Establishing a New "Common Sense": A Study of the Leftist Movement in Northeastern United States
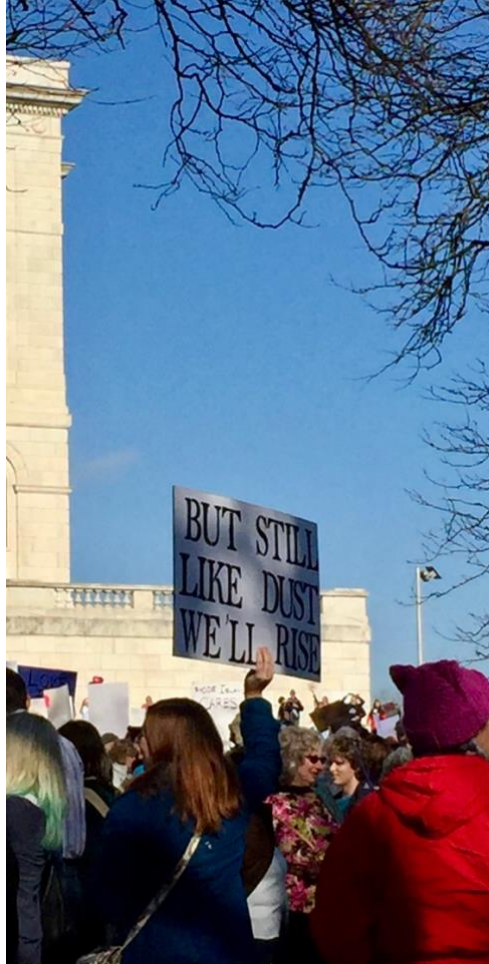
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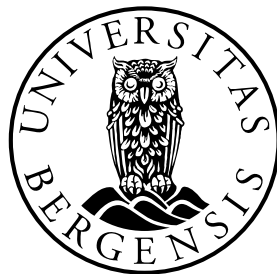
Acknowledgements

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New England, I will never forget the joy you have brought me. Your wonderful cities coupled with your beautiful nature has given me a new sense of life. Nor will I ever forget the sadness and anger I have felt witnessing people in need in my travels throughout the region. Alongside my informants, I have protested, laughed, cried, and been absolutely furious, and I can only hope my thesis provides a small glimpse into the work they are doing for the fight for political and social change.

Marte Knudsen

Bergen, May 2018.

Preface

I was standing on the grass in front of the steps where the speakers were about to start addressing the crowd. I had been in New England for exactly 48 hours, and my head was pounding from all the new impressions I was taking in. It was the day of President Donald Trump's inauguration, and I was at the Women's March. The crowd was huge, and a lot of people were wearing pink so-called "pussycat hats", a symbol of solidarity and female empowerment. It was a cold and dry winter day, and everyone was dressed accordingly. The sun was out, and wherever I turned my head I saw homemade signs with sayings like "Rise up" and "Keep your tiny hands off our rights". I was there with a friend, and as the speakers started talking, we listened intently. As we were standing there listening, all of a sudden a young man came bursting through the crowd. He looked angry, and as he was approaching I could hear him shouting something. He was shouting and chanting: 'Trump, Pence! Trump, Pence! Trump, Pence!'' at the top of his lungs. The boy cannot have been more than 16 or 17 years old. He kept bursting through the crowd screaming, completely drowning out the speakers. As he had circled the crowd once and was coming back in our direction, a group of about four or five protesters circled the boy without touching him. Without holding each other's hands, they formed a circle around him and shielded the rest of the crowd from him. They then made their way through the crowd to escort the boy away from the premises, all happening while they were still circling him and with him still screaming. As they approached the street, they guided him away from the grass and onto the pavement. After they had stood there for a while making sure that the boy had indeed left, they patted each other on the back and turned around. They then went back to stand with their friends and families for the remainder of the protest. This was my first encounter with the empowerment and solidarity I would continuously encounter throughout my travels in New England.

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Introduction

In the spring of 2017 I conducted my first anthropological fieldwork in a medium-sized city in New England, United States of America. I arrived at my destination two days before the inauguration of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States, and I was thrust into starting my fieldwork from the moment I arrived. I initially travelled there to study young Bernie Sanders supporters, more specifically students. I wanted to see if, and if so how, the movement lived on amongst the students that mobilized in support of Sanders, after he lost the Democratic Party nomination for president to Hillary Clinton, and whether or not it showed signs of materializing and becoming more of an institutionalized political movement. When Donald Trump won the general election and was set to become the next US president, the topic for my thesis became even more relevant.

I conducted quite a bit of research online before I left for the US, and one of the webpages I came across was for an umbrella grassroots organization called College Students for Bernie. When I went to their website, it was no longer active, and they had posted a message on the front page thanking everyone for their efforts and engagement in Bernie Sanders' campaign. There, they also encouraged all of their supporters to join either the pre-existing organization Young Democratic Socialists (the youth branch of Democratic Socialists of America) or a new organization called Young Progressives Demanding Action, a subgroup of the already existing Progressive Democrats of America. I was specifically interested in studying socialism amongst young people in the United States, so I decided to try to reach out to someone belonging to a YDSA or DSA (Democratic Socialists of America) chapter. After emailing one of the coordinators of a local chapter of DSA in New England, I received a very positive reply, where they welcomed me to conduct my research with the chapter, as well as with their local YDSA (Young Democratic Socialists) group.

I did indeed end up studying young Bernie Sanders supporters, but millennials more broadly instead of just students. There was not that much activity going on at the university campuses' local YDSA group as I had initially expected, so I found that I could not base my research on this alone. I therefore decided to switch to studying mobilization amongst millennials more broadly, as there were quite high levels of this type of mobilization in the local DSA chapter I had been given the opportunity to conduct my fieldwork in. There are different ways of defining age-wise those who are considered to belong to the millennial age-group, but I will in this thesis use it to refer to those who were born or came of age at the turn of the millennium.

When I arrived, I was welcomed with open arms by the local DSA and YDSA chapter, and I began attending protests, and events and meetings coordinated by the chapter to start my research there.

Main Argument and Thematic Focus

The context my interlocutors are operating within is in many ways a very polarized political landscape, which is increasingly characterized by political extremes[1]. This is of course not characteristic for US society alone, but part of a broader global picture in which the extremes of the political spectrum have in recent years become more clearly demarcated. My interlocutors, identifying as leftists and socialists, are also operating within a context where the populist and divisive Republican Donald Trump is the President of the United States. A president who has gained support among mainstream mainly working-class Americans as well as far-right political groups such as the Tea Party movement and Tea Party supporters, and who built large parts of his 2016 presidential campaign on fear and xenophobia amongst significant parts of the American population.

My interlocutors are finishing their college or university degrees only to enter a stagnating labor-market with declining wages, usually with high-interest student loans following them into the labor market. Millennials have been disproportionately affected by the 2008 financial crisis, and many openly express criticism and skepticism towards capitalism and neoliberal reforms (Milkman 2017). They find themselves part of a neoliberal and capitalist system and society which they feel has failed both them and those they care about. Due to the situation several of my interlocutors are finding themselves in, they are now working towards creating an alternative vision for the society they want to live in. Tired of witnessing the alienation, individualization and inequality that, in their experience, capitalism brings with it, this alternative vision, for them, comes in the form of socialism. I argue that through their actions and words, my interlocutors are actively challenging the current capitalist system they find themselves in. Through their activism and organizational work, they are trying to change the dominant narrative of what is seen as fair, and they are working towards building a political movement able to pose a challenge to the current capitalist political and social system. This is the main argument of this thesis.

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[1] Since I left the field this has only become more tensious, as the murder of 32-year old Heather Heyer in the summer of 2017 illustrates. She was murdered as a man drove a car through a crowd of counter-protesters protesting against a right-wing rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.

In her book, *Gramsci's Common Sense: Inequality and Its Narratives* (2016), Kate Crehan uses Antonio Gramsci's theory of the "common sense" to approach narratives about inequality in the contemporary United States. She uses the examples of two movements, the Tea Party movement and the Occupy Wall Street movement, to explore the origins of the narratives that explain why specific inequalities are by some seen as inevitable and necessary, and by others harmful and far from inevitable, and how certain of those narratives establish themselves as self-evident truths, the kind of "truths" that Gramsci would refer to as common sense (Crehan 2016, 3). Crehan bases her work on Gramsci's prison notebooks, and she explains that he was especially interested in "[…] ideas and beliefs which had established themselves as 'common sense' (senso comune)" (2016, 7-8). Gramsci's goal was social transformation, and this did not only require "[…] the mapping of common sense and the identification of the good sense he saw as embedded within it, but its translation (within the context of the political party) into effective political narratives capable of mobilizing large masses" (Crehan 2016, 13). Common sense describes the beliefs and opinions thought to be held in common by most of the population at a given time (Crehan 2016, 44), and it is "[…] that comforting set of certainties in which we feel at home, and that we absorb, often unconsciously, from the world we inhabit" (Crehan 2016, 118).

Gramsci's theory of the common sense is in some ways quite similar to Bourdieu's concept of "doxa", but departs from it in ways I believe are important to point out for the purposes of this thesis. Doxa is, according to Bourdieu, the fundamental presuppositions of the social field in which those belonging to it undisputedly and pre-reflexively comply with it (1990, 68). Such a social field can for example be a religious, political, or an academic field. Doxa is seen as an unquestionable system of given truths within a certain social field, where dominated individuals assent to much more than they themselves know, and is something that operates below the level of consciousness through the body, language and through attitudes towards things (Bourdieu and Eagleton 1992, 114-115). In this sense, the concept of doxa is quite similar to Gramsci's common sense. However, doxa's main ideological effects are, according to Bourdieu, transmitted through the body, and it is through the unconscious manipulation of the body that the main mechanism of domination operates (Bourdieu and Eagleton 1992, 115). Posing a challenge to a given doxa is thus not as simple as human actors simply gaining consciousness of their situation and then actively trying to challenge it, they also have to realize the bodily domination it holds over them, such as the way they walk or conduct their bodies in certain settings. These forms of symbolic domination, something you absorb like air and is everywhere and nowhere simultaneously, is, according to Bourdieu,

something that is very hard to escape from precisely because of these unconscious effects it has on those within it (Bourdieu and Eagleton 1992, 115). Doxa is thus a more encompassing and in some ways more of a rigid term than Gramsci's common sense, and it leaves less room for conscious resistance by the human actors within it. I believe Gramsci's common sense is a more fitting term to use in the context of this thesis because of its more flexible and dynamic nature, that it does not put as much emphasis on bodily subjection as Bourdieu's doxa does, and that the term is more susceptible to conscious resistance by human actors.

Returning to Gramsci, the emergence of a new common sense would come from a subaltern view (Crehan 2016). This would be driven by so-called "organic intellectuals" within the industrial proletariat in the masses of the people, these organic intellectuals being not a particular kind of intellectual, but through who the "[…] knowledge generated out of the lived experience of a social group with the potential to become hegemonic […]" would achieve its coherence and authority (Crehan 2016, 29-30). For Gramsci, "[…] incoherence is a primary characteristic of the 'ambiguous, contradictory and multiform' common sense (*senso comune*) (SPN, 423) subalterns use to make sense of their world" (Hoare and Smith 1971 in Crehan 2016, 31), and one of the tasks of the organic intellectuals is to turn the incoherent common sense of the class it emerges from into coherent political narratives (Crehan 2016, 31). As Crehan argues, in Gramsci's notebooks, common sense or 'senso comune' is "[…] that accumulation of taken-for-granted 'knowledge' to be found in every human community", and this accumulation provides an assortment of assumed certainties which forms the structures within which individuals are socialized and chart out their lives (2016, 43).

Common sense is not only a site of struggle for those trying to alter or revolutionize society, but also used by the dominant classes to make sure that their worldview remains dominant (Crehan 2016, 119). Crehan uses the Tea Party movement as an example of a movement trying to recraft an already existing narrative, rooted in the narratives created by the organic intellectuals in the dominant class of its time, to make sense within the context of the current historical moment (2016, 118-119). This narrative is characterized by an anti-government and capitalist mentality (Crehan 2016). Crehan uses the Occupy Wall Street movement to pose the question as to whether or not this movement may be seen as incubating, from Gramsci's perspective, the first stirrings of the kind of new common sense to which he referred, through its challenges to the dominant capitalist narrative (2016, 146-147). Even though Crehan argues that the movement did not succeed in establishing a new dominant narrative, a new hegemony, in and of itself through its actions (2016, 179-183), and can in

that way at best only be seen as a "flash" of a new common sense (2016, 181), she does argue that the movement succeeded in making the topic of inequality in the United States a part of public discourse and a part of the national debate (2016, 176-179). And, it is this challenge to the logic of the dominant neoliberal narrative I wish to argue that my interlocutors are further building on. Even though Gramsci argues (Hoare and Smith 1971 in Crehan 2016, 81), that one cannot know whether one is witnessing the establishment of a new common sense in the current moment as one has to have historical distance to it in order to see clearly, I still wish to argue that the work my interlocutors are engaged in, can in many ways be seen as an attempt to establish such a new common sense within US society. I suggest that, if we use the term organic intellectuals dynamically, we can apply it to my interlocutors, by them, through their words and actions, forming this incoherent common sense about inequality into a coherent political narrative about socialism.

Main Methods

In the field, I lived in a shared apartment with two other girls approximately the same age as me, both born in the US. Together, along with one of my roommate's' three cats, we lived in a house that was split into two separate apartments where we lived in the apartment on the second floor. The apartment was situated in a part of the city that most of the people I talked to, ranging from Uber drivers, to police, to my interlocutors, described as an "okay" neighborhood. It was situated in the middle of two different types of areas where one of them was more of a lower-middle class and calm neighborhood, and the other one a more crime-laden one. I was advised by my friends and acquaintances to stay away from the latter neighborhood, and to not walk through it after nightfall. During the course of my stay, a teenager was stabbed and murdered in that particular neighborhood, in addition to a few other dangerous incidents as well. The area I lived in was relatively cheap, but I did feel safe and comfortable most of the time, except for one particular incident where one of our neighbors acted threatening towards me and my roommate, as well as towards some of our other neighbors.

My main method during my fieldwork was participant-observation, a distinctive method for anthropologists, but increasingly in some form also used within other disciplines. The method entails that we observe our interlocutors and participate in their everyday lives over an extended time period, and ask questions that relate to their lives and points of view as

we have seen and experienced them (O'Reilly 2012, 86). Ethnographic research also entails that we try to learn about people's lives from within the context of their own lived experience and from their own perspective (O'Reilly 2012, 86), and so in the first half of my fieldwork I mainly focused on interactional data where my interlocutors met in different settings to discuss and talk about progressive and socialist politics, and in the last half of my stay I also conducted some unstructured interviews. I attended meetings, protests, working groups, casual dinners and conferences to get an idea of, and to start to form an impression of, how they talked about politics, and how they went about doing the activism work they were doing.

After getting to know some of my interlocutors more intimately, and becoming more comfortable in the field, I started carrying a voice recorder with me. I initially used it to record discussions at general and working-group meetings and speeches and talks at conferences. During the last half of my stay, when I had gotten more of an overview of the questions I wanted to ask my interlocutors based on my observations, I conducted unstructured interviews/conversations with some of them to talk about more specific topics I wanted their opinions and points of view on. These conversations were conducted in relaxed settings, over pizza at someone's house, over coffee in a coffee shop, eating dinner at a restaurant, or meeting up for lunch. I paid for their meals and beverages when we met so that my interlocutors would not have any expenses as a consequence of being a part of the research. I was awarded a grant from the Meltzer Research fund which enabled me to pay for research related expenses.

My attention has been on arenas where my interlocutors met up to talk about politics, in addition to protests and other more private social gatherings. I found that these more informal social gatherings often provided me with more insightful data as my interlocutors seemed more relaxed and open about reflecting on their political opinions in these types of settings. Because I conducted my fieldwork in an urban setting with interlocutors who led busy lives, my thesis will as a consequence rely heavily on the recordings I made during informal interviews in order to properly portray the work my interlocutors were engaged in, and their thoughts and reflections about it. All of the direct quotes in this thesis are from recordings, and the rest is paraphrased based on fieldnotes and memory.

I also travelled throughout the region with my interlocutors to attend various protests and political gatherings in different states, and so my fieldwork was also multi-sited. Most anthropological scholarship on multi-sited ethnography has traditionally involved ethnographies of migration, but has been used in other areas as well (Hage 2005, 464). Even though certain scholars, such as for example Hage, believes there can be no such thing as a

multi-sited ethnography (2005, 465) I still wish to argue that it can be a useful way of conducting ones fieldwork. My travels were all in the same region and the places not too far apart, and so Hage's challenges with jetlag and other things he points out (2005, 465) was not something that I experienced. For him, the biggest problem was that as he was hopping between the different places, he found it increasingly harder to separate himself from the social field he became a part of in the different places, making it impossible to simply land and leave as if he was floating above the cultures he was researching (Hage 2005, 465). My situation was quite different. The multi-sited fieldwork I conducted did not involve me doing research amongst different groups of people in the various places I travelled. As I followed the same group of people wherever I went, I did not encounter the same problems with conducting multi-sited ethnography as Hage (2005) describes. Conducting a multi-sited ethnography the way I did gave me the opportunity to see members of the DSA chapter in action in a way that I would not have been able to had I only stayed in the city where they lived. An absolutely crucial part of my research was to take part in actions and protests that my interlocutors participated in, and without travelling throughout the region I would not have gotten the research data I needed to get as nuanced a picture of their activism and organizational work as possible.

Something I had to be aware of while in the field, were my own political beliefs. As a politically active social democrat myself, I am a member of the Labor Party, I often found it hard to achieve the analytical distance I felt I needed to problematize the "obvious" and ask critical questions that would produce as nuanced data as possible. Even though I did find it hard at times, I spent a lot of time trying to make myself aware of this and to not lose sight of the fact that I was indeed there as an anthropology student conducting fieldwork, and not as a fellow activist. There were a few occasions at certain protests and gatherings where I did feel like I crossed the line as an observer and became a fellow activist instead, something I spent a lot of time reflecting on afterwards. One of these incidents is described in chapter five. However, I also believe that my political beliefs and convictions as well as my own work with the Labor Party at home in Norway enabled me to gain a greater and deeper understanding of their politics and beliefs. Also, it made them more comfortable talking to me about their opinions, feeling they were talking to someone who was in a way "one of them". Not to mention that I believe my being Norwegian and coming from a social democratic welfare state, helped me gain access to this particular group due to the fascination some people on the American left have with the Nordic countries.

I have decided to anonymize the specific location for my fieldwork, but not the name of the organization. The reason for this is due to the relevance of its ideological position as a whole, and because of the fact that this specific organization has had to handle a large influx of new members both after Bernie Sanders' primary campaign, but especially after the election of Donald Trump as president. All of my interlocutors have been given pseudonyms, and their professions have been anonymized to the degree that their professions still reflect their placement on the socio-economic ladder. As an extra anonymizing measure, I have also decided not to write the exact age of my interlocutors, but instead write their approximate age.

Chapter Outline

In the first chapter, I will outline the history and the current state of the American left and the political climate my interlocutors operated in, as well as introduce the region of New England where I conducted my fieldwork. I will also introduce the organization I followed and its history and structure.

