exception for Russia's war crimes against Ukrainians just as Biden makes an exception for Israel's war crimes against Palestinians.

Stein's Ukraine platform plank only says, "Stop fueling the war between Russia and Ukraine and lead on negotiating a peaceful end." She has given that position more content in interviews where she calls for an end to U.S. arms to Ukraine for its self-defense and invokes the Minsk Accords as a model for a land-for-peace settlement where Russia keeps the Ukrainian lands it has occupied.

Stein has articulated this position from the first day of Russia's full-scale invasion through to a cringe-worthy July 3 interview with Newsweek, where she said the war in Ukraine is "very much of our own making." Like too many campists among pseudo-socialists and pacifists, she condemns Russia's invasion but immediately pivots to blaming the U.S. and NATO for provoking Putin. The second part of that non sequitur, which is one of Putin's rationalizations for the war, in no way transforms Russia's war of aggression into a just war of defense, but that is the implication.

Stein has never spoken with, or acknowledged the views of, progressive activists in Ukraine and Russia with whom she should be an ally, including the Green Party of Ukraine; Sotsialnyi Rukh (Social Movement) and the Russian Socialist Movement, democratic socialist organizations in Ukraine and Russia respectively; and Ukrainian feminists, anarchists, LGBTQ people, environmentalists, and trade unionists. All of these movements call for solidarity from the western left in the form of support for military and economic aid for Ukraine, sanctions against Russia, cancellation of Ukraine's unjust foreign debt, and freedom for Russia's anti-war protesters and other political prisoners. Stein has never articulated any of these demands.

The Green Party is divided on Ukraine. The national committee narrowly voted 48-44-8 in October 2022 to call on the U.S. to end arms for Ukraine and sanctions on Russia. However, from the many communications I receive from rank-and-file Greens as the 2020 Green presidential candidate and an advocate for Ukraine solidarity within the Green Party, I believe the majority of the Greens' grassroots base supports Ukraine as does the majority of progressive-minded Americans, according to opinion polling. The position of Stein and the national committee are out of line with all the other Green parties of the world, which support Ukraine.

## **Cornel West?**

What about the other independent candidacies on the left? The only two with any modicum of support are Claudia De la Cruz of the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) and Cornel West, who is running an independent campaign. Both have similar platforms to Stein, including on Ukraine. PSL claims it will be on the ballot in over 20 states. West struggling to make the ballot on even a dozen states. Stein will be on upwards of 40 state ballots.

PSL's campist support for authoritarian governments like North Korea, Eritrea, and Syria puts PSL outside the realm of broad non-sectarian left politics aimed at building a mass party. If authoritarian one-party states are what American progressives are told is socialism, they will not support it.

West sought the Green Party nomination from June until October 2023. He then decided to strike out on his own, saying he wanted to go directly to the people instead of having to campaign within the Green Party to win delegates state by state for the Green presidential nominating convention. His decision was baffling because he had no serious competition for the nomination and walking away from Green Party's existing ballot lines and volunteer base for ballot petitioning in other states meant that West was walking away from ballot access in all but a relatively few states.

An important difference between the Stein and West is that West is running a one-off campaign

around his own candidacy whereas Stein's campaign is helping to maintain and build the Green Party as an ongoing independent progressive alternative to the two-corporate-party system.

After polling in the 3-4% range in 2023, Stein and West have settled down to the 1-2% in recent months in most polls, although they both got a 1% bump immediately after Biden's June 27 debate debacle. The pressure for a lesser evil vote for Biden to defeat Trump will only intensify as the election approaches, so we can expect the Stein and West vote to continue to decline. Since West will not be on many ballots, much of his vote is likely to transfer to Stein. Robert F. Kennedy Jr, who is running on many rightwing Trumpian themes with a family name that invokes Kennedy liberalism, has been averaging around 10% in recent months, with a 5% bump up after the debate. Most polls show Kennedy drawing votes about equally from Trump and Biden. These numbers for independent candidates are not likely to determine who wins the national popular vote, but they could affect the Electoral College outcome in one or more battleground states.

With most of the socialist left and broader progressive movements including labor unions giving unconditional support to Biden, most socialists and progressives are taking their own voices and demands out of the election. When the left and its demands disappear from the campaign, the left's identity as a distinct alternative disappears from the consciousness of the public, including activists in progressive movements who should be part of an independent socialist left. The whole political dynamic moves to the right as the centrist Democrats take progressive voters for granted and appeal to more conservative voters.

So balancing out all these considerations, I believe socialists should support Jill Stein's Green Party campaign in order to promote independent left politics as the alternative to this rightward dynamic that flows from lesser evil voting for the Democrats. I see it more as a vote to support the Green Party as the only national independent party on the left than as a vote for Jill Stein as a candidate.

### **Spoiler?**

The risk that Stein votes will "spoil" the election for Biden and elect Trump is very low. The outcome and thus the Electoral College votes are not in doubt in 44 safe states (including D.C.). Biden and Trump won't even campaign in those states. Biden and Trump are competitive in seven battleground states - Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin. So a vote for Stein in the safe states should not be controversial for socialists who advocate independent left politics.

