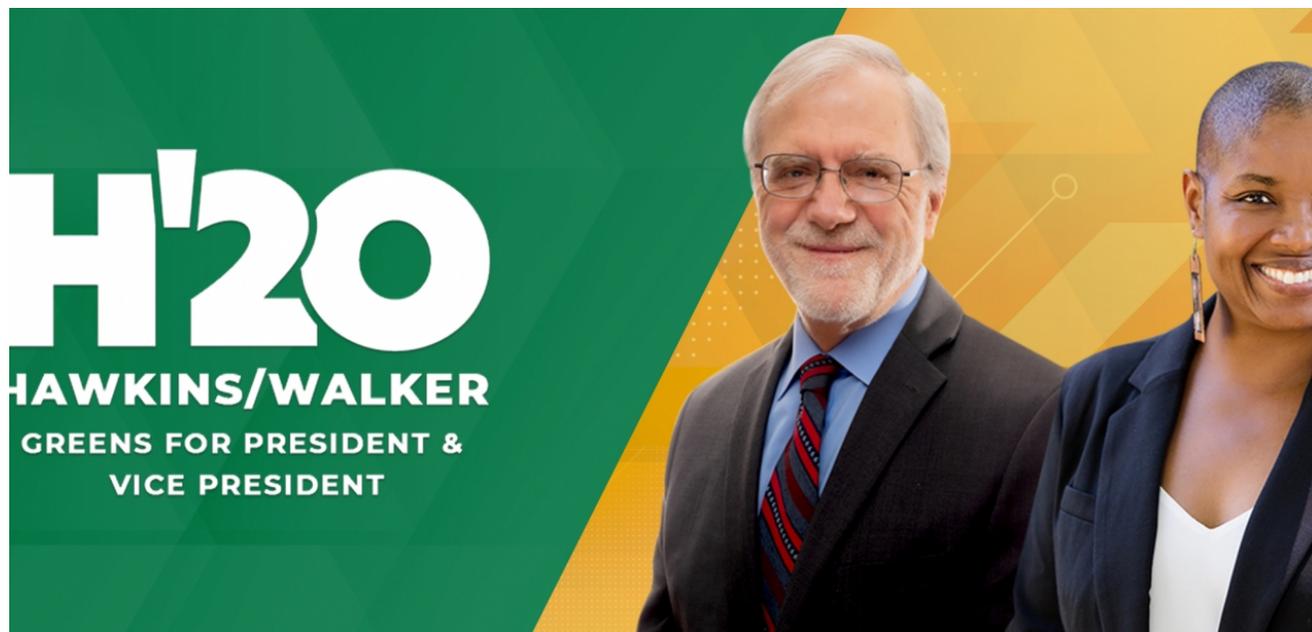


US Presidential election 2020: Will a Green vote let Trump win?

 greenworld.org.uk/article/us-presidential-election-2020-will-green-vote-let-trump-win



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US Green Party presidential candidate Howie Hawkins gets right to the point when you ask him why he is campaigning to be the next president of the United States.

“We’re running to deal with life and death issues”, Hawkins told *Green World* in a Zoom interview last week from his home in Syracuse in upstate New York.

He then delivers cogent riffs on two life and death issues that have often been at the top of the news since his campaign began: the Covid-19 pandemic (the US tops the global total with more than 153,000 deaths), as well as police brutality and endemic racism following on from the 25 May murder of African American George Floyd.

“Over the pandemic Trump has shown he is a loser, he’s given up,” Hawkins told me. (Overnight on 30-31 July, we learned Trump thought he at least knew the best way not to be an electoral loser: delay November’s election. A president doesn’t have that power, US constitutional experts rapidly confirmed, but Trump’s tweet gave us a warning that there may be “a coup in the making.”)

And while Hawkins keeps coming back to both issues that are now convulsing a more turbulent than normal America – and that’s no overstatement! – the three main planks in

his “life and death” platform are:

1. A Green New Deal to respond to the climate emergency (and here Hawkins recognised the role Green MP Caroline Lucas played a decade ago) .
2. A full package of social and economic measures to challenge the growing class and racial equality in the world’s richest and most powerful imperialist country and giving the example that life expectancy in the United States has declined in the last few years. “Shocking,” he says and pointing out how the capitalist crisis is causing such pain and despair in his homeland.
3. A whole series of “peace pledges”, including cutting the US military budget by 75 per cent, a pledge of ‘no first use’ of nuclear weapons, and re-opening negotiations to prohibit the use of such weapons.

But wait a minute. Who is Howie Hawkins? You’ve probably never heard of him before reading this article. That might not matter too much unless you are eligible to vote in the land of the free on Tuesday 3 November, and most of us are not.

The real problem is that the overwhelming percentage of American voters haven’t heard of him either – or more importantly, learned about his platform and whether they think it is in their interest to support it – because the US is a “two-party corporate state”, says Hawkins. “And it is not very different to a one-party state, just slicker because they give the illusion of choice.”

