

US Election 2024: A Marxist Case for Voting for Kamala Harris

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THIS OPINION PIECE by Cliff Conner is an additional contribution to the discussion in ATC 232, where we have published three statements by [Dan La Botz](#), [Howie Hawkins](#), and [Kit Wainer](#) on the strategic choices facing the progressive and socialist left in the November presidential election. We will be continuing to cover the dysfunction and potential crisis of legitimacy in the U.S. political system.

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PEOPLE WHO KNOW me will most likely be shocked and flabbergasted to read that headline and see my name under it. Hell, *I'm* shocked. It represents a 180-degree reversal of an opinion — nay, *a principle* — I had strongly held and professed for most of my life. Fifty-three years, to be exact — 1967 through 2020.

The headline above actually *understates* my position. I not only believe socialists and working people, including readers of this publication, should merely vote for Kamala Harris for President of the United States, I call upon you to *campaign* for her. Ring doorbells. Phonebank. Pass out flyers. Donate your hard-earned money if you can afford to. Whatever it takes to ensure her election.

OK. Having stated the proposition as blatantly, if not to say provocatively, as possible, I will now attempt to provide the justification.

A bedrock principle of the socialist organization I joined in 1967 held that no socialist should ever vote for or give political support in any form to the Democratic or Republican parties. They were and are the twin parties of capitalism, imperialism, war, racism, sexism, homophobia, and the destruction of the environment. To vote for a Democrat or a Republican was *to cross the class line* — to become the equivalent of a scab who crosses a striking union's picket line.

I had adopted that principle because of the Vietnam War. I had opposed the war since 1964, the first year I was legally old enough to vote. I followed the presidential campaigns of Lyndon B. Johnson and Barry Goldwater, and was convinced that Johnson would end the war — because he said he would — and Goldwater could end the *world* — because he was threatening to use nuclear weapons in Vietnam if elected. When Johnson won in a landslide, I was greatly relieved. And then came the great betrayal.

Johnson almost immediately did the polar opposite of what his campaign had promised. Within a couple of years he had not only failed to end the war; he escalated it into a war of monstrous proportions, sending hundreds of thousands of U.S. soldiers into combat and bombing Southeast

Asia more heavily than the Axis powers had been bombed in World War II. That war took the lives of *millions* of freedom fighters and civilians. Although we didn't have definitive proof until the Pentagon Papers were leaked in 1971, it turned out that Johnson had been planning that escalation *while he was campaigning as a "peace candidate" in 1964!*

Long story short — I became a fervent chanter of "Hey, Hey, LBJ — How many kids did you kill today?" I joined the antiwar movement and began to help organize it. I joined the socialist movement, became a Marxist, and vowed to never be fooled by a Democrat again. In every subsequent election for the next fifty years, I argued that the Democrats and Republicans were *essentially* the same. Not identical, of course, because if they didn't pretend to be different, they couldn't bamboozle the electorate. But the political consequences would be the same no matter which party won any given election — the capitalist class would continue to rule, the working class would continue to be exploited, and, as Bob Marley sang, "The dream of lasting peace will remain but a fleeting illusion." [1]

I am writing this now in response to a loving challenge from one of my daughters, who has reminded me that I taught her to avoid both of the twin parties of capitalism like the plague. Why, she asked me, have I changed?

The short answer is that I haven't changed. The American political situation has changed so drastically that I felt obliged to revise my approach to it.

But hadn't I told her that voting for a Democrat would be a *violation of principle*?

Yes, I did, and I still think so. However, I have learned that principles are not the absolutes I once thought they were. Sometimes you can find yourself trapped between dueling principles that force you to choose which is more important. This is one of those times. The principle of bearing responsibility for acting to avoid a historic catastrophe for the working class "trumps" (sorry about that) the principle of not voting for a Democrat.



“Lesser Evil” Politics?

Decent, well-meaning people I've known who are not socialists argue that despite everything that is obviously wrong with American society, the liberal Democrats are not as bad as the rightwing Republicans. The Democrats are the "lesser evil," and therefore it is a good thing when they win elections.

Socialists have heard that argument *ad nauseum*, and we have long rightfully opposed it. I opposed it until, as I said, 2020. And then circumstances changed. A much, much greater evil suddenly came to the dance.

The difference between the evils was no longer simply a matter of more or lesser; it was *qualitative*. And the difference, I am convinced, if Donald Trump wins a second term, could well result in oppression and death on a scale surpassing what happened in Europe in the mid-twentieth century. It could plunge not only the United States but much of the world into political darkness and horror for a generation or more. Trying to ignore it is whistling past the graveyard. I feel as a matter of

principle a duty to actively oppose it, not with hopes, bluster, and empty theorizing, but in a *materially meaningful* way. Get out the vote! For Kamala Harris!

