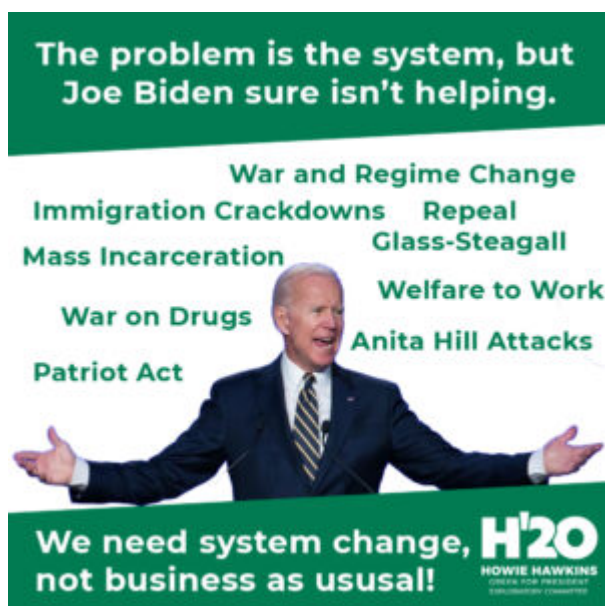
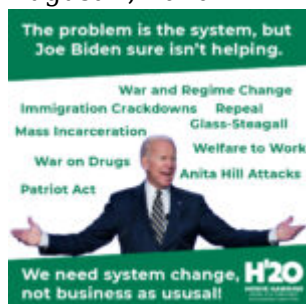


Why Leftists In Most States Should Vote Green

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My late comrade and esteemed *New Politics* editorial board member Joanne Landy steadfastly insisted she'd never vote for a Democratic Party candidate, preferring a protest vote for the Green Party. "But I'll never join that party," she insisted. Hers was always a principled rejection of Democratic betrayals, something revolutionaries and other dissidents are forced to do if only as a last, bleak resort. While she solidarized with the Greens' march-in-line rejection of any Democratic Party hopeful no matter how progressive—itself what I consider the obverse of too many electorally-fetishized DSA members, whose hyper regard for Democrats as the only game in town no matter how degenerated the game, is unnerving. To Joanne's credit she did aspire to see a mass working-class party emerge but thought the Greens, with their rampantly factionalizing inner-party life and ideo-fetishizing, would likely never cohere as a model anti-capitalist force.

To the party's credit, its 2020 electoral platform reads well enough, anticipating much of what a socialist movement would advocate. (For Green presidential candidate Howie Hawkins' view of Green possibilities, see the smart précis of his campaigning book at https://www.gp.org/hawkins_campaign_publishes_book .)

I was never quite as dismissive of the Democrats *tout court* as was Joanne, let alone Hawkins, but I always agreed that in my home state of New York the Democrats didn't need nor deserve backing from any left militant, let alone the bulk of union voters repaid so shabbily by party electeds from the grasping Andrew Cuomo on down. So, I repeatedly vote Green, too, and enthusiastically so for Howie Hawkins, a trade union militant and acknowledged socialist representing the best of the

working class left. The down ticket often isn't so uniformly impressive though: one pro forma hopeful running for state Assembly in my district some years back couldn't explain when interviewed on local TV what an Assembly member did or should do. A low moment in the class struggle, surely, but no reflection on Hawkins, then the top of the state ticket and this year's presidential insurgent.

This coming November 3rd, voters face the likelihood of a nationwide contest between two major party troll candidates that a benign house pet would not cotton to, no matter the blathering of cable news punditry pro or con. Donald Trump is the worst racist thug to aspire to a second presidential term since the genocidal Andrew Jackson of ethnic cleansing "Trail of Tears" infamy and the racist Woodrow Wilson, architect of the Red Scare, the jailing of Eugene Debs, the effective extinction of the Wobblies, the forced expatriation of émigré radicals and the segregating of the military. (If I ignore other presidential villains, I plead guilty in advance.) Trump's personal corruption and three-dollar-bill narcissism are legend, as is his blank ineptitude at anything beyond crude public relations framing. The spike in needless deaths from coronavirus—at this writing some 150,000 Americans are dead and the number of deaths from COVID-19 likely to reach 200,000 by September—are already his legacy.