In the second chapter, I will show how time constraints was something that pervaded my interlocutors' everyday lives, and outline some of the systemic and structural reasons for it. In this chapter I will depict how the people I got to know relate to the concept of time, and how capitalism puts restraints on their time in ways that are still unexplored. I will then explore how my interlocutors talked about time, and argue that they through this discourse and their actions are challenging what has become a dominant narrative of thinking about time and work in the United States.

In the third chapter, I will explore the interest in socialism among millennials in the United States, and how my interlocutors related to and thought about it. I will further discuss the generational difference when it comes to how different people in the US relate to socialism, and show how it was talked about among some of my interlocutors as an alternative vision for the kind of society they wanted to live in. Through their turn to socialism, I argue that my interlocutors are engaging in a kind of "countermovement" in Polanyi's (1944) terms as a reaction towards the free-market society they find themselves in, and the alienation and individualization that it, in their experience, produces.

In chapter 4, I will build on the discussion from chapter 3, and depict the discussion amongst my interlocutors as to how they were to practically go about realizing this alternative vision, and what shape their countermovement was to take. There was a broad consensus

within the DSA chapter that they were to both do grassroots-work and be engaged in elections when working for reforms. Varying opinions arose when they discussed how to practically be involved in elections. In this chapter, I will shed light on the discussion regarding whether or not they were to work through the Democratic Party structures, or focus their efforts on building a movement large enough to establish a third-party. My interlocutors' unenthusiastic view of the Democratic Party, and their belief that the party would never be able to represent their interests, was part of the reason why some of them were hesitant towards working within the Democratic Party. However, due to the difficulties involved in establishing a third-party in the current two-party American political system, a third-party track was often neither seen as a realistic option to gain political influence nor as a viable solution, by my interlocutors. It is this tension I wish to shed light on in this chapter.

In the fifth and final chapter, I will write about the topic of civic engagement and social media's role in the activism work my interlocutors were engaged in. Through a debate of traditional American civic engagement and social media's role within social movements more generally, I wish to show how social media and the Internet was seen as an important supplemental tool for the work my interlocutors were engaged in, but that what really mattered when working to create long-lasting political and social change for them was real on-the-ground, face-to-face action.

Chapter 1- Introducing the Field

The American Left

The history of the American left has consisted of several social and political movements, as well as political programs, throughout the country's history. From Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930's to the New Left and civil rights movement in the 1960's, many Americans have been fighting for progressive and leftist politics for decades.

The New Left movement, which took place in the 1960's and 1970's, was driven by activists fighting for civil and political rights at a time when legalized racial segregation was at its strongest in the US. Activists in the New Left and civil rights movement were actively fighting for the end of legalized racial segregation, and towards the end of the movement in 1968, Martin Luther King Jr., considered a leader of the civil rights movement, was tragically murdered in Memphis, Tennessee. The various leftist movements in US history has consisted

of people from a varied demographic, but historically, large parts of the movements have consisted of young people, and often students. The New Left was mainly driven by young activists working against the social and racial injustice their parents had grown up with. As Unger wrote in the 1960's:

> The struggle for civil rights, while endorsed by liberals and 'moderates', is largely led by young people of radical commitment. The student protests on university campuses derive their fire from young men and women who reject much of American life in the 1960's. Rent strikers, peace marchers, and Vietnam protestors- all are deeply skeptical of the affluent society. Almost everywhere throughout the country, but especially where masses of young people are thrown together- most notably, of course, at the universities- new organizations, new journals, new movements are emerging, dedicated to restoring a radical voice to the contention of ideas in the United States. (Unger 1967, 1237).

The New Left movement was characterized by an ongoing era of racial, political and social injustice, and so the movement, alongside the civil rights movement, was an attempt to change the current state of social and political life in the United States.

The belief in capitalism, the free market, and the American Dream stand strong in large parts of US society, and has alongside American conservatism shaped the American left and how they operate. In the past few decades, American leftism has in many ways become a protest movement against the neoliberal ideology which has dominantly raged throughout large parts of the world since the early 1980's. US President Ronald Reagan, alongside several other world leaders such as British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, was the front-runner in leading a movement of government deregulation and stripping of social programs in order to help boost the economy, but which proved to be extremely harmful for so many people. Reagan's and Thatcher's belief in the free market and government deregulation was of course part of a larger global picture in the late 1980's and early 1990's where several other national leaders were leading their countries in the same direction. However, neoliberal reforms and government deregulation has shaped how the American left operates today. The left's frustration with neoliberalism and the wealth and income inequality it brings with it became even more apparent and inflamed following the financial crisis of 2008 when: "Families lost their houses to foreclosure, elderly couples lost their life savings to the rapacious market, and working people lost their jobs and livelihood to the aggressive greed of an unchecked financial system" (Wolfson 2014, 1).

The American left has in the past few decades been focused on posing an alternative to the inequality and despair that, in their experience, the free market and capitalism in its most extreme forms bring with it. The movement, as we saw throughout the Bernie Sanders campaign, is in large parts driven by young people, millennials and students, who are finding themselves in a situation where they are facing an increase in student debt costs and job insecurity (see Milkman 2017), as well as having witnessed the unfairness that too much unfettered capitalism can bring with it. As Wolfson writes:

> The Great Refusal, as Herbert Marcuse (1991) once called it, has begun to show itself, as organizers, activists, and everyday people across the world respond to the economic crisis and growing specter of poverty and inequality. In this 'post-collapse' moment, we have witnessed new forms of organizing and protest that have rekindled the radical imagination. Beginning in 2009, communities from Cairo, Tunis, and Reykjavik to Santiago, Athens, and New York rose up, redrawing the political landscape and in some cases rebalancing the political scales. In some of these rebellions, dictators and their corrupt systems were swept asunder; in others, the struggle continues to this day; and in others still, a new narrative emerged that challenged the neoliberal logic that socializes risk while privatizing profit. (2014, 2).

This is the state of the American left today. Working towards political and social change in a neoliberal context has defined how they operate as well as the challenges they face. At the same time, they are fighting against a growing right-wing politics and mentality sweeping across the country, the latest result of this movement being, in many ways, the election of the populist and divisive President Donald Trump. This is also essential for our understanding when talking about the current state of the American left today and the political climate they are operating within.

My interlocutors are engaged in a movement towards socialism. Not only are they protesting and working to combat the ills of neoliberalism, they also have a clear and coherent ideology and vision for what kind of society they want to live in. For them, the solution is more government involvement and regulation, and for the government to take responsibility for its citizens. For my interlocutors, not only do they identify as leftists and as a part of a broader movement on the American left, but also as socialists.

In the following section, I will introduce the region of New England where I conducted my fieldwork.

New England

The location for my fieldwork was the region of New England. The region is made up of six different states, these being Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine, and is located in Northeastern United States. To the west, the region borders to the state of New York, and in the north the region borders on Canada.

Figure 1.- Map of New England, including the states and bordering areas (Map-USA-New England01, n.d).

Figure 2- Map of the location of the New England region in the United States (Map of New England USA, n.d).

New England has a strong maritime culture, as well as strong status as a settler region. The region was named by John Smith, English explorer and leader of the Jamestown Colony, which was the first permanent English settlement in North America, (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, "John Smith", May 5 2018). During the century of rapid expansion following the American Revolution, New England was the dominant region not merely in terms of demographic or economic expansion, but in social and cultural life as well (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Traditional regions of the United States", May 20 2018). The area exercised its primacy in fields such as politics, education, theology, literature, science, architecture, as well as the more advanced forms of mechanical and social technology (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Traditional regions of the United States", May 20 2018). New England had an unusually homogenous population during its first two centuries, and the British immigrants in the region, with some exceptions, all shared the same nonconformist religious beliefs, social organization, language and general outlook (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Traditional regions of the United States", May 20 2018). The arrival of the Mayflower in Plymouth Rock and the subsequent settlement of English Puritans in New England in the 1630's and 1640's is a central part of this history.

The first permanent settlement in New England was the Plymouth colony in Massachusetts, and it was established and settled by a group of Puritan Separatists in the early

17th century (Conforti 2001, 17). It was not until about a decade later, in the 1630's, when the Puritans from England came, that the region would gain the intellectual leadership and commitment to literacy and education that has become a strong part of the region's identity today (Conforti 2001, 17-18). The Puritan founders of New England sought to 'purify' or reform the Church of England of entrenched Roman Catholic trappings, and Puritanism was a religion of a "[…] devotional discipline rooted in literacy, Bible reading, and sermonizing, rather than ceremony, ritual, and such sensualism as churchly icons and instrumental music" (Conforti 2001, 12). The Puritan settlement of New England entailed upward of 21.000 English colonists settling in the region in one concentrated burst of migration (Conforti 2001, 11). The Puritans dominated this migration and travelled in organized groups of fellow church members, neighbors, friends, family and kin (Conforti 2001, 11), where they sought to establish a 'New' England on the colonized land. New England received very little in-migration from the early 1640's to the end of the century, and therefore it remained, from its origins and well into the nineteenth century, a relatively homogeneous area (Conforti 2001, 11). The region was mainly populated by middle-class Puritan families (Conforti 2001, 12), and early settlements of Puritans gathered along the coastal lowlands (Conforti 2001, 19). Three settlements emerged as social models in the United States following the colonization by the English, the Virginia structure where a plantation economy developed, based on cheap workers and especially slaves, the model of Pennsylvania where mainly white Europeans would be welcomed, and the Massachusetts model where the 'religiously pure' would be accepted (Helweg 1997, 254). The settlements in southern New England possessed an enthusiasm for democracy and a passion for education, as well as an intention for their values to be the values of the entire nation, and they had a strong emphasis on Puritan ethics and conformity (Helweg 1997, 254). When their residents moved west, the distinctive traits of these original settlements followed them (Helweg 1997, 254), spreading their way of life and way of viewing the world into other parts of the country as well. New Englanders formed settlements in Wisconsin, Michigan, northern Indiana and northern Illinois, and migrated across New York and through northern Ohio (Helweg 1997, 254).

The founding settlers in the region were a literate and educated group, and this played an important part in the creation of a conceptually and rhetorically dense regional identity (Conforti 2001, 12). Puritanism brought to New England the highest rates of literacy in the New World, was responsible for the first printing press in colonial America, and transported in excess of a hundred college-educated intellectual leaders to the region (Conforti 2001, 12).

In New England, there is a belief that knowledge is democratized and accessible to everyone (Tone Bringa, personal communication via e-mail, May 09 2018), and many groups, such as the Puritans and the Quakers, advocate free public education for all (Helweg 1997, 257). Since the Colonial era, higher education has been a concern of English immigrants (Helweg 1997, 257), and the region is known for having good and accessible public education, as well being known for its world-class private universities, such as Harvard, Yale, Brown, Dartmouth, MIT, and several others. Harvard University was founded in 1636 by English Puritans (Conforti 2001, 17), and is the oldest university in the United States (Harvard University, "History", n.d). A strong tradition of public libraries in New England is also a central part of the accessibility and democratization of knowledge, and this tradition is also reflected in the region's landscape (Tone Bringa, personal communication via e-mail, May 9 2018). A traditional New England town usually consists of a town square with a church, a town hall, and a public library, and the New England village is distinctive and generally recognized and cherished (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Settlement patterns", May 19 2018). New England has a long-standing tradition of the town hall as the legislature where the adults of the town meet to vote, and they do not traditionally have city councils or mayors, this being part of the puritan and egalitarian tradition of New England (Tone Bringa, personal communication via e-mail, May 09 2018).

The region is also known for being the location for the start of the American War of Independence. In 1773, a group of American patriots disguised as Mohawk Indians boarded British ships and dumped 342 chests of tea belonging to the British East India Company into Boston Harbor as a reaction towards taxation without representation, and the East India Company's perceived monopoly (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Boston Tea Party", May 15 2018), marking the beginning of the War of Independence. This was also the start of the so-called Boston Tea Party movement. Tensions and estrangement had been building between colonists and the British authorities for a long time before the outbreak of the revolutionary war, mainly caused by British attempts to assert greater control over colonial affairs after having neglected the colonials for a long time (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, "American Revolution", May 15 2018). In 1775-76 the majority of Americans were favoring independence from Britain, after coming to believe that they must secure their rights outside the British empire, and on July 4th the Declaration of Independence was adopted (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Declaration of Independence", May 15 2018). The conflict was up until early 1778 a civil war within the British empire, but in 1778 France joined in, followed by Spain in 1779, and the Netherlands in 1780, marking the transition from a civil

war to an international war (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, "American Revolution", May 15 2018). After suffering a number of setbacks in the following years, the colonists, with the help of their allies, claimed victory over the British in the siege of Yorktown, a land and sea campaign which forced the British to surrender by entrapping them on a peninsula in Yorktown, Virginia (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Siege of Yorktown", May 15 2018).

The towns and surrounding areas in New England have a quaint appearance, with a heavy presence of white houses in wood as well as town squares. New England was historically Republican, but eventually became strongly Democratic. The region was Republican in large parts due to it being strongly anti-slavery, and the Republican Party was the anti-slavery party (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Republican Party", May 15 2018). Under President Franklin D. Roosevelt the region moved to become Democratic, followed by John F. and Jacqueline Kennedy who were very much the image of a stereotypical New England family (Tone Bringa, personal communication via e-mail, May 09 2018). The Kennedy's are a part of the New England image, and they are also a symbol of the strong support in the region of the civil rights movement (Tone Bringa, personal communication via e-mail, May 09 2018). The region is generally quite left-leaning politically.

The connotations of New England that hold in the rest of the country, which is also part of New Englanders' self-image is of a solid and sensible people, and there is a strong belief that the traditional New England so-called Yankee, is inventive, thrifty, enterprising and self-reliant (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Traditional regions of the United States", May 20 2018). New Englanders hold their region in high pride, and a large part of this pride is due to the fact that the region was, during the Civil War, strongly anti-slavery, which is stressed in history lessons in the New England school system (Tone Bringa, personal communication via e-mail, May 09 2018). Many escaped to New England during the Civil War to escape slavery, and in the following years as well. There is a strong pride in the region connected to the fact that the New England states were the abolitionist states, and it is a large part of New Englanders self-understanding, as well as being strongly emphasized in the US history of the civil war, at least as taught in New England (Tone Bringa, personal communication via e-mail, May 09 2018).

The region is very white, and New England claims 3 out of the top ten states in the country with the highest percentage of whites, these being Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire (Roney 2016). The region is also known for being a hub for WASPs, White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, connoting traditional wealth and power among those with English ancestry (Helweg 1997, 254). There was a lot of awareness amongst my interlocutors around

the fact that the region is demographically very white, and so they had a large focus on how they could actively work to build a multi-racial movement within the organization. Even though this is not one of the main topics of this thesis, it is still very important to point out. The demographics within the chapter I followed was predominantly white, and only two of my main interlocutors were of a different ethnic origin. Certain parts of the region however, especially Boston, is known for its working-class Irish and Italian ethnic communities, and Providence, RI is also known for its large Italian ethnic community as well as having a large Hispanic population.

New Englanders and Americans are known for their strong civic engagement (for more on this see Putnam 2000), and this can also be seen in part as stemming from the Puritan tradition. The Puritan settlers were resistant towards dividing the world into the sacred and the secular, and they called their places of worship meetinghouses instead of churches (Conforti 2001, 23). These meetinghouses doubled as civic buildings where nonreligious assemblies gathered and they were a locus of communal devotion, not a sacred space (Conforti 2001, 23). The United States thus has a long history of civic and community engagement, as well as a strong historical idea and belief in egalitarianism in New England which is important to keep in mind as I, in the next section, give a background to the organization I followed, and its history and structure.

Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)

The organization I conducted my fieldwork in was DSA (Democratic Socialists of America). Democratic Socialists of America is the largest socialist organization in the United States (Democratic Socialists of America, "About DSA", n.d). The organization was formed as part of a merger between the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) and the New American Movement (NAM) in the early 1980's, and had at the time of the merger approximately 6,000 members (Schwartz 2017). Membership has steadily increased since then, and especially since the election of Donald Trump as the President of the United States with the organization now claiming more than 19.000 dues-paying members (Pearce 2017). Even though the organization has experienced a significant growth in membership numbers in the past couple of years, it is still a small organization compared to the US population. The organization is an umbrella organization with a varied cohort of members, which draws

support from different people across the political spectrum, ranging from strong ideological socialists to more established and mainstream Democrats.

When it comes to the structure of the organization, the National Political Committee (NPC) is the primary political leadership (Democratic Socialists of America, "Our Structure", n.d). The committee consists of sixteen people, and they function as the board of directors of DSA (Democratic Socialists of America, "Our Structure", n.d). The National Political Committee (NPC) is elected every two years by the delegates to DSA's National Convention, and based upon chapter size every DSA chapter is entitled to send a certain number of delegates to the National Convention (Democratic Socialists of America, "Our Structure", n.d). DSA also has a constitution, and amongst other things it requires that at least five seats on the NPC be reserved for people of color, and eight seats reserved for women (Democratic Socialists of America, "Our Structure", n.d). DSA has a set of major political and organizational goals which are broadly set every two years by the delegates to the National convention, and it is the NPC who guides and leads the implementation of these goals, in addition to giving instructions to the national staff as to how to carry out the organization's everyday work (Democratic Socialists of America, "Our Structure", n.d). The National Political Committee (NPC) meets three or four times a year through long weekend meetings, and they also elect a five-person NPC Steering Committee who, both in person and by conference call, meet more frequently (Democratic Socialists of America, "Our Structure", n.d). The organization also has Honorary Chairs and Vice-Chairs who are elected at each bi-ennial National Convention, and who also occasionally participate in internal governance issues through the meetings of the NPC (Democratic Socialists of America, "Our Structure", n.d). The National Political Committee (NPC) have the authority to charter local organizations or chapters by application if the group consists of 15 or more members, or 10 or more in special circumstances (Democratic Socialists of America, "DSA Constitution & Bylaws" n.d).

It is stated in DSA's constitution that they identify as socialists, and that they reject an economic order based on private profit, discrimination in all forms, brutality and violence in defence of the status quo and gross inequalities in wealth and power (Democratic Socialists of America, "DSA Constitution & Bylaws" n.d). It is further stated that they share a vision of a different and more humane social order, and that they are developing a concrete strategy for achieving that vision through building what they aim to be a majority movement that will further democratic socialism in America (Democratic Socialists of America, "DSA Constitution & Bylaws" n.d).

I was told by my interlocutors that the demographics within DSA has changed in the course of the past few decades, and that is has at least in the past few years attracted a large number of younger members, especially those within the millennial age-group. They now have local chapters in almost every state in the country and have experienced a large growth in the past year, especially since Bernie Sanders' primary campaign and Donald Trump's general election victory (David, one of my main interlocutors, personal communication through speech, February 18 2017). The local chapters do a wide variety of activism work, such as taking part in protests, working towards legislative change in co-operation with other community groups, and doing relief work for people in their local communities. They also co-operate with other political organizations in endorsing candidates for elections on the city and state-level, as well as sometimes pushing and endorsing their own members to run for office.

Membership is obtained through the payment of annual dues, with different prices based on whether you are an introductory member, regular, sponsor, registering as a family, sustainer, student/Young Democratic Socialist or low income (Democratic Socialists of America, "Membership" n.d). The local chapters each have an Executive Committee consisting of co-chairs who have executive power within the group, but who are to lead by consensus. As Johnny, one of my interlocutors who was on the Executive Committee said about being a co-chair: "I consider myself a glorified traffic cop".