Here's the electoral situation today: You don't have the luxury of voting for what you want. We are confronted, by the enemies of the working class, with a *purely binary* choice. You are forced to choose Harris or Trump. You can abstain, of course, but for working-class voters, that will be a half-vote for Trump.

Voting for a third-party candidate is virtual abstention. You disagree? You think one of the third-party campaigns might actually *win* the election? I would be quite comfortable and confident in *literally* staking my life that they will not. It is as impossible as me winning the hundred-meter dash in the Olympics. If you understand in your bones the existential danger Trump represents, you will begin campaigning for Harris immediately.

This position, I have been told, means that I support Kamala Harris, or that I support the Democratic Party, or that I support the genocide in Gaza. None of these propositions are true, no matter how often I am told what I "really mean." I do not support Kamala Harris. I do not support the Democratic Party. I loathe their policy of unconditional moral and material support to Israel as it commits genocide against the Palestinian people. I support getting rid of the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, and the whole two-party electoral system.

I support the *idea* of a labor party and a socialist America. Not a business-as-usual America run by politicians who call themselves socialists, but an America where the entire productive system is completely nationalized and under workers' control. Unfortunately there is no real labor party to support in this election, and a socialist America is a goal, not a present option that can be obtained by wishing for it.

I reject the impotent politics of "calling for" things that aren't going to happen in time to make a difference, including a labor party and massive, organized workers' resistance against Trumpist oppression. I remember Jerry Gordon quoting Shakespeare to the ultralefts who "called for" a general strike against the war in Vietnam:

*"I can call forth spirits from the vasty deep."
"Why, so can I, and so can any man! But will they come?"*

Mark Twain famously said, "Faith is believing what you know ain't so." The politics of "calling for" things that ain't gonna happen anytime soon are faith's first cousins.

In brief, my appeal to vote and campaign for the Democratic Party candidate in 2024 is solely based on the fact that *she is not Trump*, and does not pose the threat of ruling as an unaccountable autocrat.

How Real and How Large Is the Danger that a Trump Re-election Represents?

Many readers of this publication will be as familiar with the horrors of the Nazi era in Germany as I am. Furthermore, the portrayal of the Third Reich in popular culture (books, movies, and television) should mean that millions of Americans can at least comprehend what is meant by saying the Third Reich was a regime of almost unimaginable *cruelty*. The murder of millions of innocent victims provided a new benchmark of the extreme limit of "man's inhumanity to man." [2]

"I don't have a crystal ball," as the saying goes, but I believe it is entirely possible that a second Trump administration "without guardrails" would meet and exceed the Nazi cruelty. I would expect it to begin by shooting down hundreds of anti-genocide or Black Lives Matter demonstrators in the streets. Guantánamo's prisoner population could increase apace, including both American and "immigrant" protestors. And Trump has explicitly made it known that he'd like to see concentration camps "throughout our nation" to combat urban crime and homelessness — and of course "urban crime" is closely associated in his reptile brain with "immigrants" and people of color. Here is how he puts it:

"Perhaps some people will not like hearing this, but the only way you're going to remove the hundreds of thousands of people, and maybe throughout our nation millions of people . . . is open up large parcels of inexpensive land in the outer reaches of the cities . . . build permanent bathrooms and other facilities, make 'em good, make 'em hard, but build them fast, and build thousands and thousands of high-quality tents, which can be done in one day. One day. You have to move people out." [3]

If Trump gains legal control over the executive branch of the U.S. government, he has explicitly promised that on "Day One" of his taking office he will be a dictator, accountable to no one but himself.

If you need further evidence of his intentions, go to You-Tube and watch the famous debate with Joe Biden on June 27th, 2024. The world was focused on Biden's sad, mumbling performance. (As a senior citizen myself, although I abhor "Genocide Joe's" policies, I could empathize with him in that situation.) The most horrific aspect of the debate, however, wasn't how Biden spoke but what Trump said. No matter what the journalists asked him, Trump repeatedly pivoted to a diatribe against "raping, murdering" immigrants. It was classic Nazi-style demagoguery, with "immigrants" replacing "Jews" as the scapegoats for all of society's ills.

I believe Trump when he says he wants concentration camps galore, and you should, too, because his recent thundering against "socialists," "communists," and "Marxists" is aimed directly at you and me. When he calls political opponents, including Democrats, "vermin" and charges immigrants with "poisoning the blood" of the United States, he is clearly demonstrating his fascistic *bona fides*.

If Trump is re-elected, his second term will almost surely be "without guardrails." He already has the Supreme Court in his pocket, and with their support could rapidly have the Department of Justice totally under his command. Anyone who thinks the "principled apolitical U.S. military" will step up and stop him, is sadly deceiving themselves. Is all of this really "no difference" from what can be expected from a Kamala Harris administration?