Trump's putative opponent Joe Biden is a neoliberal stalking horse who offers working-class people some faint emotional balm but no real programmatic alternative, despite Bernie Sanders' post-collapse efforts to make it seem so and language glossing up the party platform. Biden is no progressive, not even a trust buster of the limped Elizabeth Warren sort. In the age of Black Lives Matter, he won't defund the police, decriminalize marijuana use, curtail military aid to Israel or even countenance Medicare for All. Can we expect a Biden administration to take down the homicidal energy industry or Big Pharma? As Dan La Botz presciently wrote in his recent *New Politics* review of Branko Marcetic's *Yesterday's Man: The Case Against Joe Biden*, "Rather than choosing the progressive Bernie Sanders, the voters [in the Democratic primaries] chose Joseph Biden, the compromiser, the advocate of bipartisanship, an erstwhile liberal whose decades-long political career led him since the late 1970s to adopt a series of fundamentally conservative budget-balancing positions, to create racist welfare and crime programs, to ravage civil liberties, and to become an advocate of U.S. military ventures around the world." An August 1 *New York Times* report points out that Biden also has a career-spanning and unseemly close relationship with K Street lobbyists and former government officials turned corporate flacks whom even Democratic liberals fear. They will unduly influence a Biden administration for the worse.

In any structured ways, then, the two-party contest will be—regardless of the outcome—a dour replay of 2016; kleptocratic racism versus neoliberal imperialism. Trump's rampant corruption, blatant white supremacy maunderings and cardboard populism—witness his call for a some \$400 billion payroll tax cut that will come at the expense of already hard-pressed Medicare and Social Security programs and do nothing for the exploding number of unemployed—is like so much of Trump's blarney straight out of Robert Penn Warren's fictive ode to Huey Long. Federal July figures for the month of June chart an 11.1 percent unemployment rate, likely to mushroom again when July figures are charted in August. The malign Trump effort might seem a boon to those still employed but is more of a freebie gift to better-paid executives and a boost to the corporate bottom line. So much for Trump's populism.

Both Trump and Biden offer a free ride for the predatory U.S. ruling class. No one should expect a revived FDR in Biden. Roosevelt's legacy—hardly a revolutionary or even social democratic one policy-wise for much of his nearly 13 years in office—won't likely be outdone or overshadowed by Biden even with a Senate Democratic majority, itself no sure thing to deliver pro-worker policies unless a mobilized opposition forces it to grow teeth. Biden and company will face a much stronger ruling class bent on sabotage than even FDR faced, as Kim Phillips-Fein's iconic 2009 book *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade Against the New Deal* demonstrates by contrasting what FDR

and today's generation of electoral reformers face in corporate offensive capacity.

Biden's chief virtue is that he's not Trump. Is there a better reason to wish his candidacy well? Sadly, no, but it can't be dismissed given the still marginal state of the electoral left as an opposition even with exciting revolutionary ideas percolating and militancy in hundreds of encouraging street protests.

With less than 100 days to go before the November 3 election, the left has an opportunity to consider what many progressives consider heresy: voting for a third-party presidential candidate. To be sure, the political stakes are high. Four more years of a Trump administration conjures dystopian visions of a fascist dictatorship and an unbridled assault on civil and political rights—a prospect that would encourage any sentient being to cast their ballot for Trump's Democratic challenger. Yet, there are circumstances in which support for a third-party presidential candidate is politically appropriate this fall. In particular, protest votes for the Greens in non-toss-up, non-battleground states would both reveal support for a more robust left political agenda and avoid throwing the election to Trump. Alas, making this happen, without alienating labor and community groups loyal to the Democratic Party, requires walking a political tightrope with a tattered safety net.

So, what's the connection between street heat and electoral action in the less than 100 days leading up to the election? It's that millions of protest votes for the Greens in non-toss-up, non-battleground states can be a prelude to that fight and a teaching moment for U.S. labor and others. A Green breakthrough could be a marker for what an articulated politics can accomplish. The tough question is where can the breakthroughs occur, and how so without giving the election by default to the kleptocratic Trump. Equally important, can we militate labor and community groups into doing the smart thing electorally and vote Green or other third-party efforts in the plurality of states where opting to oppose either pro-capitalist candidate won't throw the election to Trump?

Why Voting Green in Safe States Matters

The Greens are likely not a palpable or viable alternative to the two-party duopoly. but a vote for them anyway is necessary in the lead up to November 3 in the many states sagely predicted now to go for either Trump or Biden hands down. In that majority of non-swing states—36 at last count in which Biden or Trump can be safely predicted to cinch—the left should tout the Greens, including not just boosting them largely as an electoral adjunct to the brilliant mass movement in the streets to defund the ill-serving, misplaced police—the healthiest extra-parliamentary effort since Occupy—but as a win-win that can potentially challenge the Democrats programmatically and in actuality, picking up on Bernie's pre-collapse efforts. Would that be possible? I think yes. Because there is every reason to break with the Democrats, but not everywhere just now.