Even by voting day, most will never have heard of him either. Hillary Clinton’s unsuccessful presidential run of 2016 raised US\$1.2 billion. She and Trump spent US\$81 million on Facebook ads alone. The 50-state national campaign Hawkins is leading will do well to raise US\$500,000 in 2020, he says.

And hanging over his campaign is a key issue, which the corporate media and the Democratic Party will make much of in coming weeks: candidates like Hawkins are said to just be “spoilers” and make it even harder to get rid of Donald J. Trump who many say is absolutely the worst president in US history. (We’ll get back to that issue in a minute.)

The Green Team: Hawkins and Walker

Howie Hawkins, aged 67 and a co-founder in 1984 of the Green Party in the US, has become the Green Party’s candidate for president in what more than one commentator has called a “failed state” and one now led by a president whose rise to power and policies are “not an aberration of US history in substance” but “its logical product.”

Angela Walker, 46, is his vice-presidential running mate. She is a bus driver and truck driver. Hawkins, who is now retired, used to work the night shift unloading trucks for UPS. Both are active trade unionists. Both proudly call themselves eco-socialists.



Howie Hawkins addressing voters.

Commented political activist Ralph Nader, who ran as president for the Greens in 1996 and 2000: “When’s the last time you had two truck drivers running [on a national ticket]? You see how off the wall that sounds, even though there are millions of truck drivers. These are not professional politicians, they work with their hands ... That’s a good combination, because people often try to pit labor against environmentalists.”

Hawkins has been active in the US anti-war and environmental movements since the 1970s. “Howie is a genuine working class environmental activist,” a lefty mate of his told me in a Zoom call recently, and Hawkins was wearing his black Teamsters union t-shirt when we chatted last week. Here’s [a video](#) of Hawkins being interviewed five weeks ago on a Washington public affairs show The Hill.

Walker, who was born to a working class Black family, calls herself “a fierce advocate for the rights of Black, Brown and Indigenous people, the LGBTQIA community, labor and the Earth itself.” Here is [a recent brief video](#) of Walker. Impressive!

Observers I talked to suggest that the Green Party in the US has become a more working class-based party in recent years and certainly more so than, for example, the GPEW here.



Angela Walker

The sole pro-environment and left-wing choice

Hawkins and Walker have also gained the nomination of the Socialist Party USA. In 2016, Walker was that party's nominee for Vice President. In 2012 and 2016, the Green Party's presidential candidate was well-known physician and activist Jill Stein.

Meanwhile in April 2020, after popular left-wing Senator Bernie Sanders was defeated by Joe Biden in the Democratic Party presidential primaries, Hawkins offered to stand aside and give Sanders a clear run at the Green Party nomination. That move would have been transformative to the 2020 electoral contest. But Sanders refused. Instead he is backing Biden and says he will keep "working from within" the Democratic Party.

He is not being too successful. Just this week and right in the midst of this terrible Covid-19 pandemic, the Democratic National Committee's platform committee decided, again, not to support in 2020 a universal health insurance scheme or "single payer" as it is called stateside. "Single payer" was one of Sanders' signature policies and is far worse than our NHS because most US hospitals would still remain as private profit-driven companies.

But the Democrats under Biden are an increasingly discredited force among progressive voters and it is far from clear that Sanders will be able to keep a sizeable percentage chained to the Democrats. In fact, many on the US left view yesterday's hero Bernie Sanders as a sell-out.

The Greens will be the sole left-wing and environmental option in November and Facebook groups such as "[Berners for Howie Hawkins](#)" are springing up. (I'm a member.) A summary of the Greens 2020 platform can be found [here](#) under the "issues" tab.

You can choose from 32 different types of cereal

Hawkins and Walker have an electoral mountain to climb in a huge and complex country of 331 million people. Its ruling elite has created a voting and overall political system that is becoming even more discriminatory against smaller parties, such as the Greens. By contrast, the UK's own first-past-the-post (FPTP) voting system almost comes across as signalling a democratic utopia. Well, almost.

Indeed, it has been almost 30 years since a third party candidate, Ross Perot, made any serious dent in the Democratic and Republican vice grip. Perot, a multimillionaire and definitely not a progressive, got nearly 20 per cent of the presidential vote in 1992. In any event, Hawkins and Walker are not striving to promote their own individual careers, but to build a party and represent a movement.

Perhaps comedian George Carlin described best the Tweedledum and Tweedledeeness of the US electoral charade: "In America you can choose from 32 different cereals but can only choose between two people for president."

It would take several thousand words to lay out for non-U.S. residents all the various ways that this highly restrictive and repressive electoral stitch-up operates. Here are but a few bullet points:

As with FPTP, almost every one of the 50 US states operate on a winner-takes-all basis. Everybody knows that, in 2020, there will be as much chance of Trump winning in Massachusetts as there will be of Biden winning in Wyoming. This means that electoral competition – or indeed serious election campaigning itself – only occurs in about ten states known as swing or battleground states, such as Michigan. Most votes or voters simply don't matter. The winning candidate in all but a few states is allocated all of the votes for that state in the US Electoral College. It actually selects the next president. Despite getting nearly 20 per cent of the overall vote in 1992, Perot did not gain a single Electoral College vote. Hawkins likely will not get any either in 2020.