Marxism and the Bourgeois Revolution

Let me explain the difference in Marxist terms. The Democrats say that Trump presents a threat to "democracy." The problem with that is that American democracy has not been "the shining city on a hill" that it has always promised. It certainly has not fulfilled its promises to the indigenous population of North America, to African-Americans either during or after the era of slavery, or to refugees and immigrants who can see only hypocrisy in the welcoming words, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." Its promised "equal justice for all" has been deeply corrupted by the ability of wealthy criminals to "play" the legal system by buying the services of very expensive lawyers (not to mention stacking the courts at all levels with rightwing judges vetted by the Federalist Society).

But it is nonetheless true that American society has from its origins enjoyed the benefits of what Marxists call “bourgeois democracy.” That is to say, capitalist democracy. It is sometimes called “political democracy” to distinguish it from “economic democracy” or “socialist democracy.”

The essence of bourgeois democracy is fealty to the rule of law, and equality before the law, which excludes the rule of unaccountable autocrats. And anyone who thinks Marx, or Lenin, or Trotsky pooh-poohed bourgeois democracy as “no different from monarchy” is tragically mistaken. They understood bourgeois democracy as the monumental achievement of one of the world’s most consequential social revolutions: The French Revolution of 1789-93.

Bourgeois democratic rights are the necessary foundation of all human rights. They were first codified in The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of the French Revolution, and in the Bill of Rights amended to the American Constitution. Solidifying and extending the democratic gains of the bourgeois revolutions is prerequisite to socialist democracy. Bourgeois democracy and bourgeois democratic rights in the United States are often taken for granted, but Marxists, of all people, should be completely aware of what it would mean to lose them. It would make the struggles we are now engaged in far, far more difficult to pursue, and therefore, to win. If we lose bourgeois democracy, the vibrant movements against genocide, for abortion rights, for union rights, for justice to Cuba, for climate justice, will be crushed, suppressed, and driven underground — *for at least a generation and possibly much longer.* No political principle can take precedence over the need to actively resist that eventuality. Yes, “resistance” implies much more than merely organizing voting for an alternative to a demagogue, but at the present moment that is the only road open to us. Palestinians and their allies will certainly continue the struggle against the genocide in Gaza by any means necessary, and against Biden and Harris’s policies of supplying the

weapons that are killing children and others in Gaza. Can that be squared with voting for Harris against Trump? It can be and it must be, for all the reasons I have stated here.

As a Marxist, I also adhere to philosophical materialism as opposed to idealism. I have therefore long understood that socialism cannot be accomplished by logical arguments influencing people’s ideas, but by material events that force working people by the millions to resist the collapsing capitalist system and create a socialist alternative to replace it. For the same reason, I do not expect my verbal arguments here to change the minds of those whose adherence to the principle of not voting for Democrats is deep and long-held. But to keep my opinion to myself would be violating the greater principle I recognize: to do everything in my limited power to prevent the disastrous destruction of bourgeois democracy.

Those who see not voting for a Democrat as an absolute principle say it might politically mislead the working class into thinking that a capitalist party can solve their problems. That is true, but it is an error of philosophical idealism to treat *ideas*, mistaken or not, as the primary factor in the class struggle. They are not. The material conditions that a Trump protofascist regime could impose far outweigh political confusion on any scale.

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As an example of what I am arguing against here, I will cite an opinion that appeared in a periodical of an organization I respect and admire, *Socialist Organizer*, August 28, 2024:

“The [Democratic Party] candidates are not going to get a guaranteed vote from everyone just because we don’t want Trump. Obviously, we don’t. Nobody wants another four years of that nonsense, but it’s sad that these are our only two options. I see Kamala

as just Biden 2.0. We need to have a Labor Party. We need to have other parties that can have candidates that people will want to support and vote for.”

The editors’ comment on this opinion was: “We agree.”

I emphatically do not agree, comrades. Trump’s threat is not simply “another four years of that nonsense.” It is not merely “sad” that our only electoral options are limited to Harris and Trump. “Kamala” is not “just Biden 2.0.” She is the bourgeois democratic candidate running against the antithesis of bourgeois democracy. The difference is a matter of life and death on a global scale.

New York City, September 5, 2024 (two months before election day)

Cliff Conner

P.S.

- Against the Current. :
<https://againstthecurrent.org/a-marxist-case-for-voting-for-kamala-harris/>
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Footnotes

[1] “War.” Marley was actually quoting a speech by Haile Selassie at the U.N.

[2] Forgive my use of the word “man” to denote all of humanity, male and female, but that is the common phrase our culture has bequeathed us.

[3] In a public speech, July 26, 2022.