In only a minority of states will a Biden vote by leftists matter and need to be called for. An effort by any socialists for Biden is defensible and necessary in defeating Trump only in the 14 battleground states at present as demarcated in the Cook Political Report for late July, showing four states (Arizona, Georgia, Maine 2nd CD and North Carolina) as toss-ups, seven leaning Democratic (Florida, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska 2nd CD, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin), and three leaning Republican (Iowa, Ohio and Texas), of which there may reasonably be fewer in the weeks leading up to the general election on Nov 3. Absent those 14, polls show that the rest appear now to go for Biden or Trump by comfortable margins.

Of course, it's too early to know the outcome. Closer to the election we will see if any others emerge as toss-ups, if the 14 remain close, or if more collapse for one or the other sad, bad and dangerous-to-know candidate. It's also only in that minority of states that the pro-Biden argument holds water and where a vote for the Greens over Biden would prove mischievous at best and, to too many allies,

traitorous at worst.

Here's Why I Say What I'm Saying

If I lived in Ohio or Michigan, for example, and had relations with labor activists sweating blood for Biden, I could not in good faith sit that one out, let alone militate for the Green candidate. As I live in New York, I owe Biden and his pro-capitalist, careerist DNC machine fixers nothing. In the other 35 states, any leftist urging a vote for Biden when the results are foreordained will seem like a naïf engaging in a will o' the wisp. A Biden vote would add nothing either propaganda-wise or in building a left alternative base. In those 36 states he's already either won or lost; the outcome's not looking to be close.

It's also now far too late in this election cycle to institutionalize a third-party effort or even do much to build the Greens. Still, where either the Dems or the GOP are safely expected to win the race, it's better to give a third party a boost. Should Biden win, we'll be battling him the day after his election. Where we disagree is supporting neoliberal Biden in the safe states. There he doesn't deserve us or need us, nor would we be doing anything to materially hurt the GOP raptors and their white nationalist/killer clown president or build a socialist left. Howie Hawkins, to his credit, is campaigning for the presidency as a socialist. He comes with a long and meritorious labor pedigree. Voting for him in the 36 safe states makes good sense. Helping the Greens in the far fewer battleground areas is a nonstarter as well as a potentially catastrophic game changer.

At this moment—and things can get far better or worse, given Trump's law-and-order piratic elan, his flagrant deployment of Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Border Patrol thugs in their decades-long attacks on desperate asylum seekers and their marauding in Portland and other cities the closest approximation yet to a domestic fascist militia—and his coup-like threat to negate an electoral defeat no matter how clear the result means a close race in just those 14 battleground states matters. A vote for the Greens, the only national alternative to the duopoly no matter its inherent weaknesses, will not come at the expense of Democrats either in the bulk of presidential or down-ballot positions. Taking control of the Senate from the hard-right GOP and handing it to the Israeli settler/Mossad enabler and laggard centrist Chuck Schumer will be no relaxed walk in the woods, but he does respond to pressure, and a solid vote for Greens in all but the toss-up states will embolden a movement to strengthen opposition both inside and outside the Democratic structure.

DSA, to its credit, is amicably working both sides of the fence, though that may be more a reflection of few factional body blows and contending egos than a healthy respect for differences, though that could change given how difficult it is for comrades to socialize absent in-person formal meetings—thank you COVID-19—when political chatting over drinks and sundry at a pub can be worth more in recouping common ground than the best informed debate polemics.

Electoral politics under monopoly capitalism is in most instances a snare. Absent social movements banging on the door and knocking recalcitrant heads to keep them honest—how many AOCs can we expect to put and prize in office absent irrepressible pressure from an organized rank-and-file social movement keeping electeds accountable?—or in optimal circumstances forming countervailing power centers (workers' councils, anyone?)—we leftists go into the new electoral cycle woefully ill-prepared. Add the number of election-avid wannabe fixers infesting campaign circles—some in DSA, sad to say—and it's fair to ask "Which side are you on?" For all of the Greens' missteps, their side in the class war at least is not in doubt. Promoting the Greens in the time remaining is no stairway to heaven, but it's inescapable in the bulk of states in the run-up to November 3. Just refrain in those few states where the outcome seems shaky. Your conscientious protest vote could come at your base's expense. Your allies will hate you for it, should Trump win, and they'd be right to write you off as narcissists not unlike Trump. Try overcoming that in the short run, when a unified fight back

regardless of which mainstream party stooge wins the presidency in November will need maximum cooperation nationwide in a united front effort against capital in crisis.

Bottom line: the larger a vote for the Greens equates with more pressure that can be put on Biden post-victory to address labor and community issues and bring down attention to those suburban insecurities of the professional/managerial class that draw media and politicians' attention but detract from the needs of working-class people. Bernie addressed these needs—needs Bill Clinton and Barack Obama only addressed largely rhetorically and that Biden will likely do as well. But Bernie's campaign is over. A vote for Hawkins in any of the non-battleground states, if only *de minimus* to secure ongoing ballot access and federal funding for the party's effort to soldier on, is the least we leftists can do.