The local DSA chapter I conducted my fieldwork in had been a relatively small group before my arrival and had just started to handle an influx of new members since the general election. In many ways it was still a start-up group, so I was able to follow their development as a chapter during my fieldwork. Those on the Executive Committee were also relatively new in their positions, the group having agreed that those who had been on the committee for a while should step down so that others were also to be given the opportunity. Even though the local chapter I followed did not only consist of millennials, they were disproportionately represented within the group. I also followed a local YDS chapter, the youth branch of DSA, which I will now turn my attention to.

Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA)

Young Democratic Socialists is a national organization of campus chapters and activists, and is the youth and student section of Democratic Socialists of America (Young Democratic Socialist of America, "About Us", n.d). They are students organizing in their high schools, colleges and universities to, as stated on their website "[…] fight for the immediate needs of workers and students while building our capacity to fight for more radical and structural changes" (Young Democratic Socialists of America, "About Us" n.d). The organization does a variety of different organizational and campaign work such as anti-poverty work through local mutual aid programs, actions to protect immigrants through campaigns for sanctuary campuses and work alongside labor campaigns to organize student workers of staff (Young Democratic Socialists of America, "About Us" n.d). YDSA chapters do not only work for the rights and justices of students alone but aim to build an organization that works across the whole campus community with everyone affected by capitalism, such as students, faculty and campus workers (Young Democratic Socialists of America, "Start a YDSA Chapter" n.d).

The YDSA chapter I followed was a group who had had an active chapter at the local university campus for several years, but which had in the last few years been inactive. The group had just started up their activities again when I arrived, with the help of one of my main interlocutors David who was a part of the local DSA chapter. The group mainly focused on campaign and actions happening on the university campus in the beginning of my fieldwork, but as time went on they slowly started to get involved in actions that the DSA chapter was involved in in the broader local community, or alongside other local grassroots organizations. Attendance at the meetings and actions was inconsistent, and there were occasions where several of my interlocutors were not able to come to the meetings because of their studies, work, or other commitments. Most of my interlocutors in the YDSA chapter seemed to have quite a bit of free time aside from their studies, but a few of them, in likeness with many of my interlocutors from the DSA chapter, seemed to be struggling with not having enough time to get everything they needed done. This is what I wish to shed light on in the second chapter.

Chapter 2- The Struggle for Time

Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss time constraints within the context of my interlocutors' daily lives. I wish to show how, for several of them, the way they distributed their time was often dominated by having to work long hours, and sometimes nights and weekends as well, and how that again affected their capacity when it came to the organizational work that needed doing. Some of my interlocutors were also students and had quite a heavy workload with their studies. A couple of them also had full-time jobs in addition to their studies, to which I often stood in admiration and awe over all the things they were able to get done in the course of a week. As a consequence of that, it seemed to me as though several of them barely had any leisure time to pursue their interests. I also got the impression that my interlocutors felt a lot of pressure at their places of work, and that they felt like they were being held to quite high expectations when it came to their performance. I was often told by several of my interlocutors that they felt like they never had enough time outside of work to get all the things they wanted and needed done, especially when it came to DSA.

The US is one of the leading industrial nations when it comes to the proportion of the population holding jobs, the number of days spent per year on those jobs, as well as the hours worked per day (Schor 2003, 6). In the last three decades there has been a steady increase in work time (Schor 2003, 10), and overworked and stressed-out Americans today include both women and men of all ages, classes and races, and all income-levels and in all occupations (Brandt 2003, 12). In this chapter, I will focus on the concept of time, and use it as an analytical category in order to shed light on some of the struggles that my interlocutors faced in the course of their everyday lives, and how it affected their ability to engage politically.

To help illustrate my point, I will employ Nichole Shippen's (2014) theory on the "colonization of time". Shippen is a political scientist, and in her book *Decolonizing Time: Work, Leisure and Freedom* (2014), she argues that in a capitalist society, such as for example in the US, time becomes "colonized" in the sense that "[…] the social use, meaning, organization, and experience of time are dominated by the needs of capital, rather than the needs of human beings" (Shippen 2014, 2). She mentions and builds on Karl Marx's insight that people spend most of their time working under capitalism, and points out that: "Despite this fact, much of political theory does not treat work or time as politically significant categories" (Shippen 2014, xi). In order to analyze and understand the experience and organization of time under capitalism we need to realize that: "The political nature of time is

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intimately related to the historical development of global capitalism and should be treated as such" (Shippen 2014, 180). She thus calls for a politicization of time, and for time to be employed as an analytical category to be able to gain a greater understanding of, and to be able to shed light on, how capitalism affects people in their everyday lives in a variety of ways (Shippen 2014). Shippen mainly builds on her own experiences growing up in a working-class home with parents who spent nearly all their time working to make ends meet (2014, "Preface"). Most of my interlocutors defined themselves more as "middle-class" on the few occasions they used the word[2], but I do however believe that many of Shippen's (2014) insights can still be made relevant in the case of my interlocutors as well. I especially believe her arguments can be relevant in order to shed light on how, in the US job market, the need to work long hours to make ends meet is affecting people across all classes and income-levels, as Brandt (2003, 12) points out.

The concept of time has in anthropology mostly been focused around time as temporality, how various societies conceptualize and understand time (see Bear 2016 and Munn 1992). I will, however, here focus on actual clock-time and show how it can be argued that my interlocutors can be seen as challenging the time-regimes they find themselves in, specifically concerning their jobs. In his article on mass transit workers in San Francisco, anthropologist Mark Fleming coins the term "neoliberal time discipline" to describe how: "Neoliberal governance repurposes time discipline in order to undermine existing wage labor systems in the name of flexibility and efficiency" (2016, 786), and the term draws attention to how time is controlled through devices such as timekeepers, clocks, schedules and financial accountings "[…] in ways that support neoliberalism's normative and political commitments" (Fleming 2016, 787). There, structural and systemic issues such as too tight time-schedules, maintenance problems and general traffic causing the bus company to have a chronic lateness issue, is reworked and portrayed as being mainly a problem caused by lazy and inefficient bus drivers (Fleming 2016, 785). This is then used to undermine the transit workers' union in order to implement policy that will weaken the employees working rights and conditions, in the name of making the company more efficient and flexible in line with neoliberal demands (Fleming 2016). I believe Fleming's (2016) work is useful when it comes to shedding light on how large parts of the US job market is structured and governed today, and that his idea of neoliberal time discipline is especially useful for explaining the work system surrounding my

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[2] See chapter 3 for more on how my interlocutors used the term "class".

interlocutors. Through their actions and words, I argue that it is precisely this type of governance and system of neoliberal time discipline my interlocutors are challenging.

By observing how my interlocutors relate to the concept of time and through how they talk about it in their everyday lives, I thus argue that they are challenging what has become a "conventional wisdom" in US society. The term comes from economist John Kenneth Galbraith, who in his book *The Affluent Society* (1977) performs an analysis of modern capitalism. Galbraith was a critic of the neoclassical so-called "conventional wisdom", which according to Brue and Grant is , "[…] a set of ideas that is familiar to all, widely accepted, but no longer deemed relevant" (2013, 415). The conventional wisdom is the set of ideas that are generally accepted as being true by the public, or by the dominant group within a society (Galbraith 1977), but Galbraith is quick to point out that it is not the property of any specific political group (1977, 8). Neoclassical theory is often associated with neoliberalism, the aggressive anti-state strategy bent on privatizing public companies, reducing public spending and dismantling social protections (Herrera 2013, 102), forming a broadly accepted idea that that those who are poor are so because they are lazy and unwilling to work, and that those who are wealthy are so because they have worked hard and earned it, ignoring the structural reasons for why some have it easier than others.

Galbraith argues that the reason for the robustness and survival of the conventional wisdom is because of tradition, and the fact that people approve the most of what they understand the best (1977, 7). He goes on to explain that:

> […] economic and social behavior are complex, and to comprehend their character is mentally tiring. Therefore we adhere, as though to a raft, to those ideas which represent our understanding. This is a prime manifestation of vested interest. For a vested interest in understanding is more preciously guarded than any other treasure. It is why men react, not infrequently with something akin to religious passion, to the defense of what they have so laboriously learned. Familiarity may breed contempt in some areas of human behavior, but in the field of social ideas it is the touchstone of acceptability. (Galbraith 1977, 7).

Galbraith had an evolutionary approach where he examined the need to change our ideas to fit new situations and changing conditions (Brue and Grant 2013, 415). He argued that ideas are in and of themselves inherently conservative, and that they yield only to the massive attack of circumstances which they cannot cope with (1977, 17).

By questioning and challenging this structure of ideas in relation to work and time in their daily lives through their conceptualizations, words and actions, I argue that my interlocutors are actively challenging and questioning the general acceptability of this conventional wisdom[3]. I believe both Shippen (2014), Fleming (2016) and Galbraith's (1977) writings can be relevant when it comes to framing this particular issue because neoliberal governance, capitalism, and the idea that one should work as much as possible are what make out the conventional wisdom in this case, and Shippen's (2014) theories on the colonization of time provides us with a tool to analyze this issue through the concept of time. I also argue that the conventional wisdom generates high expectations that my interlocutors are forced to struggle and deal with at their workplaces and in their daily lives.

In this chapter, I will recount stories and quotes from four of my interlocutors to illustrate the issue of how time is experienced and organized for them, how they talk about it and conceptualize it in their everyday lives, and how I believe it can be argued that they through this are directly challenging and questioning the general acceptability of the conventional wisdom. I will start off with Rita and Frederick.

Rita and Frederick

One late and rainy April evening I was at Rita and Frederick's house. We had scheduled for me to come over that night so that we could have an informal interview/talk about various topics that I wanted their views on. Rita and Frederick are married, both from the Midwest, and both in their early thirties. Both of them were relatively new members to DSA, and had joined the local chapter in November 2016, a couple of weeks after the general election. That night we had just eaten pizza together, and after a while we got to talking about socialism. One of the questions I asked is whether or not they saw socialism as being the alternative vision for US society[4]. They both said that they did indeed see it that way, and the passages pulled here from the recording made that night illustrates well how, for them, time seemed to be directly connected to the realization of that vision. This was something they talked about a lot, Rita said, and she went on to explain that:

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[3] "The conventional wisdom" has certain common traits with Gramsci's concept of the "common sense". For more on "common sense", see Introductory chapter.

[4] See Chapter 3 for more on this topic.

People talk about how capitalism is basically synonymous with innovation, and how you know the reason why we have all this innovation in this country is because we have capitalism, but if we weren't in this capitalist system, if we had socialism, we could use our creativity for other things, we could offer something.

Frederick agreed, and continued:

I mean, that's part of the problem is that you, we don't have the intellectual time, and we're not able to commit the amount of intellectual labor that it often takes to actually realize an alternative vision. The alternative vision that needs to be created requires a vast amount of resources and those resources come from human labor, from intellectual labor that is currently being funneled into creating shit apps or things that people don't need.

Rita agreed, and added: "I just feel like I would be using my energy for so much more if I wasn't in so much fucking student loan debt". This statement was tied up to how money for her was a constant concern because of the large student loans she had, and the reality of the time it would take for her to pay them off, even though she did have a full-time job. Rita and Frederick often said that they felt like their time was being mainly funneled into serving the needs of capital, and not spent towards creating a better society, something that was very important to them. They also felt that that work and everyday life was always centered around making the most amount of money possible. To them, as they said on several occasions, it would be a lot more rewarding to be able to spend some of their intellectual capacity and time towards something they felt to be more useful and rewarding.

Frederick works for a marketing company and works from home. He often expressed his frustrations with his job and was exhausted by the fact that despite his education he was still working the same job that he had been before he finished his degree. He had considered going into teaching at the university level, but after learning about the salary he would receive from that type of job in addition to the job uncertainty, he had decided that it was not an option for him. He therefore went back to the job he had had earlier, a job which at least allowed him to manage his bills. He told me about how he one day had actually finished his work early, and had been able to sit and work on stuff for one of the working groups for the remainder of the day. This had been really rewarding he said, and he finally felt like he was doing something really useful and interesting with his time.

Both Rita and Frederick expressed on several occasions that they weren't really happy with their jobs, Frederick especially. But, they of course kept them because without them they

would not be able to pay their mortgage, their student debt, or keep up with their bills. Rita works in the insurance industry for a company in the neighboring city. There were several occasions where she actively distanced herself from the way her colleagues behaved, and the "corporate culture" she felt was very strong at her workplace. There was a large focus on networking, and for several of her colleagues, work was the single most important thing in their lives. She did not feel that way. During our talk that late night in April, she told a story from her work where her boss had talked poorly about one of her colleagues who had not shown interest in "climbing the corporate ladder":

> If you do stay at a certain company or organization for any extended period of time, you're expected to keep taking on more and more responsibilities. I remember my boss talking poorly about this other woman one time who just, she was a middle-management kind of person, and my boss was talking about how 'Yeah, she's just, she's just okay with what she's doing right now, she doesn't wanna keep climbing the ladder or whatever', and I was just like 'Yeah? So? She probably has other stuff going on in her life. She doesn't wanna be married to her job, you know'. I don't know, I just thought that was so weird, this pressure is put on me too and I'm just like 'No!' I just, I wanna go home at night, you know? Obviously, I want to be paid more, but like this is… yeah.

As Shippen points out; "[…] the things that make life meaningful such as maintaining healthy relationships with family, friends, and lovers, building community, creating, writing, raising children, volunteering, coaching, mentoring, caring, etc., take immeasurable amounts of time" (2014, 174). Time that you don't have if you are working most of the day. Rita's story also touches upon expectations at play when it came to how much time and effort the employees at her company were expected to put into their jobs. For Rita, being at work all day like some of her colleagues were, was not an option. Her job was not the single most important aspect of her life, and she wanted more time to spend on her hobbies, her husband, their dog, and not to mention on DSA.

Rita and Frederick had also talked about having kids. Frederick told me about his background and his family, which he described as a very mainstream middle-class family. The term "class" was not one that was used regularly by my interlocutors in everyday speech, but usually only used within the discourse of their politics and activism in a more abstract way. It was rarely used by any of them to describe themselves or theirs or others' background,

other than mentioned briefly in the way that Frederick did here when talking about his upbringing.

His mother works in education and his father works in the insurance industry. Frederick told me that he felt like his parents had bought into American consumerism a lot and believed that the extent of it had ended up affecting his parents' life-styles later in life. This had also impacted their inability to pay for his college education, something he felt would impact him for many years to come:

> It'll impact us for a very long time because I'm paying off student loans that I could be putting away towards retirement or children's loans or something. Because if we do decide to have kids, the financial impact of having children weighs on us in a way that it definitely wouldn't if we didn't have student loans.

The financial cost of having a child in the first place would be quite large, but the cost of Rita taking maternity leave or Frederick taking paternity leave in addition to that would make the financial cost of having a child too big. Rita's job only allowed a few weeks of maternity leave, and she would not get paid her full salary. Frederick's job did not allow for any paternity leave whatsoever. The way Frederick's parents had spent money in their younger years had had a direct impact on him and his financial situation. Rita also told me that her parents had had a similar background concerning spending, and that neither of them had gone to college. She said that she remembered her mother telling her once that when they were young they had basically furnished their entire house on a credit card, and that they from there on had just gone into more and more debt. This had caused her mother to warn her about credit cards, but Rita felt like they had never really taught her about what she actually should do: "I always thought that my college was going to be paid for. I saw kids in college working two or three jobs because they had to pay for their college and I was thinking 'Oh, I'm one of those assholes whose parents are paying for them'". However, that didn't happen. She said that she did think her parents had intended to pay for her, but the economy had started spiraling downwards as she was in college, and her dad lost his benefits and bonuses, so they were not able to pay for it the same way that she knew they had wanted to. Rita and Frederick's situation shows how the idea of taking back control over one's time is not so simple. The way their parents had spent their money in the past had had a direct impact on Rita and Frederick and their financial situation. They both had to work jobs with long hours in order to keep up with paying their student loans, loans they might have avoided taking had

their parents been able to pay for their college education. This in turn affected how much time they had, both to invest in each other, but also into the work they were doing with DSA. Their situation can serve as an illustration of what Shippen talks about when she points out that the way towards achieving the goal of having more control over our time is not immediately obvious due to the way that the issue of time is framed under capitalism, as something that affects the individual and thus something that requires individual solutions (2014, 18). She asserts that:

> Framing work-life balance in this way mystifies the colonization of time by capital whereas capital creates the experience of time as loss that it then profits from in a variety of ways. The tradition of liberalism only serves to reinforce this idea with its notion of individuals abstracted from the concrete realities of their political-economic circumstances, which insinuates people have much more control over their time than they actually do. (Shippen 2014, 18).

Something Frederick said later on in the conversation also illustrates how he actively challenged the logic of capitalism and the direct constraints it put on how he and others were able to spend their time. He was talking about a speech that he always went back to listen to that David Harvey, writer and Professor of Anthropology and Geography, had given at a socialist conference once. There, Frederick said, Harvey had talked about unused capital in the form of accumulation of money, and how we have a world of immense, unused capital in a world of immense social need, and how he said that he saw this as a reflection of the irrationality of the system:

> It just boils it down, and you're just like 'Yeah, that's exactly what's wrong'. That's exactly what we're pushing against all the time when we're like 'I don't have the time to commit to what I want to, I don't have the time to put towards making a better social world outside myself, I don't have the time to invest in myself properly, I don't have time to create the social networks that make a vibrant social life'. All of these basic tendons of what make a good society run functionally aren't able to be achieved because there's trillions of dollars in capital. Trillions of dollars, like immense global resources that just aren't being used.

Frederick felt like he and other people around him did not have the time to do several of the things that made for a vibrant life because they always had to work to first and foremost make money in order to survive, and not to invest in their own well-being. He found this to be very

paradoxical and exasperating when there was so much accumulated and unused capital in the world. By spending some of this capital towards investing in people and their well-being, he believed everyone would not have to work so much all the time and could thus as a consequence of that lead more meaningful lives.

Keeping Up With Pressures at Work: Johnny's Story

Another one of my interlocutors I wish to write about in this regard is Johnny. Johnny is a male in his late twenties. He was not born in the US, but his family immigrated here when he was a teenager, and he has lived large parts of his life in New England, where he also went to college. Johnny works in a large management company and holds a management position, requiring him to work quite long hours, in addition to him often having to work extra on weekends. He is also a member of the Executive Committee of the DSA group, and therefore has quite a bit of additional work and responsibilities. Johnny was consistently very involved in the different working groups, and hands on when it came to organizing and taking notes for everyone at the various meetings. He was directly involved in at least three working groups, and in two of the groups I also got the impression that he had somewhat of a leader role. Johnny led a very busy life, and one evening when he was giving me a ride home from one of the DSA monthly general meetings, he told me that he was the first one to hold the position he currently held with only an undergraduate degree, and not a postgraduate degree. He told me that he felt a lot more pressure to perform well in his job because of it and felt like he constantly had to prove himself to his colleagues and bosses.

As mentioned, Johnny was a very busy man who was often stretched for time, and an incident where we were supposed to meet up for a working group meeting serves as an illustration of this. Johnny had tried for some time to find an appropriate time to set up the first meeting for the single-payer working group, and finding a time that worked both for him and for everyone else turned out to be a bit of a challenge. After a while, everyone who was a part of the working group all managed to agree on a date, which was a Saturday morning in early April. Later on, the night before the meeting was scheduled to take place, Johnny had to reschedule as something had come up. He wrote to all the participants in the working group on Slack[5] that he would get back to us all with a new time for the meeting as soon as he had set one. As far as I know, a new time for the meeting was never set up during my time there,

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[5] Slack is a communications app. For more on this see Chapter 5.

and the working group did not, again; as far as I know, meet while I was there. I know there was a coalition of other groups in the local community that were already working on the campaign on single-payer and had been for a long time, which might have contributed to Johnny choosing to channel more energy into the group's other campaigns that were just taking off. Or, it might have been that he just did not have the time to get together with the group because of everything else that needed doing.