Even making it onto the ballot is a huge hurdle for parties such as the Greens. "Getting on the ballot in this country is off the scale compared to any other electoral democracy in the world," says Hawkins, and he wistfully compares it to the number of

names you need to stand as an MP in the UK. For example, to run for Congress in the state of Georgia as a Green or Libertarian Party candidate requires the collection of 20,000 signatures. (The two old-line parties are usually already on the ballot as a consequence of past election results; it is called having a “ballot line.”) Multiply the effort needed in Georgia times fifty (for all states) and you start to appreciate the scale of the effort required for the Hawkins/Walter ticket to appear on 3 November. With the US now plagued by a pandemic and with only a few states allowing electronic signatures (and this despite court cases stating that requiring physical signatures is unreasonable in Covid conditions), well, it is stuff of electoral nightmares for parties such as the US Greens. And why the phrase “duopoly dictatorship” seems an apt descriptor.

Both the Republicans and the Democrats are errand boys for US corporate capital. There are essentially no limits on how much money multinational corporations, such as those making up Big Pharma, can funnel to these two parties. Why? In part, it is because any and all limits on election contributions, including from corporations, are viewed by US courts as infringing constitutionally-protected free speech rights and, again, America is the land of the free. “The corporate speech doctrine is a huge problem in elections,” says Hawkins in our interview.

If you don’t know the meaning of the word “gerrymander”, look it up It is a conjuring trick perfected by the two ruling parties in America to try to ensure they keep ruling in service to the existing power structure. The same goes for implementing even stricter voter registration schemes and the use of other voter suppression tactics. They are directly targeted at people of colour, the poor, the working class and “outsiders” more likely to be asking: are Donald Trump and Joe Biden the best that are on offer? (For a thorough expose of Biden’s long career of betrayal and double dealing, check out *‘Yesterday’s Man: The Case Against Joe Biden’* by journalist Branko Marcetic.) In the UK, the Tory government is studying the implementation of similar election manipulation.

The US pioneered the idea of television debates with Nixon vs Kennedy in 1960. Then other parties were occasionally allowed to join in. Not anymore. Hawkins explained that such debates are now controlled by a private company owned by the two parties and “the TV networks just go along with it”. He hasn’t polished his shoes in anticipation of an invitation to the 2020 presidential debates. And as for access to TV for campaigning purposes, Trump gets a few free hours every day.



Howie Hawkins speaking to voters.

The 'lesser evil' issue

There is no need in this article to talk about how reactionary, how racist, how anti-people and how downright dangerous Trump has been as a president and what might happen if he is re-elected. Take this a given.

And without denying there are differences, and some big differences, between Trump and Biden, there are many questions to be asked about both Biden's campaign and his possible presidency. Should everyone – well everyone who despises Trump – simply line up behind Joe Biden and consider him the lesser evil?

First, it is far from certain that turnout of anti-Trump voters will be massive on 3 November, especially if the pandemic worsens. There are serious limitations to an election campaign focused on one theme: "I am not Trump."

Second, Barack Obama selected Biden as his vice-presidential running mate to please Democratic moderates. No one could be more pro-establishment than Biden. He is weak or downright reactionary on leading US and global issues that animate progressives: climate justice, racism, structural inequality, and health insurance. This is how US journalist Jeremy Scahill summed up Biden's career and current competence in [an April 2020 article for *The Intercept*](#):

"Biden has an abominable public policy record on a wide range of issues. He has a penchant for lying – about his role in the civil rights movement and about being arrested in apartheid South Africa. He continues to lie and mislead about his support for the war in Iraq, the most consequential foreign policy decision of the post-Vietnam era. He has been accused by eight women of misconduct... Biden's cognitive health and mental acuity is, to say the least, questionable, particularly when you compare his current performance with videos from just a few years ago. He frequently rambles without a clear point, forgets what office he is running for and has to rely on teleprompters and notes to make it through interviews and speeches without saying something embarrassing."

To title a book on Biden "*Yesterday's Man*" seems particularly appropriate. Is he really a candidate for this fast-moving era?

Third, political analysts say that voting Green in about 40 of 50 US states will have no effect on whether Biden or Trump will win those states and determine their all-important Electoral College votes. If you are a Green voter in New York State or California, for example, you can feel very confident your Green vote will not let in Trump via the back door.

Moreover, why should Green voters in the US be called "spoilers" due to the negative effects of the wretched American voting system or the fact that the Democratic Party chooses such baggage-burdened candidates – to be charitable – to be their presidential

candidates in 2016 and 2020 against Trump? Prize winning US journalist Chris Hedges takes up “this Greens as alleged spoilers” issue in more detail in this [May 2020 interview with Hawkins](#).

Finally, as Hawkins explains in [this lengthy 2019 article](#), “If the Left in America is to challenge the capitalist two-party system, it will have to build a political party based on working-class independence from the corporate rulers and their political representatives in the Democratic and Republican Parties.” If 2020 is not the year for progressive forces to take a step forward towards a green and red alliance, when is?

Those of us watching from afar wish you well on your journey.

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