In the battleground states, many on the left feel that they must hold their nose and vote for Biden to block Trump. Although I disagree with that choice, I am not going to spend much effort on trying to dissuade people in those states who want to vote defensively for Biden to stop Trump. I would just state that I am voting for the Green Party in order to express my support for an alternative to the two-corporate-party system that gives us such miserable choices as Biden and Trump.

I do think we should warn that Trump and today's Republican Party are a neofascist danger to democracy with their authoritarian, racist, misogynist, xenophobic, and violent pronouncements and actions. We should be realistic and credible by acknowledging that the Green vote could be the margin of difference between electing Biden or Trump in the Electoral College. It is not a risk in the 44 safe states, but it could happen in one or more of the seven battleground states.

Most Green voters are Green voters, not wayward Democrats. Most Green voters are irreparably lost to the Democrats. They are a hard core of about 500,000 judging by party registration figures and votes in the last three presidential elections. Most Green voters are disgusted former Democrats who found that the Democrats fought against them on issues they care deeply about, from universal

health care and affordable housing to climate action and ending U.S. wars of aggression, from Vietnam to Iraq to Gaza. The Democrats have lost these Green voters for good.

The claim that Stein cost Clinton the election in 2016 doesn't hold up in light of the facts. The 2016 exit poll showed that if Stein had not run, 61% of her voters would not have voted, and only 25% would have voted for Clinton, with 14% voting for Trump. Plug those numbers into the three states where the Stein vote was bigger than the margin of difference between Clinton and Trump — Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania — and Trump still would have won those states.

What Biden does is a far bigger factor than what Stein does. The election hinges on whether the Democrats can mobilize their majoritarian base to the polls despite the party's vapid centrism. The Trump base is smaller, but more energetic, enthusiastic, and committed.

The Electoral College is also a much bigger factor than the Stein candidacy. Biden won the popular vote in 2020 by over 7 million, by 4.5% with an absolute majority of 51.3% to Trump's 46.8%. If as few as 21,462 votes in Arizona, Georgia, and Wisconsin had flipped from Biden to Trump, the electoral vote would have been tied. The presidential election would have been thrown to the House for a one-state, one-vote decision where Republicans controlled a majority of 26 state delegations. The Republicans have only won the popular vote once in the 36 years since 1988. The only way in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that Republican presidents have been first elected — George W Bush in 2000 and Donald Trump in 2016 — was by the Electoral College after losing the popular vote. One would think that the Democrats would realize they have a problem and campaign to eliminate the Electoral College. Stein cannot be blamed for the anti-democratic Electoral College. Her platform calls for its abolition and replacement by a national popular vote using ranked choice voting.

## **Electoral Reform**

Which brings up why I believe we should prioritize changing the electoral system to ranked choice voting and proportional representation to enable the left to win its fair and proportional share of representation and power in government.

The Electoral College illustrates the problem of the winner-take-all election system that produces a two-party system that marginalizes challengers of the left as "spoilers." We have an answer to the spoiler problem: ranked choice voting for single-seat executive offices like the President and proportional ranked choice voting in multi-seat districts for proportional representation in legislative bodies. By eliminating the spoiler problem, and in its proportional form also eliminating gerrymandering, widespread adoption of ranked choice voting is a reform that can replace the exclusionary two-party system with an inclusive multi-party system.

The good news here is that we are making these changes at an accelerating rate. In 2000, there were just two municipalities that still used proportional ranked choice voting (also known as the single transferable vote), a legacy of Progressive Era reforms from the 1920s to 1940s when two dozen cities enacted proportional ranked choice voting. By 2020, there were two dozen jurisdictions using ranked choice voting. Today in 2024 there are over 50 jurisdictions, including two states, and several cases of proportional ranked choice voting, including Portland, Maine and Portland, Oregon. Ranked choice voting is on the ballot in November by initiative petitions in six states — Alaska (repeal), D.C., Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon. Ranked choice voting is on a streak of 27 straight wins in ballot measures.

Ranked choice voting is a reform we are winning. Whatever one's views on how to vote for president in 2024, I hope we can all agree that we should support the movement for ranked choice voting and, within that movement, advocate for proportional ranked choice voting for legislative bodies.

The other thing I hope we can all agree on is that if Trump wins we must immediately build and sustain mass public opposition to the repressive and reactionary policies of his administration. After 9/11, social movements evaporated, most notably the rising global justice or alter-globalization movement against corporate-managed international trade and financial institutions. People were fearful and demoralized in the face of repressive legislation like the PATRIOT Act and the widespread jingoism in support of wars of revenge and regime change in Afghanistan and Iraq. In this absence of opposition, the Bush administration had two years to build support for its Iraq invasion before an opposition began to mobilize. We cannot afford a similar delay in opposition as a Trump administration begins its promised persecution of political opponents, purge of thousands of civil service workers, deportation of millions of undocumented immigrants, big tax cuts for the rich paid for by deep cuts in social programs, acceleration of fossil fuel exploitation and global warming, federal ban on abortion, and many other reactionary policies. We will need to make such measures, which are not what the large majority of Americans want, politically impossible to implement due to mass opposition in the streets and every possible public forum.