One of my other interlocutors who always seemed to be struggling with time was Henry.

Working Two Jobs: Henry

Henry is a male in his early thirties originally from the surrounding area of a Midwestern city. His parents were, as he described it, "solidly middle-class", but told me that they overshot their goals: "We went hungry a lot growing up". His father has a disability and was for a long period of time during Henry's upbringing back and forth between having a job and not having a job, making around 70.000 dollars a year, to making almost nothing. His mother works in a beauty salon, and his parents are now divorced. Henry grew up in a religious household and went to public school growing up. When it was time to go to college, he enrolled in a religious college in a Northeastern city but ended up dropping out due to the high costs. Even though he did get a couple of scholarships and saved up some money himself, he still had to take out 40.000 dollars in loans, and then later dropped out as he could not keep up with the expenses paying for college. He said that he had currently paid off around 15.000 of the 40.000 dollars he had taken out in loans. When he dropped out of college he moved home but ended up being kicked out by his mother who did not agree with his lifestyle. Henry did not elaborate on what she specifically disagreed with, and I decided not to pry any further. After he got kicked out, he moved in with his girlfriend for a couple of weeks until she broke up with him, making him homeless. Henry was homeless for about a year when he moved around staying wherever he was allowed to stay, sometimes on his friend's piece of unused property and sometimes on friends' couches. He did not make a lot of money, but he knew where to buy cheap food that would fill him up. He used to buy the same pizza at Little Caesar's (a pizza-chain) whenever he had the chance that only cost 5 dollars and had around 3000 calories in it. That enabled him to fill up his calorie-intake for the day. After a while he got a job as a waiter and eventually got himself an apartment. After a while he was able to get himself a "real job" as he described it, and from there on out started getting better and better

jobs. Eventually, he landed himself a job working with computers that paid well and told me he started making more money than he had ever seen in his entire life. Henry was at the time in a band, and used some of this money to help some of his fellow bandmates who were only making 8-10 dollars an hour at the time, and said that it was important for him to help other people, especially since he had been in the same place as them just a few years ago: "Yeah, I might be pretty successful" he said about himself at that time in his life, "but I have to understand how to use that success to benefit people other than myself."

Henry currently works in the IT business, and one day during my stay he lost his job. His company was pulling the workforce back to its originating country, and this was a huge point of stress for him as he was currently supporting both his girlfriend, her mother, and her sister. Luckily, he got a new job quite quickly, but still had not gotten the severance he was owed from his former job and was struggling financially because of it. One evening we were driving home from a barbeque one late May evening that DSA had hosted in a local park for all members, and he suggested we stop and buy some ice cream. He asked if I happened to have cash as that was all they accepted, to which I replied that I unfortunately did not have any on me. He thought he had a couple of dollars, but then he remembered that he had used them for something else. He told me that he currently did not have any money in his bank account. He also had to refill gas for his car, but did not have the money for it right now. As he had not received the severance he was owed, Henry was forced to take on additional work to be able to pay his bills and ended up working two full time jobs at once. Since he was working all day and large parts of the night as well, this naturally put constraints on what political and social activities he could participate in. As he was being forced to take on this additional work, it made it harder for him to be able to do as much work for DSA as he wanted. Henry barely had time to do this work, much less spend time for himself and take care of his other personal needs.

Henry's case is a good illustration of something that several of my interlocutors seemed to struggle with. There never seemed to be enough time to get everything done, and I often got the impression that Henry was stretched very thin: "Yeah, I work my ass off in capitalism because I can't actually, unless you're making money, unless you're relevant to profit, you're kind of disposable", he told me. Henry's situation seemed to touch upon what Shippen talks about when she points out that: "In general, people want more control over their time, but they cannot fathom how that might be possible given the need to work long hours or multiple jobs to make ends meet" (2014, 3). Henry also said that his political engagement started from growing up poor in the economic cycles of his family:

When I was ten, I was just thinking like 'this isn't fair'. 'This isn't fair'. And I kept trying to understand it. And, it was hard growing up in a pretty conservative Republican town where people were like 'that's just the way it is. That's just how the free market works. You just have to accept how the free market works. If you have a problem with the free market, you have to change it yourself.' And I'm looking at it like 'What am I supposed to do here? How am I supposed to change this?'

He said that he felt these types of statements to be the truest realization in the Marxist sense of the entire concept of capitalism in general, this abstracted way of saying that things just happen to you.

Conclusion- Challenging "The Conventional Wisdom"

In this chapter, I have shown how several of my informants struggled with not having enough time to be able to take part in everything they wanted to, or to get all the things they wanted done. I have shown how this form of time constraint was often, if not always, intimately tied to their jobs and their financial situations. I first introduced Rita and Frederick and their reflections on how time was integral to create what they believed to be a better society, and how they talked about and dealt with time and "the market mentality" at their places of work. I further focused on Johnny and Henry and how they were always working and seemed to be constantly pressed for time. Rita, Frederick, Henry and Johnny all expressed on different occasions that they had a strong desire to be able to put more time into the work they were doing with DSA, and several of them also said that they felt this type of work to be much more meaningful and rewarding than their full-time jobs.

I have further argued that Nichole Shippen's (2014) theory on the "colonization of time" can be useful in this regard because it enables us to approach some of the issues that my interlocutors struggled with through the concept of time. It also enables us to use time as an analytical category in order to shed light on how the fight for time is not simply something the individual struggles with and something that must be handled and approached mainly on an individual basis, but how it is intimately shaped by and tied to the political-economic forces that shape people's lives (Shippen 2014). Shippen points out that even though people may complain about their lack of time, "[…] they do not necessarily recognize the political-economic factors that most contribute to this lack" (2014, xi). Many people have a tendency to accept these types of constraints as just something that is a part of life, and do not recognize

the ideological and root causes of them (Shippen 2014, xi). However, through their criticisms of capitalisms logic, how the idea of the "free market" is structured, and through the vocabulary they use, I argue that my interlocutors are actively questioning the validity and acceptability of this dominant narrative of thinking about time and work in the United States that I argue has become a conventional wisdom (Galbraith 1977) in US society. In the same sense, I argue that they are challenging the workings of the overhanging system of neoliberal time discipline (Fleming 2016) that they find themselves in by identifying and shedding light on how systemic and structural issues are in several cases the root cause for how their places of work are structured, and by extension the time challenges they face in their everyday lives.

I will now turn to the topic of socialism, and the vision my interlocutors had for a different social and political structure and society.

Chapter 3- Socialism: A "Countermovement"

"It's getting to a place where people are the primary object
of any form of government. It's not about profits,
it's not about economics,
it's about making sure people have basic rights and dignity".
(Henry)

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed how time constraints pervaded several of my interlocutors' daily lives and how it was intimately tied up with their jobs and financial situations. I argued that through their criticism of capitalism's logic, that is, how the idea of the "free market" is structured, and through the vocabulary they use, they are actively questioning the validity and acceptability of what has become a conventional wisdom in US society. In this chapter, I will explore the issue of socialism, and how my interlocutors relate to it, define it, and conceptualize it.

Socialism is a heated topic in the US, and it becomes especially apparent through how different generations understand it, which I will discuss later in the chapter. How my interlocutors individually conceptualized and defined socialism varied quite a bit, some spoke of it as a way of organizing society that started at the local level in the communities, and some

spoke about it in more systemic terms, but there were some common traits as well. The word, socialism, was openly and non-controversially used by all of them, and they all talked about it as something positive.

Socialism has increased in popularity amongst young people in the US for quite some time, especially within the millennial age-group (see McGreal 2017 and Milkman 2017). Part of a generation that did not grow up with the fright of the Soviet Union, many within the millennial age group have a different way of relating to socialism than their elders. Milkman presents a wealth of survey data to support the argument that millennials' views and attitudes are often generally to the left of those of older generations (Milkman 2017, 6), and that their worldviews have been disproportionately shaped by the intensification of precarity and employment polarization since the 2008 financial crisis (Milkman 2017, 5). Millennials have since the financial crisis been disproportionately affected by it, and many openly reject capitalism and express skepticism towards established political parties and institutions (Milkman 2017, 7). Milkman further points out that:

> Unlike Boomers, who came of age in a period of relatively abundant career opportunities, Millennials face a stagnant labor market with far more limited options (Duke 2016). Those without college education fare worst, but college graduates also find it difficult to access the stable workplace-based jobs that were commonly available to degree-holders in the second half of the twentieth century; instead, many settle for marginal employment as interns, temporary workers, independent contractors, freelancers, and the like (Kalleberg 2011; Katz and Krueger 2016; Standing 2011) (Milkman 2017, 9).

Millennials have also paid a much higher price for their education than earlier generations, as college tuition rates have skyrocketed (Milkman 2017, 9). According to a study performed by the Project on Student Debt (2012), a majority of students who earned a four-year college degree in 2011 borrowed money to be able to finance their studies, and student loan debt is also far higher than among earlier graduates (Project on Student Debt 2012 in Milkman 2017, 9). In addition to precarious employment and debt, it has also become difficult for many millennials to live independently due to soaring housing costs (Milkman 2017, 9), causing many to having to live in their parents' homes (Fry 2016 in Milkman 2017, 9).

In the past couple of decades there has been a wave of social movements arising in resistance to neoliberalism across large parts of the world, including in the United States (see for example Mason 2012). These movements have a varied demographic and do not only

consist of individuals within the millennial age-group, but a common denominator nonetheless for several of these protest movements is what Mason calls 'the graduate with no future', a generation of twenty-somethings whose projected life-arc has switched since the financial crisis of 2008 from an upward curve to a downward one (2012, 66-67):

> Throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, students had been told they were society's new archetype. Their knowledge work would ensure a prosperous future; their passion for personal electronics would keep China's factories in business; and their debt repayments would fuel Wall Street for half a century. But by 2010, students all over the developed world were coming under economic attack, through a combination of fee increases, hikes in the cost of student credit and a jobs downturn that had seen casual work dry up. If the students who led the struggles at Berkeley in the 1960s had been a prosperous, nerdy elite fighting for the rights of African-Americans, their successors were now themselves victims, on an economic front line. (Mason 2012, 38).

All my interlocutors regularly expressed skepticism and at times also disdain towards the current political and economic system, something they saw as too influenced by special interests, creating large disparities in wealth, and permeated by a neoliberal agenda that has for the last two decades proved to be harmful for so many people, including themselves, their families, and people in their local communities. In the current labor market, flexibility has become more important and valuable than knowledge (Sennett 2006 in Mason 2012, 68), and Mason points out that what the global revolts of 2010-11 have shown is "[…] what this workforce looks like when it becomes collectively disillusioned, when it realizes that the whole offer of self-betterment has been withdrawn" (2012, 68).

The anthropology of socialism has mainly been focused around Eastern-Europe and the era of post-socialism that countries belonging to this part of the world find themselves in (see Hann 1993), and the term post-socialism was specifically adopted by native and western anthropologists to describe how the lived realities of people within certain communities had changed after the fall of communist regimes in East-Central Europe (Cervinkova 2012, 156). Anthropologists doing research on socialism have thus mainly focused their attention on looking into social changes happening within former socialist countries in East- and Central-Europe. The United States is not a former socialist country, and so we must approach the issue of socialism in the context of the US in a different manner than most anthropological scholarship traditionally has done. Americans' views of socialism were shaped by the

totalitarian versions in the Communist block and by the Cold war, and the United States also became home to people who had fled communist regimes, which might have shaped public views. As Verdery writes: "From the earliest days of the 'totalitarian' model, Americans' image of 'Communism' was of an autocratic, all-powerful state inexorably imposing its harsh will on its subjects", and this image of a totalitarian autocracy persisted with many politicians and the broader public as late as into the 1980's (1996, 20). In contrast, socialism, as talked about by my interlocutors, was future-oriented and something they wished to realize as a social and political system within modern American society, and not something that they had previously personally experienced unlike those living within former socialist and communist regimes. Capitalism, and the "American Dream", pulling yourself up by the bootstraps and securing your own success without government assistance, "[…] the belief, however realistic or not, in the possibilities of upward mobility in society's ranks" (Duina 2018, 31), is part of the dominant narrative in US society, and has been so for several decades. The laissez-faire approach to the economy of the last couple of decades, the withdrawal of the state, is a departure from the New Deal of Roosevelt in the 1930's and the post-war years, when the social security systems were much more expansive. And so, when looking into socialism in the US, we must bear these factors in mind. For my interlocutors however, this narrative of the free market being the answer to all of their societal ills and the "American Dream" being something anyone can achieve if only they want it hard enough, is seen as a lie. To them, too much unfettered capitalism is the cause of the inequality and despair that so many Americans experience, and they are therefore turning to socialism as an alternative vision for the kind of society they want to live in.

Someone who can be of help when it comes to framing this issue is Karl Polanyi. In *The Great Transformation* (1944), Karl Polanyi writes about the rise of the market economy and the free market in the 19th century, and about attempts to dis-embed the market from social controls in order to create a "self-regulating market" that would operate independently of such social and political influences. Seeing as production is, for Polanyi, interaction of man and nature, he argued that any process to organize production through a self-regulating mechanism of barter and exchange would entail man and nature being brought into this relationship and them being dealt with as commodities through being subjected to playing a supply and demand role (1944, 130). However: "To separate labor from other activities of life and to subject it to the laws of the market was to annihilate all organic forms of existence […]", and replace these forms of existence with an individualistic and atomistic type of organization (Polanyi 1944, 163). Polanyi (1944) argued that placing people as commodities

within the workings of the market would create large social dislocations which would then lead to resistance movements among those being commodified. This attempt to, on the one hand, continuously expand the market through the commodification of labor and people, and on the other hand, check the expansion of the market in definite directions, together forms what Polanyi refers to as the "double movement" (1944, 130). The resistance to commodification would, according to Polanyi, take the form of a countermovement checking the expansion of the market in definite directions, and such a countermovement was more than the defensiveness of a society faced with change, but a "[…] reaction against a dislocation which attacked the fabric of society, and which would have destroyed the very organization of production that the market had called into being" (1944, 130). Such a countermovement would call for the re-embedding of the free market under social and political controls, and for human beings, labor, land and money to no longer be treated as commodities within a self-regulating market (Polanyi 1944). Polanyi's (1944) main point is that the economy is always embedded in society, and that because of this, any attempts to commodify human beings will eventually lead to resistance movements.

Even though Polanyi's insights originated from the context of the nineteenth century, and thus are in its origins based on an earlier era, I argue that his concepts of the "double movement" and the "countermovement" can be relevant in this case as well due to the era of market liberalism that the US and large parts of the world currently find themselves in. Polanyi's (1944) theories of the double movement has been resurrected by several scholars in the last few years to understand the wave of movements resisting and opposing a market expansion (See for example Levien and Paret 2012 and Levien 2007), and I believe that his concept of the countermovement as a call for the market to once again be re-embedded within social and political controls can be of help here as well when it comes to conceptualizing and understanding the movement for political change my interlocutors are engaged in, especially when it comes to their turn to socialism.

First, I will show how some of my interlocutors conceptualized and talked about socialism, what it meant to them personally and how they themselves understood it. Some talked about it in more systemic and ideological terms, and for some it was considered as something that first and foremost started at the local level through the interaction between people. Even though my interlocutors talked about it in different ways, they were still all focused on how they could make socialism work as a system in the everyday lives of ordinary people. In addition to this, several of them had been through experiences in their lives which had made them turn to socialism. I will then move on to address the generational difference

when it comes to how socialism is viewed in the US, something I talked extensively with my interlocutors about. Lastly I will turn to how socialism was for some of them seen as an alternative vision for US society and argue that the movement for socialism for my interlocutors can be approached as a kind of countermovement in Polanyi's terms (1944) where the ultimate goal and the desire is to once again re-embed the market and the economy under social and political controls.

A Matter of Life and Death- Socialism at the Local Level

Melissa is a woman in her late twenties who grew up mainly in the Midwest. She was very involved in the local community during my time there, and in addition to working full-time in the public sector she also taught on the side, was studying to get her graduate degree, and in addition did local activist work. Melissa had a large social network of friends and acquaintances, and she spent a great deal of time and energy on building relationships with people. One Saturday evening in mid-May Melissa and I were at her house having dinner together, and I wanted to ask her some questions about her background and upbringing, in addition to other topics. Melissa told me she had always been very fond of reading as a young child, and that her parents would often find her in the library after school: "All through middle and high school I did a lot of independent learning, and I think as a result I definitely felt really out of place". She said that she attended a high-achieving high school, but that there were not really that many people there who asked "big questions", and it was a calm suburb, so you didn't really rub up against big issues every day like you would in for example New York City:

> Everyone had like a two-car garage you know, a really expansive front lawn, and they took care of gardening like really seriously and stuff like that. And so, I think my parents always wanted me to want that lifestyle, but I think it's really scary when you are a teenager and you read about things and you get angry about the world, and I was just like 'I don't want to find someone and marry so that I can have this life, I want to go and fix all these injustices'.

Melissa said that when she got into college it was a very big deal for her, the school she was accepted to had been her dream school since she was in the sixth grade. It was a private Ivy League University, and she also received financial aid to be able to attend: "My world was blown away", she told me. Her parents were rarely home, and she said that they never really

talked about the things that she read about. During her initial time at college, she wanted to be a poet, and so she spent all her time studying English and reading in the library, until she one day burned out: "I woke up one day when I was like 20 and just thought "what am I doing?". In addition to this, her brother has a developmental disability, and due to her English being stronger than her mother's she had been the liaison to his teachers and found it hard to be away from home because of that. Melissa was undecided concerning what she wanted to do with her life, and at one point she started tutoring refugee families in the neighboring state. This, she said, had really opened her eyes to how unfair the system was for immigrants coming into the country:

> I would go to their apartment and they would give me everything, they'd have like nuts and tea and all of the food that they had in their fridge they would try to give to me just for tutoring their kid, and I would go back to a school that most people paid around 70.000 dollars a year to go to, right? And I was just thinking like 'What the fuck is wrong?'

-she said laughing. She found it paradoxical that this was happening in the same city as her private Ivy League university was in: "This refugee family can't get their basic mental and physical needs met, you know? All of them had been through deep, deep trauma." She then toyed with the idea of doing immigration law to settle asylum cases, but after talking to someone at the law school at her university about how the work was actually mostly paperwork, she decided that she wanted to work with something where she could be more directly and intimately in touch with people.

When I asked Melissa what socialism meant to her, she said that for her it was a matter of life and death: "What I like about socialism and why I say that its life or death is that you are accountable to the people that you have relationships with. And socialism is a model that you actually build relationships with people under". She went on further to explain that:

> Because if you have cooperatives, if you have a healthier understanding of public spaces and what the public is, if you have community-based schools, if you have health care options that aren't managed at a very high health care management level, but you have local clinics, in the way that we, I think, envision one day having, you have relationships with everyone around you, and so you're less likely to say like 'this person doesn't deserve A, B or C'. Because you're forced to take a step back and be like 'this person just doesn't have the money to do A, B or C, and I have a little bit more money'.

For Melissa, socialism was something that started at the local level in the communities, and she also said that what she felt socialism does is that it puts people in closer contact with real individuals and conversations about them:

> You know, all these online crowd funding campaigns are driven through relationships and social networks and sharing, and if you feel compelled emotionally to do something, you begin to care. Just imagine the number of people who like changed their position on gay marriage because of a son, or like a son's friend or a daughter's friend, you know?

When it came to how local she envisioned it being, she said that:

> I think it can be as local as like three people who live next to each other on a street. A lot of what appeals to me about socialism is this idea of sharing communal spaces, democratized everything. As someone who grows vegetables, I think if we taught people to build a lot of things on their own, and slowly excited them from aspects of a market economy, we can make socialism happen on a very small scale. And to me that's just as important of a project as getting someone into office who identifies as a DSA person.

Melissa's statements above ties well into Polanyi's (1944) point about the individualistic organization that a free market society creates. It was precisely such an individualistic thinking and organization that Melissa was challenging. For her, having a healthy understanding of what the public is and should do, would enable people to have a deeper understanding of each other as human beings, and that they then, as a consequence of this, would be less individualistic in their thinking. Thinking about others and not only yourself, and forming close relationships with other people was paramount to Melissa's understanding of socialism.

"It's tangible things more than a system"- Henry

Henry's opinions and thoughts about socialism also started at the local level, and more specifically on how people in and of themselves should always be at the center of things. Socialism was for Henry at the very core of what egalitarianism was all about: "It's getting to a place where people are the primary object of any form of government. It's not about profits, it's not about economics, it's about making sure people have basic rights and dignity. And

when profits are involved I don't think there's a way to do it". The way Henry talked about socialism as egalitarianism ties into how members of the DSA chapter talked about egalitarianism and equality. The way they explained it, egalitarianism was about equality, about everyone having the same rights and opportunities no matter how they looked or what their socio-economic backgrounds were. Being equals was about having the same opportunities, and everyone having their basic needs met. He also said that the big differential issue for him was when people talked about "seizing the means of production":

> A lot of people talk about the means of production, and I'm like 'Yeah, part of it, but what's the goal?' What's the goal of workers that control the means of production?' We shouldn't be defined by work, but by what we do towards each other. That's really what it is, to me it's the embodiment of that, the civil role. […] Workers controlling the means of production is really important, but that's not the end goal. The end goal is to make sure that kids don't go hungry, that people get health care, it's tangible things more than a system.

What I interpreted Henry as putting into the term when he talked about "seizing the means of production" was that it was important for him that the workers themselves were in control of the companies they were working in, and that they would not have to answer to capitalist leaders and executives making ten times the salary the workers themselves were making on the back of their hard work. Henry said that for him he did not really care what socialism looked like, as long as those things were the goal: "I think that's why I kind of like DSA is because we have very different ideas of what it looks like, but the entire point is to get there. To get the power to get us there." What Henry meant by "there", was, as I understood it, to get to a place where everyone would have equal rights and access to things such as food, health care and other basic services that everyone, regardless of social or financial status, for him were entitled to. It was also very important for him that local government was seen as the place to start socialism, through getting people elected in the state government or city councils: "I think it's something that socialists as a whole have kind of forgotten for the past 50 years, that we need to start at the bottom, and work our way up. We have to create a companionship to make a mass movement so that people will know and trust the brand, basically".

Johnny, one of my other main interlocutors, also had more of a local and from the ground up view of how to "start" socialism.

"Instead of wealth having the power, human beings have the power"- Johnny

Johnny grew up in what he described as a poor household, and said that because they were immigrants, he felt like they always had to work a little bit harder than everyone else to fit in: "We almost had to like prove that we were American enough to be here kind of thing". His father passed away not long ago, and his mother is mentally ill and unable to work: "I did grow up quite conservative with my parents. I mean, when we moved to the States my parents got really involved in church, and my immigrant family-, loved watching Fox News" he said laughing. "My mom loved Bill O'Reilly". His dad had been a bit more liberal than his mom, he told me, and towards the end of his life he became more left leaning politically and had ended up being a big Bernie Sanders supporter.

One night when we were having dinner together with Louisa at a local restaurant, he talked about what it was that had attracted him to socialism. He started by telling us that his father had always worked two or three jobs until he retired, and that Johnny himself had also worked two or three jobs since he was in high school, and all throughout college: "There are a lot of things that I've experienced either first hand or second hand that for me point out the reason to have strong social programs for the greater good". One of the things that he pointed out as very important to him was regarding how he felt that immigrants were often treated as "second-class citizens": "I've seen firsthand the racism and xenophobia that's associated with that, and for me it all ties back to economics". For him, he explained, the root cause of xenophobia was the narrative that white people were being denied certain opportunities because of immigrants coming into the country and taking those opportunities away: "And this misses the mark completely. It's not the immigrants taking these opportunities, it's the ruling class, they are the ones taking this from you".

For Johnny, socialism was about not letting the billionaire and millionaire class being concentrated as a power, but putting people and humanity over the core concept of profit:

> Instead of wealth having the power, human beings have the power. The end goal is to have humanity thriving and successful, and in order to do that social programs are a necessity. Access to good education empower the individual, health care is vital, individual civil rights so that people of color are respected as much as people who are white, that they are protected equally under the law, that the LGBTQ society can thrive and be who they are. To me that's what, you know, what democratic socialism is.

Carol, one of my interlocutors from the YDSA chapter, had a bit of a different way of talking about socialism than Melissa, Henry and Johnny.

Carol's Story

One afternoon in early May Carol and I met up at a coffee shop on her campus to talk a little bit about certain topics over a cup of coffee. The coffee shop was a common hangout for students on campus, and so it felt natural to meet there before she left campus for the summer. Carol is a member of her campus's YDSA group, she is in her early twenties, attends a private university, and grew up in the Northeast. She grew up quite privileged[6], attended a private preparatory school, and lived in what she described as a pretty left-leaning town: "But it was also a wealthy enough town that there were a lot of people there who had a lot of money and loved their money, and wanted to keep their money". When she reached about eight grade her dad lost his job, and things changed: "I definitely think I still have a recognizable level of privilege, but I also think that that opened my eyes to what it meant to have money and then to not have money. And I think that that's one of the things that has drawn me to looking into socialism more". We got to talking a bit further, and when I asked Carol what had drawn her to DSA in the first place, she said that there were a number of factors. The triggering moment for her, in addition to the rise of Trump and the likelihood during the election that he was actually going to win, was a conversation she had had with a friend last fall about the climate. Her friend was a volunteer for a small climate organization, and her job was to mobilize people to fight climate change and to get them to understand the gravity of the problem: "I had a conversation with her that I knew I wouldn't recover from or forget, in which I was able to recognize the gravity of the situation and it was all that I could think about for weeks". Carol joined the organization and became an official volunteer for them, but the requirements for what she had to do as a volunteer became too much for her to handle. She did however very much enjoy feeling like she was a part of something bigger than herself, so she looked for something else to channel her energy into that was working toward effective change: "I guess the rise of Bernie, too, and his relative success made me aware that the DSA was a viable alternative, and so I started going to meetings". Carol said that she identified as a democratic socialist, but it was something she said she was still exploring: "But everything I already know about it I agree with".

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[6] Carol used this word herself to describe her own upbringing

When talking about what socialism meant to her, she said that:

> I was reading *The ABCs of Socialism* in *Jacobin Magazine* and one of the things that it pointed out in the section called something like "Don't the rich deserve to keep their money?" was that it's a libertarian fantasy that before taxes people own money privately or they made it as an individual, like they themselves possess that money and have made it, and what this essay was saying is that nobody makes money on their own. If somebody runs a successful firm it's because property laws have allowed them to put their firm in a specific place and immigration and education policies have built up their body of workers, and without all of those state-funded laws and rights, that person could never have made all of the money that they did. And so, socialism, as far as I understand it, has to do with redistributing the wealth that has benefited those who have made a lot of money to put it back into the state and allow other people to benefit from it. And I think that that interconnectedness principle, the idea that no one person can ever possess something or like own their money, the idea that they couldn't possibly have made it by themselves is really important and undermines all of that selfishness and greed that people who identify themselves as capitalists would tend towards.

Carol's point about the perceived autonomy of the free market among those who identify themselves as capitalists, the belief that they have made their money independent of the state, ties into Polanyi's (1944) point about how the economy is always embedded in society, and that there is no such thing as a free market operating independently of the human beings who surround it. This interconnectedness principle between the free market, the state, and society which Polanyi (1944) also points out was crucial to Carol's understanding of socialism, and for her, what socialism does is that it redistributes the wealth that others have made back into society for others who have contributed to it to also benefit from it.

David, like Carol, also had more of a systemic way of talking about socialism than some of the others in the group.

"I don't think there's any other solution to any of our problems"- David

David is a male in his early thirties, who grew up in a Northeastern city with working-class parents[7]. David first attended college in the Midwest where he did his undergraduate degree, before starting his postgraduate degree at a university in a Northeastern city, before then

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[7] David used the term "working-class" himself.

finally transferring to a university in New England to finish his PhD within the social sciences. Both his parents went to college, and they were the first in their families to do so. His father passed away before David entered his teens, where his mom then received social security survival benefits, which is when the government pays the widow or the widower a certain amount of money every month, especially if they have a dependent child. That extra money, he said, allowed him to go to a private high school, something he saw as a privileged thing that most people are not able to do: "But not because my family was wealthy", he said, as is usually the case with people who attend private schools. "Partially just because of government and the social safety net", he continued. "What little social safety net we have", David said through a light scoff.

David has been politically active for more than ten years and was also slightly involved with the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011. One of the people in his life who had had quite an influence on his political awareness, was one of his teachers in middle-school who had been pretty far left on the political spectrum. But, he said, things did not really come together for him before he started college. One of his roommates during his freshman year was already a well-developed socialist, and David said that talking to him really helped him develop his views. Together they started a socialist student organization, and later on they voted to affiliate themselves with the national YDSA group.

When we were having a conversation about socialism, I asked David why he believed that socialism was the solution to the current state of things, and what it was that drew him to it. He started by saying that this was something he felt had changed over the last few years ever since he came to New England to finish his PhD and really got into reading more Marx: "Basically", he said, "I don't think there's any other solution to any of our problems, besides a very fundamental transformation of the basic structures of our society". And that transformation was something he said had to happen in certain ways: "It's got to be a mass movement, centered on the question of the class structure and control over production and distribution, and it has got to take the form of a party that democratically transform the state, and uses the state as an instrument to affect that change". When we talked about what socialism meant to him personally, he based his answer on a talk that he came up with for an article he had written some time ago. He said that socialism can basically refer to two things, when used correctly:

> For one, it refers to a vision of a different kind of society. Like socialist society. We can say socialism to refer to that, in socialism how would we be doing things differently, you know?

That kind of thought experiment, and that serves as like the goal of what we're trying to work towards. And then the other sense is referring to socialism as like a movement that actually exists in the world today, and that should be built stronger. It's the word that people used to use social democracy for, to refer to the social democratic parties, like what is the state of social democracy today? Not referring to any kind of government institution, but the strength of the parties and the trade union movements associated with them, and the level of self-education that was going on in the social democratic organizations. I guess that refers to the socialist movement, you can use the word socialism to describe that movement. So, I think it refers to those two things. One way that it's used very incorrectly is like saying that certain government programs are socialism. I think that's just a totally wrong way to understand that term, but it's one that is very common. Not only used by the far-right which is like who came up with that I think, but often times people on the left and fans of Bernie Sanders will use it that way too. […] Government functions and the government providing public goods and doing things that actually do in some way serve the interest of people in general and the workers specifically, they're all normal functions of a capitalist state. They're not socialism. And so, when we use that word, we should use it in a more precise way.

Even though both David and Carol talked about socialism in a more ideological and systemic way, at least Carol's relationship to the concept was still grounded in her personal experience growing up with a father who lost his job. In the same way as Johnny's experience growing up with a father who was constantly working and then himself working two or three jobs to make it through college, they had both found themselves or people they love in situations of difficulty, which made them see the need for strong social programs in a more immediate way. This brings me to the next section of the chapter, where I will discuss the generational difference in relating to the concept of socialism in the US.

The Generational Difference

As a generation that did not grow up with the fright and legacy of the Soviet Union, my interlocutors had a different way of relating to socialism than many of their elders. I wanted to know if my interlocutors felt like people of older generations, such as for example their parents, were negative towards socialism when my interlocutors talked about it. The same day that I was meeting up with Carol over coffee, I asked her about what her parents thought about her involvement in DSA and YDSA, and if they had any strong opinions about it. She said that:

Yeah, that's another interesting thing. The response that I generally get from adults like my older relatives and my parents is that socialism is ideological and it's something that you believe in and fight for when you're young, but then as soon as I'm out of college and making money I'll realize I want to hang on to that money and that I don't actually want to be a socialist, and right now I'm just in a bubble of a world and it's easy for me to believe in a system I wouldn't actually want to live under.

This attitude was something she was actively trying to challenge, and she said that she found it incredibly reductive and unfair for an older person to discredit her values just because of her age.

Melissa, one of my main interlocutors, said that her parents knew about it, but that they did not really approve of it. Part of the reason was because of their own backgrounds and how they had fled their home country due to a communist regime. However, Melissa said that she saw the idea of statehood to be very context-specific, and that she and her parents had had really good conversations about the issue which had caused her to understand their point of view better:

I found the more I learned about their past and their relationship with the state, I found that a lot of their behaviors and their fears made sense. And I think that's almost always the case when you talk to people like that. Nothing they say is ever out of line once you've realized what their biographies were.

The same night that Louisa, Johnny and I were having dinner, Louisa said that she was still learning about socialism, but that she had initially, while growing up, thought it was a bad thing. Johnny elaborated, and said that they had always been taught by the grown-ups around them growing up to hate the "commies" and that socialism was a bad word: "The ideas of socialism and communism are not taught adequately in the United States", Johnny said. "People are taught that they are the same thing, when they are absolutely not. At all." Louisa agreed and added:

I don't think I ever learned about socialism ever in school, we just learned about how the Soviet Union was terrible. And I had like seven years of American government. You just learned about the Revolutionary War like seven times, that's it. Nothing that happened after that is important, The Industrial War happened. The end.

- she said sarcastically[8].

One incident that occurred while in the field illustrated this generational tension that my interlocutors talked about. One late March evening, the Executive Committee was gathered at Rita and Frederick's house for a meeting. We were sitting on the couch talking before the meeting started when Henry turned to Justine and said: "You need to tell Marte what you told me the other day!" He turned to me and said: "It's really interesting, you'll want to hear this." Justine is in her sixties and is a relatively new member of the Executive Committee of the local chapter. Justine turned to me and started telling me what she and Henry had talked about earlier on. She said that even though she was a member of DSA, she had problems with using the word "comrade". This word was frequently used by the others within the group to address each other, but she herself had problems with it. For her, she explained to me, it connoted associations with the Soviet Union and the Cold War and how people around her had talked about socialism negatively during her upbringing, and she therefore felt very uncomfortable around it. She did not use it herself, and even though she had gotten more used to the word, she still did not like it.

The word "comrade" was used in a relaxed way by my interlocutors, mainly to refer to each other at talks or during meetings. The word was in many ways used quite affectionately, and the everyday use of the word, derived from its old contextual and historical meaning, can serve as an illustration of the generational shift when it comes to how different age-groups in the US relate to socialism.

"It got me less afraid to talk about things"

Several of my interlocutors repeatedly stressed that Bernie Sanders' run for the Democratic Party's presidential candidate nomination in 2016 and his publicly embracing social democratic and socialist policies, opened up a space to talk about those types of policies in a way that it had not been normal or socially acceptable to talk about in the US for a long time. Alice, one of my interlocutors who was in her early thirties and highly educated within the social sciences, told me, as we were meeting up one day, that she was noticing other people being more open to talking about politics than they had been before, and that:

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[8] For more on the debate on the difference between a Socialist and a Communist in the US, see Bump 2015.

If you are already kind of identified as on the radical left and anti-capitalist, or critical of capitalism or something like that, which felt like very fringe opinions to have in the US like a year or two ago, it might have been something you talked about with your friends that shared your viewpoints, or you read about or something. I kind of had all these things inside of me that came out when I did my activism or I read certain books, it's not that I never had a means of expressing them, but I always thought of them as both unpopular views and views that were potentially controversial, and maybe it was better to just not talk about politics with certain friends. I was very aware of the limits of discourse of conversation. But for me it felt like for the first time I was seeing friends of mine who I went to high school with posting about how we should have single-payer healthcare who have never been political before, or who I thought were conservative. And this was happening at the same time as the Bernie campaign or right afterwards.

She went on further to explain that:

It felt like a freedom, not so much to think differently, but to have more open conversations about politics. What it did for me is that I felt much more able to openly identify my politics and identify as having a certain set of political positions publicly on Facebook, or in meetings with colleagues. I both felt more people shared them, but also if they didn't it wasn't like you were some kind of crazy person. It felt difficult and marginal and kind of hard to be open about your beliefs on the left I think when I was younger.

Alice, too, felt Sanders' campaign had changed how the left was positioned and seen when it came to politics: "The idea of like the left taking power and winning campaigns rather than only having a submissive and marginal position seems more like it's actually on the horizon now".

This was also related to her hesitation to initially identify as a socialist, and she wanted to explain her hesitation more thoroughly when I asked her about it:

It's interesting to me because it's recent for me to identify that way, which is not because I didn't at all before, but it has much more to do with what we were just talking about, that like it would have just seemed very strange to call yourself that in a US context. I would probably be more comfortable saying like 'I am an anti-capitalist' than saying 'I am a socialist' like three years ago. […] and it wasn't that I viewed that as so wrong, at all, but it just seemed like what we had of socialism in the US by the time I was an adult, or by the time I was born for that matter, any time after the 1970's, was a very small set of sectarian groups with very small

memberships, and that was my association with it. And then of course you have the association, though I was born near the end of the Soviet Union's existence in 1984, but you also have the association with state socialism. So the idea was like, if you say that you are a socialist it can either mean one of two things or both of these things, either you're the member of a very tiny group that has a few members and like hates every other socialist group, very sectarian and fragmented, or you support a specific socialist regime. So, it didn't really feel like it had much of an aspirational content beyond that. It just felt like a leftover of another period in a way, and so even though I firmly identified as sort of, of a Marxist orientation and had a critique of capitalism, it didn't feel like socialism was a term that I could use to describe my politics because of these associations and how uncommon it was to describe yourself that way.

What Bernie Sanders did, at least for Alice, was open up a space to talk about something that it had not been socially accepted to talk about in the US for as long as she could remember. Through Sanders' public embracement of social democratic and socialist politics, it made her more comfortable identifying herself that way publicly, and his run for the presidential candidate nominee in many ways challenged the dominant discourse on socialism in the US by him opening this space and talking about socialism in public. According to Foucault, "discourses" are not only language and speech but, "[…] practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (1972, 49). Discourses are composed of signs, but they do more than use these signs to designate things, which is why they cannot be reduced to only be about language and speech (Foucault 1972, 49). According to Mills, a useful way of thinking about Foucault's discourse is that it, instead of being something which exists in and of itself and something which can be analyzed in isolation, it produces something else such as an utterance, a concept or an effect in the particular context of which it is used (2004, 15). Foucault was thus concerned with how certain discourses become produced as the dominant discourse within a given context (Foucault 1981 in Mills 2004, 17). This is strongly connected to power, knowledge and truth, and Foucault points out that truth is not something that is outside of power or deprived of it, but something which each society creates within itself based on "[…] the types of discourse it harbours and causes to function as true […]" (Foucault 1979, 45-46)[9]. Foucault's discourse theory could be of relevance here to help us think how the dominant narrative about socialism has traditionally been accepted by large

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[9] This also connects to the discussion on Gramsci's "common sense". For more on this, see Introductory chapter. See also Mills (2004,16) for a discussion of Foucault's "truth".

parts of the American population as an accepted reality and as a type of given truth, and show how the joining of political power and knowledge is what has reinforced and ensured this dominant narrative's viability and continuity. Like Alice said, she was always aware of her political beliefs and strong in her conviction of them, but she was also aware of the limits of discourse of conversation.

Something which Henry said on one occasion also illustrates this point, when he told me that the big thing about Bernie Sanders' campaign for him was that it opened a door: "It made me more comfortable to do things I was less comfortable doing. Like, I knocked on 1200 doors for Bernie during primary season. In 5 states. It got me less afraid to talk about things."

In the next section, I will discuss how socialism was seen by my interlocutors as an alternative vision for what kind of society they wanted to live in.

Socialism as an Alternative Vision

In Mid-February I was invited by my interlocutors to join them at the semi-annual YDSA national conference. The conference was held in a combined church and activism venue in Brooklyn, New York, and the event went on for three days, from Friday- Sunday. I travelled to New York City the day before the conference to visit a friend and met David and Ben at the conference on Friday. We were the only ones who travelled from their YDSA chapter to attend, and David had been to several of these conferences before. It was Ben's first time. On Friday, David and I met at a Dunkin' Donuts around the corner first as he was sitting there working, and we walked together to the venue. When we got inside, we registered and paid the fee for the conference (the event on Friday was free and open to all, so we only paid for the two remaining days), and each of us received a pamphlet with various information inside, such as the DSA's official magazine, an introductory reading list for socialists, and various other things. I did not attend the conference on Sunday, but I attended all day Saturday and Friday. After we had completed our registration, we went inside to find seats. The program on Friday was set in a room called The Great Hall, which was the biggest room in the venue. After scouring the room for familiar faces, we saw Ben who was sitting a bit further back, and we sat down next to him. People were constantly stopping to say hi to David, and it seemed like a lot of people knew who he was. When I asked David if he knew many of the people at the conference, he answered that there were quite a few new faces, and that he probably only

knew about a third of these people. This was a good thing, he said, because that meant that DSA and YDSA had attracted a lot of new members. The room was completely full that night, and David told me he thought there were about 250 people signed up for the conference. After talking among ourselves for a little while, the program for the evening started and there were several speakers on the list.

One of the speakers, an elderly man there representing a nurses' union, said something interesting. He started off by preaching to the crowd that Trump is part of the global right-wing wave that we are seeing around the world right now, and that it is a global phenomenon they are fighting, not just Trump and his administration. He went on to say that neoliberal capitalism is what is to blame for what is happening in the world right now, to which the crowd started snapping their fingers loudly[10]. He also said that they need to fight the individualistic isolation that is feeding the right side, and that people are craving a political alternative to the current situation they are in. People are demanding an alternative vision, he said, and asserted that it was their job to be that alternative vision. This statement became something I wanted to explore further and talk to my interlocutors about.

When I asked Johnny what he thought about it, he agreed with the idea that DSA as an organization needed to be at least one voice in saying that there is an alternative. He explained that:

> It's not this huge utopian 'everyone gets along' thing, I personally don't believe that socialism is perfect, there is no perfect system. There's always gonna be screwed up things, things that are not completely answered. With every system. And anyone who says that a system is perfect and infallible are deluding themselves in my opinion. But, socialism is a better alternative than the capitalist-billionaire based system that we have now.

Johnny also explained that what he believed to be part of the problem was that people had never been educated about what socialism really is, and so many do not know that there is an alternative to capitalism. One of the examples he used was debates and arguments he had had over health care:

> Every single debate and argument I've had about healthcare revolves around the idea of insurance being a necessity. People have this really hard time conceptualizing a world without

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[10] This was something that the attendees at the conference did regularly as a way to indicate agreement with what was being said. For more on this see for example Rosman 2015.

health insurance. No middle man, no mediator between the end user of health care and the provider.

"They just can't grasp the concept", he said. "It's like 'well, what about health insurance? Well, isn't that gonna make health insurance premiums increase?' Johnny imitated people saying. "No!" he continued on saying while laughing, "you're not getting it there! You're not gonna have to pay those! There would be no such thing as health insurance!" he exclaimed while both he and Louisa were laughing in frustration. "They've never even thought about an alternative to the way things are!"

When Alice and I talked about this over coffee, she did agree with the idea and pointed out that:

> It seems possible to win. It seems possible to fight for something and not just be in resistance. I mean, as important as resistance is, but resistance is kind of like a negative action: 'I don't want this or that', or 'I'm gonna have to resist the onslaught of a terrible thing', but all we can do is sort of be an obstacle. But, that's like a negative thing rather than 'what type of society do we want instead?' But, since that seemed so undoable and untenable to, like, actually propose an alternative in the US, under Bush, or even under Obama, early Obama, for other reasons, I think it just, it didn't enter into our consciousness, it was just all about resisting what was bad. And now that all these things have changed, including negative events since the election of Trump, has certainly made things that seemed unlikely seem possible. If someone like that can get elected, well maybe politics is more malleable than we thought it was?

The statements from Johnny and Alice above illustrates how they, through conversations and actions, are actively challenging the general acceptability of a neoliberal political and social system. They are also shedding light on how established and ingrained this common truth is among many Americans, as Johnny's example of the debates about healthcare he has engaged in shows, and also how difficult it was in earlier periods to get people to understand that there are other alternatives. Bernie Sanders' run for the Democratic nomination for president and other political incidents can be seen as having made an alternative order apparent, because, as Alice points out, it now seemed possible for them to fight for something specific and to not just be in resistance. What had previously seemed unlikely, now seemed possible.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to show how some of my interlocutors related to, defined and conceptualized socialism. I have argued that even though some of them, like David and Carol, talked about it more ideologically, and others such as Johnny, Melissa and Henry had a more practical application way of talking about it, almost all of them had experiences in their own lives, either through things that have happened to their loved ones or people within their communities, that made them turn to socialism as the type of societal structure they want to live under, and which made them see the need for these types of policies such a system would bring in a more immediate way. I have also argued that Polanyi's (1944) insights can be of use when trying to understand my interlocutors' turn to socialism as an alternative societal structure. Because, at the same time as they are working towards change in their daily lives, my interlocutors are fighting a system that they see as deeply unfair, and which they feel has left them and so many of the people around them behind. Living under a political and economic system that they view as deeply flawed, they are now turning to socialism as an alternative, and for them a better and more just system to live under. Tired of witnessing the greed, individualization and alienation that a free-market economy brings with it, they are now engaged in a countermovement calling for the free market to once again be re-embedded within social and political controls. The attempt to dis-embed the market in the US from state controls, which has become a standard of US politics and economics, in order to create a self-regulating market which operates independently of such controls, has fueled my interlocutors' political engagement. I also argued that what Bernie Sanders did, for my interlocutors, was open up a space to talk about socialism in a way that challenged the dominant discourse of it, and made it more acceptable to publicly identify yourself that way.

Building further on this, in the following chapter I wish to shed light on the ongoing discussion within the chapter about how they were to practically go about realizing this alternative vision and different political and social system to live under.

Chapter 4- DSA and Engagement in Elections: Gaining Political Influence

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I showed how my interlocutors understood socialism and what it meant to them and argued that in their turn to socialism they can be seen as being engaged in a kind of countermovement in Polanyi's (1944) terms where the ultimate goal and desire is to once again re-embed the market and the economy under social and political controls. In extension of this, I have also showed how, living under a capitalist and neoliberal governing system that they view as deeply flawed, they are now turning to socialism as an alternative vision for the kind of society they want for themselves and those around them.

In this chapter, I will focus on how my interlocutors envisioned themselves practically and concretely going about realizing that alternative vision. This was an ongoing discussion within the chapter, and the main part of that discussion revolved around what they should mainly channel their efforts into both as a chapter, and as a national organization. There was a broad consensus in the chapter that both they, and DSA nationally, should be involved both in doing grassroots- and community-work when working for reforms, as well as participating in elections. Maintaining a balance between these two types of issues seemed essential, but there was at the same time a lot of emphasis on how their involvement in elections was not to interfere with their grassroots work. In addition to this, when it came to the issue regarding DSA's involvement in political processes like elections both nationally and locally, there were varying opinions within the group as to how they were to go about it. The dividing issue was whether or not they were to run candidates for office through the Democratic Party's party structure, or, focus their efforts on building a broader movement with a long-term goal of establishing a third-party. The issue then was how they were to practically go about their countermovement[11].

DSA's official stance on this issue is that they reject an either-or approach to it, in that the focus has to be either solely on establishing a new party or realigning within the Democratic Party (Democratic Socialists of America, "Where We Stand: Building the Next Left", 1998). The difficulty in establishing third-parties in the current two-party political system, due to state legislative control over ballot access, election laws, the absence of

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[11] For a discussion on the countermovement, see Chapter 3.

proportional representation and other issues, makes it so, as stated on the organization's website, that political action for DSA will continue to occur within the Democratic Party primaries (Democratic Socialists of America, "Where We Stand: Building the Next Left", 1998). DSA's official stance is that being involved in elections is only a means for them, and that the end goal is to build a powerful anti-corporate coalition (Democratic Socialists of America, "Where We Stand: Building the Next Left", 1998). As stated on their website, as they believe we are unlikely to see an immediate end to capitalism any time soon, "[…] DSA fights for reforms today that will weaken the power of corporations and increase the power of working people." (Democratic Socialists of America, "About DSA", n.d). DSA is thus involved in both grassroots organizing and elections, through endorsing candidates from the Democratic Party and independents, as well as third-party candidates. They utilize both tactics to work for reforms.

Even though DSA's official statement excludes an either/or approach to the issue due to the current realities of the American political system, it was not necessarily that straight forward for my interlocutors. Something many, if not all of them, kept repeating was that there was no real alternative on the left in American politics. They also said that they thought the Democratic Party had been failing the people it was supposed to represent for a long time. This was for some, part of the reason why they were hesitant about working within the Democratic Party. At the same time, the limitations of what seemed possible was also very clear for my interlocutors. Gaining political influence by focusing their efforts on establishing a third-party was overall not seen as an immediate realistic option due to the difficulties involved.

In contrast to the Occupy Wall Street movement, which did not have a clear and definite organizational structure, DSA is an institutionalized organization with more of a fixed framework as to how to operate. At the same time, the chapter I followed was a start-up group who were, in many ways, just starting to find their footing within a local community where several other activist groups were operating simultaneously as them, and on many of the same issues. In contrast to some of the more established DSA chapters, such as in for example New York City, they, in addition to having to handle an influx of new members and a growing local supporter base, had to decide amongst themselves how they were to go about their activism work. This start-up phase was for the chapter locally oriented, and the main focus of the chapter was on the local level. They especially worked towards reforms that would affect those within state boundaries. One of their campaigns, the fight for a 15-dollar minimum wage, was state-based, as well as their campaign for a universal health care system for the

inhabitants of the state. National issues were talked about in the group, but more as a topic of discussion rather than something they would engage in as a chapter directly and actively. This also applied when it came to endorsing candidates in elections.

Because they were a start-up chapter, and working towards finding their footing, it took some time for the group to start to form a plan for, and agree on, the kind of actions they wanted to initiate within the local community. In the beginning, the group mostly attended protests and similar actions such as for example town hall meetings, but after a while they began planning for, and started to coordinate, more concrete campaigns to initiate on the state-level. The meetings and working groups were in the beginning slightly disorganized, but after a while of getting more used to organizing and getting more of an overview of the kind of issues they wanted to work on, their meetings became more organized and had more of a clear agenda. There was a broad consensus within the chapter that they were to do both grassroots and local organizing work, as well as getting involved in local elections. An example of this is when they had to decide who they were going to endorse out of two candidates running for a seat in the city council. Both candidates, one male and one female, wanted the local DSA chapter's endorsement, and so the group had to choose between them by consensus. Both of the candidates were at the time members of DSA, and even though the man reached out to the chapter first and gave an introduction of himself at one of the meetings, the chapter, in the end, decided to endorse the woman. The reason for this had been because, in addition to her being highly qualified and a strong candidate, she was also a candidate with a minority background.

It should be emphasized that DSA is an organization, and not a political party. In more established and formal political parties, the members' motivation to join is often twofold or multi-motivated, being about both their ideological beliefs and wanting to engage with the political issues they believe in, but also driven by a desire to make one's career. Having been politically active in the Labor Party in Norway for a few years, it is my experience that many of those who join are indeed there to work for the issues they believe in, but often their commitment is just as much driven by their own career-ambitions. A significant proportion of those I know within the party have gone on to hold political positions within the party on different levels. There are always opportunities for positions within the party for those who want it. Within the DSA chapter I followed, I did not get the impression that this was something they were engaged in to make a career out of it. Even though a couple of my interlocutors were considering running for office in the midterm elections in 2018 at the time, I would argue that their engagement and activism was mainly driven out of a commitment to

the issues at hand. In addition to that, as a natural consequence of being a political party, the Labor Party is part of the national power structures and formalized and institutionalized within Norwegian society in a way that DSA, being an organization, is not.

However, the discussion regarding how they were to go about their involvement in elections was an ongoing and consistent discussion within the group, and it is this tension I wish to shed light on in this chapter. The chapter will mainly rely on recordings I made in talks with my interlocutors, as this was something they discussed and talked about frequently amongst themselves, and thus a topic of conversation in our individual talks as well. I will, however, also present interactional data in the chapter in order to provide context and to frame the issue.

I will start with a story from a reading group session hosted at Alice's house to illustrate the discussion surrounding the issue, and to outline some of the mechanisms that have been put in place historically to impede third-parties from establishing themselves, which was one of the main reasons why the particular route of a third-party did not seem like a viable route into politics for many of my interlocutors.

Reading Group Session- The Two-Party System

One evening in early April, Alice, in tandem with some of the others in the group, organized a reading group session at her house to discuss two articles that we were to read beforehand. I arrived with David whom I had attended a YDSA meeting with earlier that same evening. We were quite a large crowd, about 15 people, including David, Alice and Zach, three of my main interlocutors. Everyone brought chairs and stools from the kitchen into the living room where the discussion was taking place. Some light snacks were served, and Alice opened the reading group by welcoming everyone.

The two articles we were discussing that evening was first, an article published in *Jacobin Magazine* by Seth Ackerman (2016) called "A Blueprint for a New Party", and the second, an article published in *Viewpoint Magazine* (2017) called "Making Waves (Part 1)". The articles were related to each other, where the first one by Ackerman (2016) was structured as a proposal regarding how to build a national political organization or party able to gain political influence, and where he also outlined structural mechanisms put in place historically to prevent third-parties from gaining significant political influence in the current

two-party political system in the US. The second article was written as a response to the first article.

Alice told the group that the first article, the one by Ackerman (2016), was an eye-opener for her in many of ways, because she was not fully aware of how suppressive the US electoral system actually was before reading the article, despite her being highly educated within the social sciences. In the article, Ackerman outlines systematic efforts by the major-party leaders and the US legal system between approximately 1890 and 1920 to restrict third-parties access to the electoral system through measures such as increasing the number of signatures needed, and restricting ballot access as the parties' membership numbers grew (2016). Alice said that she found the structural mechanisms outlined in Ackerman's (2016) article to be astonishing, and that she had never been made aware of, or come across, any of this during the entirety of her college studies.

One of the other attendees who I had only briefly met before, followed up with a story of his own to compliment the discussion. It illustrated the attitude he thought a lot of people in the US have towards third-parties. He told us he had been to the DMV (the Department of Motor Vehicles) one day to get something sorted out, and that the person behind the counter had asked him about his political affiliation when filling out some forms. The employee had asked him whether he was a Republican or a Democrat, to which he had replied that he was neither, but that he was affiliated with the Green Party. The person behind the counter had then looked at him and said: 'Oh, so you're unaffiliated', making a note for herself of this. Everyone in the room at Alice's house that night scoffed at the reply he had gotten. For them this was an illustration precisely of the attitude they thought many people in the US have towards third parties.

As we got more into Ackerman's (2016) article, and the discussion had gone on for a while, I asked those at the reading group what they personally felt about how DSA should position itself in relation to getting involved in elections, and whether or not they thought they should work within the Democratic Party structures. The room went pretty quiet, and after a little while of awkward silence, Zach answered. He said that he thought that one of the reasons why people were drawn to DSA was precisely the fact that there is not a very strict organizational dogmatism concerning these issues, and that there is space for different and varying opinions. Zach was the only one in the group who directly answered the question, and the rest of the group seemed not to be sure what to answer.

Engaging in Elections- Which Way to Go?

This issue was something my interlocutors talked extensively about, and as mentioned in the introduction, the impression I got within the chapter was that there was a broad consensus that they were to involve themselves in elections, but that the issue seemed more to be about how they were to go about it. The discussion then was about how they were to go about realizing their alternative vision, and which shape their countermovement was to take[12].

When I talked to some of my interlocutors who belonged to the local campuses YDSA chapter about it, they said that they did not feel like they had properly researched or thought about the issue enough to be able to properly reflect on it. Ben, belonging to the YDSA group, told me that he did not have a strong opinion about the issue, but said that building a third-party on the national level to him seemed difficult. For him, it almost made more sense to push third-party candidates in local elections, and to work within the Democratic Party on the national level. For Carol, it was something she said she needed to think about more. She said that when she had decided to first join YDSA on campus, it was not a conscious choice to not go to other organizations like for example Socialist Alternative. One of the reasons why she did decide to join YDSA was because she had friends who were involved in it, the organization had a presence on campus after the election, and that it was big.

Amongst my interlocutors in the DSA chapter, however, they all seemed to have quite well-formed opinions about the issue. Some had a quite pragmatic and non-dogmatic approach, whilst some felt more hesitant towards working within the Democratic Party. Zach is an example of someone who had a quite pragmatic approach to the issue.

Zach- "The all of the above, strategic approach"

When we met up to talk about it one day over coffee, Zach told me that for him, it was not a question of either/or when it came to DSA being involved in elections: "I'm very non-dogmatic across the board", he said. "I think dogma is really damaging and rigidity in general." It seemed as though Zach had quite a pragmatic approach to a lot of issues that DSA was involved in, and he seemed to be more concerned with the actual immediate actions and on-the-ground type work than spending a lot of time engaging in ideological discussions: "To me", he told me, "it's actually shocking that there's still a debate over whether it's useful to engage with the Democratic Party after the Bernie Sanders campaign." "Not even engage it",

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[12] See Chapter 3 for a discussion on the countermovement.

he said about the debate, "but just to use it as a vehicle. Almost to like, expropriate the party for our own needs." He pointed out that he did agree that people on the left have good reason to be hostile and skeptical towards the Democratic Party, but that there was almost this idea that if you ran someone on a Democratic ballot line, they would in some way become tarnished by it, something he did not agree with:

> For me, the touchstones are like the Nader campaign in 2000 and the Sanders campaign in 2016. […] What Bernie Sanders figured out, is that basically you can run a third-party campaign within the Democratic Party, in the primary. And no one's made a serious argument that he would have been better off running as an independent. He would have gotten nowhere. He would have gotten like 1 percent of the general election vote or something. Instead, he like dominated the national discussion and radicalized millions of young Americans. [13]

Zach was, however, quick to point out that he did not consider himself a Democrat, even though he has voted for a lot of Democrats in elections: "I joined DSA in significant part because I think that leftists need to have independent organizations, because the Democratic Party is not a labor party, and it's not a socialist party". Zach defined himself as someone who wanted to approach the issue in a strategic manner and did not think it had to be an either/or issue. He wanted to take the "all of the above, strategic approach" as he himself put it. Alice, a DSA member and academic, held similar views to Zach's but also stressed that if they were to run socialists in Democratic primaries, their connection to DSA had to be clear.

Alice- A Clear Connection to DSA

Alice was, like Zach, not opposed to running candidates through the Democratic Party. She was fine with running socialists in Democratic primaries, so long as their position, ideology, program and their connection to DSA was clear. "I think it gets trickier at the national level", she said. She continued saying that:

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[13] For readability, I have removed the word "like" from the direct quote in several sentences. The word was frequently used by my interlocutors in everyday speech, but when in writing, it can draw attention away from what is being said.

But, in terms of like state or local, I have no problem using the vehicle of primaries that are already in place to push more left-wing candidates. I don't want to say 'beggars can't be choosers', but there just aren't a lot of options electorally. If you don't care about who's in power, then that's fine, but if you do care about who's in power then you would like someone with not only better politics in those positions, but also with real connections to groups like DSA or other socialist groups. Then, I think it's worth doing what one can to run candidates in primaries.

She then said that, of course, the even better situation which exists in some states, is where there are open primaries, and where you do not have to go through the Democratic Party at all. But, she did not see a problem with doing it this way, and explained that: "I don't think people get tainted by sort of like using a certain structure to advance politics as long as the goal is clear and the commitments are clear".

"I don't give a shit about ideological purity"- Johnny

Johnny had a similar approach to the issue. He was not convinced that it had to be an either/or proposition, and he thought it was ultimately a question about ideological purity:

I don't give a shit about ideological purity. I really don't. I think that the whole issue is that we should not sway from access to good quality education for free as a non-starter, we need to have that. A strong economic message for a livable minimum wage, not necessarily 15 dollars an hour, that's the minimum. Protections for the LGBTQ, protections for women, insurance and equal pay for work, equal protection for people of color and indigenous peoples, those are 5 or 6 core concepts that we don't detract from. Everything else we can work with, you know?

Johnny continued, explaining that he thought DSA was in a unique positon at the current moment because they are not what he believed to be a dogmatic organization like for example Socialist Alternative, but a big-tent organization:

I don't say dogmatic in a negative way, they have every right to be like that, and frankly there needs to be groups that keep other groups in check, but the fact that DSA is a big tent organization and that we accept liberal Democrats, that we accept people who are on the left fringe, and that they're all valid members of DSA, that is one of the most important parts in my opinion of DSA's success - and failure, depending on how things work out.

"You want to be part of a movement that is actually creating material effects impacting people's lives"- Frederick

When I asked Frederick what he thought about DSA being involved in elections, he said that: "When it comes to direct action it's pretty unified, we understand that there are direct actions that need to be taken for a 15-dollar minimum wage, for any number of given issues that we're all on the same page on", but explained further that the issue of elections often ended up being the divisive issue within the organization as a whole and within various chapters. It was a large ongoing discussion.

The words "direct action" was used by several of my interlocutors as an umbrella term to describe all the work they were doing within the communities, all of their grassroots work. It was a key term in their discursive vocabulary and used as a designation of all their actions that did not involve direct engagement in elections or the political process. This varied between everything from participating in protests, to attending town hall meetings, to putting direct pressure on their state elected officials. Frederick explained that:

> I've been a part of other leftist things in the past, and I've hung out in socialist groups in socialist organizations in the past including in college, and for me there is always like a certain degree of frustration, and that was a twofold frustration that probably was related to one another. It was that the conversations that people were having were too abstracted from political reality, and that the viability of what we were trying to bring about just didn't seem even remotely possible.[14]

He further explained that it was huge for him that Bernie Sanders running for the Democratic Party nomination for president had even been possible, and that:

> I like Bernie a lot. For the world we live in, he's an ideal politician for me within the American system of governments. I would love to see an actual socialist movement come about, not just a social democratic movement, but for the world that we live in he's what is the most realistic possibility. And the viability of that just made me feel like we're not just going to be sitting around reading like political tracks, or like talking in abstract terms about these like boring leftist theorists. I can talk about that stuff for a long time, but at a certain point it just gets depressing, and you want to be part of a movement that is actually creating material effects impacting people's lives rather than just being part of some ethereal possibility.

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[14] For readability, I have removed the word "like" from the direct quote in several sentences here as well.

This distinction between a "social democratic movement" and a "socialist movement" was a distinction that some of my interlocutors made. I was told by those who made the distinction that a truly socialist movement would entail the abolishment of capitalism in its totality. No country, they pointed out, has ever realized a truly socialist agenda because of this, and no country is therefore truly socialist. My interlocutors who said this used the Scandinavian countries as examples of social democratic countries who had gotten the closest to realizing socialism, but seeing as they had not abolished capitalism, they were not truly socialist. A true socialist movement would, for them, go even further than social democracy by abolishing the private market in its entirety. Some of my interlocutors made this distinction very clearly, whilst others did not.

Louisa and David

Louisa and David did not have a dogmatic approach to whether or not DSA should be involved in elections, but they seemed to view things a little bit differently than some of the others. When I talked to Louisa about it, she said that she did not think trying to change the Democratic Party would work. For her, the party had proved since the election that they did not understand the struggle the left was engaged in in American politics. She did not think that the politicians within the Democratic Party had shown any self-insight into why they lost the election, and she felt they refused to properly reflect on and realize why it happened. She did, however, say that establishing a third-party in the US would be very difficult due to how the current political system is structured, but that she did not really know how else to create proper and effective change.

For David, the way DSA nationally relates to the issue of electoral politics[15] is something he believed had changed during the years he had been a member. The approach that DSA mainly had when he first joined was to not really focus that much on involvement in elections, but to focus more on concrete struggles for specific reforms, such as for example raising the minimum wage and similar issues, while engaging in elections on the side. This, he said with a laugh, was often just about supporting the least bad candidate in elections, supporting the "lesser evil":

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[15] The term "electoral politics" was used as an umbrella term by my interlocutors to describe all the activity that had to do with the political process and involvement in elections.

I mean, many DSA chapters prioritized backing progressive Democrats running against more corporate-oriented or neoliberal Democrats in the primary races at the state or local level. But, many also were happy to campaign for the bad, corporate neoliberal Democrats when they were running in general elections against much worse Republicans, which is like the definition of lesser evil politics.

An example of this, he explained, was when DSA at the national level endorsed John Kerry in 2004. Not because he was a good candidate at all, David pointed out, but because another Bush presidency would have been much worse. David went on to explain that it was only recently that there had been a lot of pushback against that sort of "lesser evil" mindset in DSA. DSA did for instance not endorse Obama again in 2012 against Romney, and they did not endorse Clinton against Trump in 2016. The term "lesser evil politics", was something I only ever heard David use, but the term sheds light on many of my interlocutors' attitude towards established politicians within the Democratic Party, as well as the American political system in general and the politicians who are a part of it. It can serve as an illustration of their lack of belief in the party's politicians ever being able to represent their interests, and their frustration with the candidates not being progressive enough. It also sheds light on their frustration with feeling they constantly have to settle for candidates that are not representative of their agenda, or of leftism in general. In many ways, it is an expression of general powerlessness and frustration when it comes to the Democratic Party and the US two-party political system.

However, DSA did issue a statement that David saw as a tacit endorsement of Clinton in 2016 where they encouraged everyone to do everything they could to defeat Trump, which in reality meant voting for Clinton. For David, it was important that the organization moved away from a "lesser evil" orientation when it came to elections, and he explained that there were a couple of reasons why he felt this way:

> The organized left is so small that we don't actually have much of an impact on those races, when we actually do organize. So, if we support John Kerry for instance in 2004, that doesn't really affect that race in any way, so we've essentially wasted our time I think, by trying to work on it. It's not like, by abstaining from the race we're really endangering this worse outcome, because we're just not really gonna have a practical effect on it. Except in very unlikely circumstances. And it doesn't help us build our organization, I mean if it did, then there might be a separate case for working on lesser evil races. But, I think it's sort of a drain

on our precious little time and energy and resources to spend it on campaigns like that. Plus, it will do nothing to help grow our movement.

David seemed to use the term "grow" to describe both an increase in membership numbers within DSA, but also as a way of talking about building a larger social movement. His use of the word seemed to revolve mostly around how DSA as an organization, and leftists in general, could best move forward strategically to build a larger movement of like-minded people able to change the national political conversation. David also said that he thought that engaging in "lesser evil politics" could hurt DSA's credibility in the eyes of potential recruits: "Like 'you say that you're trying to pose this like great alternative, yet you're spending your time working for the establishment', for instance. And, like we talked about before, trying to put forward that alternative is one of the main things that we have to be doing." David's opinion about the importance of abstaining from a "lesser evil mentality" regarding elections is why he signed an open letter ahead of the presidential elections in November 2016, issued by mostly younger people in DSA, stating that socialists should not be campaigning for Hillary Clinton. The letter also stated that no one should guilt them for who they were going to individually vote for in the election: "It got a lot of pushback, that letter", he said. "Especially from older folks in DSA who are much more wedded to the lesser evil strategy". David explained that their reaction was tied to a concern regarding how horrible a possible Trump presidency would be, and that those who signed the letter were in a way risking making that happen by abstaining from voting in the election: "But", David said, "I think the perspective of trying to get out of this never-ending cycle of spending our time in lesser evil races is really gaining traction now, especially since the age-range in DSA has moved down substantially".

Even though this was how David positioned himself in relation to the issue, he never opposed the chapter getting involved in local and state elections. He was, after all, involved in the working group on elections, where he both engaged in discussions and was involved, like everyone else, in deciding who they were going to endorse in the local elections. It seemed as though David's hesitation stemmed more from a concern that getting too involved in elections through the Democratic Party structure would make DSA less desirable as an organization for potential new members, and that it could in a way "taint" them and draw attention away from the alternative vision they claimed to want to represent. Also, as illustrated in chapter 3, David was a strong believer of the idea that it would take a fundamental transformation of the US political system in order to create real and effective political change.

Some, like Zach and Johnny, had more of a pragmatic approach towards being involved in elections, and did not really seem to be concerned that DSA would in any way be tainted by working within the Democratic Party as long as they only used it as a means to an end, and as a conduit to gain political influence. With Alice as well, as long as the candidates' connection to DSA was clear, she did not see a problem with using the Democratic Party to gain political influence. Louisa and David however, seemed to be a bit more concerned as to what an association with the Democratic Party would entail, and seemed to be less enthusiastic towards working within the Democratic Party than some of my other interlocutors. Their concern, at least David's, seemed to revolve around not wanting to be co-opted by the Democratic Party, and in extension a concern as regarding how this association could possibly affect new members' view of DSA and the alternative vision they claimed to want to represent. Zach, Johnny and Alice did not seem to share David's concern, and were more certain that DSA had mechanisms put in place that would prevent such a situation from happening, such as withdrawing their support of the candidate.

DSA Versus Socialist Alternative

However, even though there seemed to be slightly varying opinions in the group concerning involvement in elections, there was an even bigger contrast when it came to their DSA chapter, and the local Socialist Alternative (SA) chapter. Socialist Alternative is a national socialist organization, committed to building an independent third-party completely independent of the Democratic or the Republican Party (Socialist Alternative, "ABOUT SA" n.d). They are consequently against working within the Democratic Party, and several of my interlocutors used Socialist Alternative's stance on the elections issue as an example of what they saw as one of the main differences between the local SA chapter and their own DSA chapter.

My interlocutors regularly encountered representatives from the local Socialist Alternative chapter at protests and other community gatherings, and even though representatives from both sides were very polite and respectful towards each other, there seemed to be a slight underlying rivalry going on. Many of my interlocutors said on several occasions that they thought the way Socialist Alternative operated was too dogmatic, and that they alienated more people than they were able to attract to their group. One of them said that one of Socialist Alternative's "initiation processes", consisted of a one-on-one talk with

potential new members where it was made clear what the organization expected of them, and what they could expect in return. He said that new members have to commit large amounts of their time to the organization, and that being a member of Socialist Alternative puts demands on people early on that he thought risked pushing people away[16]. The approach that I was told Socialist Alternative had towards new members, and the way they conducted their work was often used as an example by my interlocutors to illustrate that if they themselves were too militant and dogmatic, they would put off the members they already have, and risk pushing new ones away. Many of them thought that DSA's strength lied precisely in that it did not put strict demands on members, and that everyone could be as involved as they themselves wanted and felt they had the time and capacity for.

This tension between DSA and Socialist Alternative also became apparent at an informal panel debate one Saturday afternoon in mid-May. The panel was set to take place at a library, and David was representing DSA in the panel that day. I arrived quite early and was one of the first people there. When I entered the room where the panel was to take place, the representative from Socialist Alternative had already arrived, and had set up a table with pamphlets for those at the event who wanted more information about their organization. After waiting for a little while, David arrived and sat down to talk to me before he took his place in the front of the room for the panel discussion. The event was set up so that the panelists would first have ten minutes each where they introduced themselves and talked, and the attendees would then be able to ask questions. When it was David's turn to talk, he explained that he identified himself as belonging to the leftist-Marxist side of DSA but pointed out that DSA did not have a strict or dogmatic ideological approach on the organizational level. He explained that DSA was more of a big-tent organization, and that they welcomed people with different views. David spent most of the time talking about Marxist theory, until he was interrupted by the moderator for running overtime. They moved on to the other panelists, and eventually it was the representative from Socialist Alternative's turn to speak. He had more of an energetic and straight-forward way of addressing the crowd and opened his talk by stating that Socialist Alternative is a revolutionary socialist organization. As he continued his talk, he came across as quite strict when it came to Socialist Alternative's ideology, and he brought a more direct and assertive energy to the room than the other panelists.

Socialist Alternative and their organizational approach also came up in various conversations with my interlocutors. The evening where Frederick and I talked about DSA

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[16] This also ties into the discussion on time. For more on this, see Chapter 2.

and their involvement in elections, he told me about a panel discussion between Socialist Alternative and DSA he had seen online where this issue had come up. I watched the panel discussion later that night on Youtube, but Frederick told me about it first, and explained that:

> Socialist Alternative generally has a position that there's no reason to in any way work with- , they are militantly against the Democratic Party and everything they stand for, and they're not willing to even use the Democratic Party as a means of entry into political power. And DSA seems to have a little bit more of a nuanced response to it. For Socialist Alternative, they consider it a complicit response that we're willing to work within the Democratic Party, they say that we're just the left wing of the Democratic Party.

Frederick continued explaining that Bhaskar Sunkara[17], who was representing DSA in the panel, set up a nice response where he said that historically, yes, DSA has in a way more or less been set up as the left-wing of the Democratic Party, and that it is supposed to be an organization that pushes the party to the left. Historically, however, there have been times where DSA has been directly involved with the Democratic Party, but Frederick said that what Sunkara says in the panel, is that what can and needs to change about this now, is that all of the local DSA chapters need to hold their representatives accountable for the decisions they make. If they are forced by American political realities, fundamentally shaped by a two-party system, to work from within the Democratic Party structures, Sunkara explains, i.e., they recognize their contention with the Democratic Party ideologically and use the Democratic Party's ballot, they can gain political influence even though it is through a party that they do not feel any ideological affinity with. But once they get the elected officials into office, they will be held accountable by a local DSA chapter. "For me", Frederick said, "that gives socialists a more viable entry into the political system."

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to show how my interlocutors envisioned themselves practically going about realizing socialism as an alternative vision through their organizational work. The issue was thus also about what shape their countermovement was to take[18]. Their efforts when working for reforms were twofold. There was a broad consensus within the chapter that to be

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[17] Bhaskar Sunkara is a DSA member, and editor of *Jacobin Magazine.*

[18] See Chapter 3 for a discussion on the countermovement.

able to create effective political change they were to do both grassroots work and be involved in elections on the state and local level. However, when it came to the issue of being involved in elections, I have tried to show the discussion amongst my interlocutors as to how they were to go about it. Due to the difficulties of establishing a third-party in the American political two-party system, the only viable route to gain political influence was seen by many of them as pushing or endorsing candidates within the Democratic Party structure. Even though DSA on a national level rejects an either/or approach to the issue, as I have outlined above, I have tried to show that the issue was not necessarily that straight forward for my interlocutors. Some of them did not see a problem with using the Democratic Party's structure as a conduit to gain political influence, but some did. The main concern for those who were hesitant about it was a concern with being associated with the Democratic Party to the degree that it could push potential new members away, or discredit their statement as wanting to work towards an alternative vision for US society by being associated with the neoliberal Democratic Party. In addition to that, their general discontent and at times disdain towards the Democratic Party also played a part in their stance towards this issue.

However, even though some of my interlocutors can be seen as having a slightly more hesitant approach to it than others, I did not get the impression that any of them had an unrealistic approach to the issue of being involved in elections. They were very aware of the limits of the political system they found themselves in. They were always discussing and working towards reforms that would create real and immediate effective change in people's lives, at the same time as their commitment had a long-term horizon. Their navigation through the political system was a dynamic one. At the same time as they are actively challenging the political structures they find themselves in, they are still very much aware of its restrictions. Even though the way the current American political system is structured today, fundamentally shaped by a two-party system, they did not see it as an impossibility that they one day would be able to build a broad enough movement to be able to establish a third-party. It was not an either/or issue. At the same time, with the immediate needs that so many people in their state and local communities had, it was not an option for them to sit on the sidelines and to not be involved in local elections until they had mobilized enough people to establish such a third-party. Their work was driven by a desire to create immediate social change as well as long-term social change, and in order to do that, engaging in local and state elections was seen as necessary. Thus, the countermovement they are engaged in was in the first instance characterized by a high level of pragmatism in regards to the question of being involved in

elections, but at the same time it also contained a long-term horizon for their future engagement with the topic.

In the fifth and final chapter, I wish, through a critical discussion of the use of social media in activism, to illustrate the tension between on-the-ground and online activism in my interlocutors' organizational work.

Chapter 5- Online Versus On-The-Ground Activism: The Role of Social Media in Grassroots-Action

It was a freezing cold Thursday afternoon, and we were standing outside the office building waiting. Republican Paul Ryan was scheduled to make an appearance at a nonprofit career training organization downtown, and so the different grassroots organizations in the local community had mobilized a large crowd to protest his visit, in addition to those who had travelled here for the occasion. A group of us had gathered on the crosswalk, close to the venue itself. A bit further down the street, another group had gathered by some fences, closer to where the police were standing. Big portions of the street were blocked off, and there was police everywhere. The crowd started getting bigger and bigger, and the coordinators of the protest started handing out chants for all of us to shout out as Paul Ryan was approaching the building. "Hey ho, let's go, Paul Ryan has got to go!" the crowd started chanting. They were angry. A state representative who was there grabbed the megaphone and shouted into it: "No matter where he goes", he said, "wherever he takes his radically dangerous Ryan-Trump agenda, the resistance will be there to meet him!". Paul Ryan, representative of Wisconsin, had refused to host a town hall meeting in his district, despite the fact that his constituents had called for one. After chanting along with the crowd for a while, one of the community organizers pulled out her phone. She logged onto her Facebook profile, and started calling someone on FaceTime. They were taking calls from constituents in Wisconsin. As soon as the connection was established, the person on the other line from Wisconsin told her something. They were posing questions they wanted to ask Paul Ryan. The organizer listened, and then shouted their questions for Paul Ryan into the megaphone directed at the office building he was in.

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed how my interlocutors practically went about working towards socialism and in extension what shape their countermovement was to take, and the discussion as to how they were to realize socialism as an alternative vision through their organizational work. I observed that there was a broad consensus within the DSA chapter that they were to do both grassroots-work and involve themselves with elections, but that there was an ongoing discussion as to how they were to proceed with their involvement in elections. This discussion, as I have tried to show, was about whether or not, and to what degree, they were to engage with the Democratic Party. In this chapter, I wish to shed light on the relationship between on-the-ground and online activism in relation to my interlocutors' daily organizational work. Through a critical discussion of the use and role of social media within social movements, I will in this chapter illustrate and discuss the difference between the importance attributed to social media by my interlocutors in relation to their activism work, and the importance they attributed to real on-the-ground actions and face-to-face organizing.

Social media and the Internet were used extensively by my interlocutors, both as individuals uttering their opinions on various platforms, but also as representatives for DSA. Their chapter had a presence both on Facebook and Twitter, and they eventually opened their own account on Instagram as well. The Facebook and Twitter accounts were used actively by the chapter to promote their own actions, national DSA actions, or actions by other chapters of DSA, as well as spreading information about actions or campaigns by other local grassroots- and leftist organizations. In the beginning of my fieldwork, their use of social media as a chapter was not that coordinated and expansive, but as they started to establish more of a formal structure, their use of it increased. In addition to this, my interlocutors were active on social media as individuals as well. They regularly used social media to share news stories, articles, or as a platform to utter their own personal political opinions. Some used it more regularly than others, but they were all active on various social media platforms.

The role of social media and the Internet within contemporary social movements has been extensively explored by anthropologist, sociologists and other scholars. The role of social media has fundamentally changed how social movements today are structured and how they operate, and in his book, *Digital Rebellion: The Birth of the Cyber Left* (2014), anthropologist Todd Wolfson introduces the term "Cyber Left" in order to get a firm hold on the transformations that have come about in contemporary social movements in general due to

technological innovation (2014, 4), but with a focus on the American left (2014, 5). Through his use of the concept "Cyber Left", he argues that "[…] we are on the cusp of a new stage in left-based social movements, enmeshed with the changing nature of new digital technologies and the globalizing economic order" (Wolfson 2014, 4). Wolfson uses the term to historicize this growing and emergent mode of movement building and argues that "[…] the way activists have employed communication tools (from the Internet to cell phones) has shifted spatial and temporal configurations within movements, creating new possibilities for organizational structure, democratic governance, and media strategy" (Wolfson 2014, 4).

The role played by social media and the Internet during the Egyptian uprisings, or the Arab Spring as it is also called, should also be pointed out. Several scholars have written about the importance, and use of, social media during the uprisings which ultimately led to the resignation of autocratic President Hosni Mubarak (see Eaton 2013 and Idle and Nunns 2011). The Egyptian activists use of the Internet and social media played a crucial role in helping to shape the form of the uprising, and it was both used as an alternative press and as an organizing tool in calling for protesters to assemble at Tahrir Square on 25 January 2011, which started the revolution (Idle and Nunns 2011, 19). Without social media, it has been argued, the Arab uprisings would not have happened at the speed and the manner in which they did (Idle and Nunns 2011, 22).

Central to the debate about the use of social media within social movements, is the debated effectiveness of it. This debate is, broadly speaking, divided into those who see these new tools as creating immense new possibilities for contemporary social movements to effect real and lasting political change, and those who view if from a more skeptical viewpoint. Two media scholars who may be considered as representing different sides within this debate is Clay Shirky and Evgeny Morozov[19]. Shirky, labeled "the king of the techno-optimists" by Paolo Gerbaudo (2012, 7), has a positive approach to the role of social media in movement building. He argues that "As more people adopt simple social tools, and as those tools allow increasingly rapid communication, the speed of group action also increases […]" (Shirky 2008, 161). Shirky (2008) is thus of the belief that social tools enabling more rapid communication will automatically lead to an increase in group action and to higher and more efficient activist mobilization. Shirky believes that group forming in the digital age has gone from hard to ridiculously easy, and because of this argues that "[…] we are seeing an explosion of experiments with new groups and new kinds of groups" (2008, 54).

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[19] See also Gerbaudo 2012 for a discussion on Shirky (2008) and Morozov (2011).

Evgeny Morozov (2011), on the other hand, has a more skeptical approach to the usefulness of social media in creating real and effective long-lasting political change. He warns against what he calls "cyber-utopianism", which, according to him, is: "[…] a naïve belief in the emancipatory nature of online communication that rests on a stubborn refusal to acknowledge its downside" (Morozov 2011, xiii). For Morozov (2011), social media activism runs the risk of becoming a shell-activity, something that gives the impression of creating real political and social change, but which in real life has a very limited effect. He argues that one of the problems with the new group formations that engagement on various social media platforms facilitates is that many activists may choose to tackle a problem collectively when tackling it individually would make more strategic sense (Morozov 2011, 192-193), because: "When everyone in the group performs the same mundane tasks, it's impossible to evaluate individual contributions, and people inevitably begin slacking off […]" (Morozov 2011, 193). For Morozov, non-Internet and social media based forms of activism is much more effective, and he argues that: "While it may be true that new forms of activism are emerging, they may be eroding rather than augmenting older, more effective forms of activism and organizing" (Morozov 2011, 203). Even though Morozov writes from the perspective of social media use within autocratic states, some of his more general points regarding the use of social media by activists may be applied more generally to cases such as the one discussed in this thesis. The Cambridge Analytica and Facebook affair that was revealed in 2018 also serves as an illustration of the risks involved with making information about yourself publicly available on social media sites, and how it can be used to serve purposes, in this case as a propaganda effort to interfere with election results, that you as an individual have not agreed to and may have no knowledge of.

Returning to Wolfson, he clarifies that he uses the term "cyber" descriptively to define the certain set of practices that have been brought about by new technologies within the twenty first century, which in turn has enabled new possibilities for the way social movements are organized and go about their work in the current moment (2014, 4). He points out that he does not use it to argue that social life has been singularly transformed by the networking that certain social media sites facilitate or that this social media and cyber shift in how social movements operate is necessarily something positive (Wolfson 2014, 4). As he points out: "In fact, the most successful movements are still driven by face-to-face relationships, trust, analysis, a strong understanding of local concerns, leadership development, and on-the-ground organizing […]" (Wolfson 2014, 4). Through following the two broad stages of social movements, which historically has been The Old Left, such as the Communist Party, and the

New Left, which developed out of the civil rights movement and was shaped by Mao's peasant-based revolution in China, he argues that we are "[…] seeing the outlines of a new phase, the Cyber Left, that has taken the shape of a globalized, digitized, radically democratic network formation" (Wolfson 2014, 5). Even though Wolfson (2014) goes a bit further in his argument and focuses on non-hierarchical internet-based network formations on a global scale, mainly the Indymedia network, his arguments regarding social media and the Internet in leftist movement building can still be made relevant in the case of my interlocutors as well.

Wolfson (2014) also writes, in addition to other movements, about the Occupy Wall Street movement. Even though the movement did not, as several scholars have pointed out (see Crehan 2016 and Wolfson 2014), channel into something more institutionalized, it certainly, along with other social movements around the world, illustrated the power and influence of social media and the Internet in movement-building, coordinating, and activism. It is important to point out, however, that DSA has an organizational history dating back to the 1980's, and that it did not come together as a movement primarily through social media and the Internet, such as for example the Occupy Wall Street movement. Nevertheless, even though my interlocutors are operating and going about their activism in a more institutionalized setting, they are, at the same time, part of a broader movement working towards radical social change. In addition to this, as well as some of them having taken part in the Occupy movement in 2011, their activism and commitment is a reaction to a lot of the same issues as the Occupy Wall Street movement. The main difference is that they are conducting their activism work within a more institutionalized and organizational setting. The use of social media and the Internet was critical to their work as a chapter when sharing information about events and distributing information to their members, as well as a publicity tool for the organization more generally.

Even though my interlocutors regularly used social media in their daily grassroots work, it was almost always used as a supplement to the work they were doing on-the-ground, as illustrated in the story told in the beginning of this chapter. Social media was used mainly to distribute information about meetings or protests, and to post articles and writings that were relevant to their work. Social media was not used as an activism arena in and of itself, and none of my interlocutors really talked about it in that way. My interlocutors put a strong emphasis on the importance of being directly involved in on-the-ground actions.

Historically, the United States has always had a strong civil society with high levels of civic participation (Putnam 2000). Although Putnam (2000) writes from the vantage point of American civic participation in decline, some of his more general points regarding the

manifestation of democratic participation in a US context can still be made relevant in the case of my interlocutors. As he points out: "Today, as 170 years ago, Americans are more likely to be involved in voluntary associations than are citizens of most other nations; only the small nations of northern Europe outrank us as joiners" (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995 and Putnam 1995 in Putnam 2000, 48). He goes on to explain that:

> […] surveys of American communities over the decades have uncovered an impressive organizational vitality at the grassroots level. Many Americans today are actively involved in educational or school service groups like PTAs, recreational groups, work-related groups, such as labor unions and professional organizations, religious groups (in addition to churches), youth groups, service and fraternal clubs, neighborhood or homeowners groups, and other charitable organizations. (Putnam 2000, 48-49).

Putnam points out that, generally speaking, since at least the 1950s, this same arrangement of organizational affiliations has been a characteristic of Americans (Hausknecht 1962 and Babchuk and Booth 1969 in Putnam 2000, 49). Putnam also points out that among Americans, philanthropy and volunteering are roughly twice as common as among citizens of other countries (Ladd 1999 in Putnam 2000, 117), and that it is a long-standing and distinguished tradition in American society to give of one's time and money to help other people (Putnam 2000, 117). Putnam's (2000) general insights on Americans' civic participation and mentality surrounding it can be of use in the case of my interlocutors in the present day as well. Political campaign work in the US builds on this tradition of civic engagement as it is largely built on volunteer work and use of personal leisure time. Another aspect that is central to American political and civic engagement are town hall meetings, as illustrated in the story told in the beginning of this chapter. Town hall meetings were, during my fieldwork, arranged in almost all of the different states, and it was seen as a vital democratic arena for constituents to speak their mind to their elected officials. Putnam's (2000) insights can thus provide us with a tool to help us think about why my interlocutors saw the use of social media the way they did, and to help us frame the issue as to why face-to-face, on-the-ground action was considered the most important element when working to create real and long-lasting political and social change.

In this chapter, I will first illustrate how my interlocutors actively used the various social media platforms, what they thought about its role in building their organization, and their reflections surrounding social media use and movement-building in general. I will

engage with the scholarly discussion of "slacktivism" and how my interlocutors engaged with it, as well as show how certain parts of their grassroots work would not have organized as fast as it did without the use of social media. Through this discussion, I will argue that the use of social media was seen as a vital supplemental tool for their organization's daily operational work, but that in the end, what really mattered to them when working to create lasting political and social change was real, on-the-ground, face to face action. In this way, I argue that for my interlocutors, Wolfson's (2014) point about how some of the most successful movements are still driven by face-to-face interaction and on-the-ground organizing, as well as Morozov's (2011) point about "old forms" of activism, such as on-the-ground direct action and organizationally structured movements being more effective, in many ways coincides with how my interlocutors saw themselves going about creating real and lasting political and social change. Further, I will also argue that Putnam's (2000) insights regarding the long-standing tradition of civic participation in US society can be of help when trying to understand my interlocutors' commitment to, and priority of, on-the-ground, face-to-face actions.

Social Media: A Vital Supplement

When talking about the role of social media in relation to their organizational work, most of my interlocutors said that the use of social media was very important, but that it did not replace actual on-the-ground work. The use of social media platforms was mainly seen as a supplement to their other organizational work. At the same time, they also emphasized the importance of social media, and the crucial role it had played in situations such as for example their increase in membership numbers. David told me on one occasion that DSA had done a survey of new members joining where they had looked at the members who had joined in the 6 months prior to Donald Trump winning the presidential election, and the 6 months after. It showed that it was in the 6 months after the presidential election that most new members had joined, because they had heard about DSA through social media. Prior to that it had been the website, but the website had at this point been a much smaller percentage of the reason why new members had joined. "So", David had said. "When it actually does help build the organization in reality, then it's really great".

At least in the beginning of my fieldwork, my interlocutors were more active on social media than they were in specific actions and campaigns. This was mostly a combination of the fact that they were often pressed for time, as illustrated in chapter 2, and that they were a

start-up chapter, and that it therefore took some time for them to find their footing within the local community, and to get an overview over what kind of campaigns they wanted to initiate. Their social media use was mostly dominated by their use of it as individuals, and not that much as a chapter. As the group started to become more organized, they were more consistent with their social media use, and the main form of communication that the group used to contact members was through sending out e-mails about actions and communicating through an internal communication tool called "Slack". Slack is a website and an app that allows businesses and organizations to communicate through various group chats. The app was used by both the DSA and the YDSA group, and I quickly realized the importance of paying close attention to what happened on the app. When spontaneous actions happened, or when meetings were moved on short notice, Slack was used to inform everyone of this through the different channels. It was also used to distribute or post articles or news stories that someone in the group wanted to share with the others, in addition to there being a channel where they would post memes, or other things that were not directly related to the chapter's organizational work.

The way social media was used by my interlocutors, and the way they talked about it, gave me the impression that it was an important supplement, but that it was not seen as an equally vital part of their activism as actual on-the-ground action. When the topic of using social media came up, it was usually just talked about as a way to advertise for meetings or to chat about issues that could not wait until the next general meeting, or issues concerning the working groups. The group usually met face-to-face when they were going to have discussions, except for a couple of times when meetings between the Executive Committee members was done on Skype. An example of this was at one of the working group meetings for the elections working group when Julian, who was leading the group, asked the rest if they wanted to meet face to face every meeting to discuss things, or if they wanted to do it online. Everyone there expressed that they preferred to meet in person due to it being easier and better to communicate that way. Julian also said at the meeting that he felt the various apps and sites they used to communicate, such as for example Slack, was a bit messy, and that he wanted them to have somewhere more centralized to communicate, such as for example the website.

However, social media was frequently used by the group to mobilize their members to show up for various on-the ground actions and protests. There was usually always a Facebook event established for protests taking place in the local community, such as for example the Women's March and the March for Science, and even though it was not always the DSA

group who formed these Facebook events, they would promote them on their own channels and encourage all their members to attend, in addition to them often having a coordinated presence there as a chapter of the organization. Like Zach pointed out when talking about social media: "It's hard to imagine the Women's March coming together as quickly as it did and being the largest march in American history without it". Thus, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, especially Facebook, were frequently used by the group to mobilize people to attend such events.

Even though the use of social media was mainly seen by my interlocutors as an organizational tool and as a supplement to their grassroots-work, it was still seen as something important to engage with. This can be exemplified by something Johnny said at one of the chapter's general meetings. Johnny was leading this particular meeting, and he wanted to talk to the group about the different working groups they were starting up and inform everyone on how they could get involved. Johnny went over the different working groups and explained that people could be as involved as they wanted to, but that they encouraged everyone to join one of these groups. But, if people did not want to, or did not have the time to join a working group, they would still need people to be active on social media. As Johnny put it: "We need social media warriors too".

Even though they considered social media to be mainly a supplemental tool, my interlocutors were still very much aware of the ongoing debates surrounding the effectiveness of the use of social media when it came to movement building. It is this I wish to shed light on in this next section.

"Slacktivism"- Activism For Slackers

The term "slacktivism", put together by the words "slacker" and "activism", has been used extensively by scholars within the social media and activism debate to describe those who mainly engage in online activism, and who do not, or only do so to a limited degree, engage in real on-the-ground action. There are different ways of explaining the term, but according to Morozov, 'slacktivism' is "[…] where our digital effort make us feel very useful and important but have zero social impact" (2009). He goes on to argue that "When the marginal cost of joining yet another Facebook group are low, we click 'yes' without even blinking, but the truth is that it may distract us from helping the same cause in more productive ways" (Morozov 2009). "Slacktivism" was not really a term I heard my interlocutors use in their everyday speech, but it did come up during our conversations when talking about social

media, and the term did have pejorative connotations. Morozov argues that one of the problems with political activism aided by social media is that much of it happens to impress one's friends, and that it has nothing to do with one's commitment to ideas and politics in general (2011, 186). He argues further that this is not a problem that the Internet itself has caused, but that: "For many people, impressing one's peers by pursuing highly ambitious causes like saving the Earth and ending another genocide may have been the key reason for joining various student clubs in college, but this time one can proudly wear the proof of one's membership in public" (Morozov 2011, 186). For scholars such as Morozov (2011), political activism conducted mainly through social networking sites becomes a type of impression management for those who use it and is not driven by a genuine desire to create significant social and political change.

When Melissa and I were talking about the use of social media, she said that she did feel in a lot of ways that she was able to present herself as who she was in real life on the various social media platforms. She told me that she had been told by people that she knew that how she presented herself on the various platforms was very much how they experienced her in real life. Melissa was the one, out of all my interlocutors, who was the most active on the various social media platforms. She regularly posted on Facebook and Instagram, and also posted so-called "stories" on Instagram regularly where her followers were able to follow her through her daily activities. Melissa works in the public sector, and so she used the various platforms to give friends and those who were following her an insight into her daily work life, as well as other aspects of her life as well. She tried to be honest about her line of profession, she told me, and she also said that as a result of her posting about her job online, she had been told by people she knew that they had been inspired by her to get into the same line of work themselves: "But", she pointed out, "I also don't pretend like it's an easy job online. Like, I don't pretend that I'm like this happy person all the time, like, I am really angry, and I get really stressed out, and like, the Internet is like a good place to find people who are also feeling that way". Melissa also said, based on her own experiences doing activist organizing for several years, that a lot of the people who were active online and who often run big groups do not have the charisma in real life to do any of that work. She used the example of a good friend of hers who is a big organizer online and explained that his internet persona was not one that carried out in real life: "It's not who he actually is, and he wouldn't be able to fake it", she said. She further explained that:

And it's one of those things where I thank God for Twitter, thank God that people find DSA via his amazing Twitter, because he's very good at it! And, I think there's a lot of people on the left who are really socially awkward people, who are insanely weird, and the Internet has become this like amazing home for them where they can do organizing work while also just being bonkers weird! And, so I think in a weird way it like lowers the sub consciousness that people have, right, that it's like: 'I can be as weird as I want, or not', and somehow this is organizing! And, I think that's great! And, I think that often times, you know, even if fifteen percent of those people can find themselves into an actual protest line, or donating to a cause, then we're good. Like, I'm not gonna say that everyone who logs on and makes a Twitter handle with a rose next to it, you know, is someone that I wanna hang out with. By no means, I just think that my people are always gonna be the people who are doing the work on the ground. But, I love the Internet speak, I love social media.

Presenting herself, and giving those who followed her on social media an insight into her daily life was important to Melissa both personally and professionally, and in some ways it did become an outlet for her to give off a certain impression of herself. At the same time, her presence on social media was not something that for her could replace the work she was doing on-the-ground.

Melissa also pointed out that she believed the expansive use of social media in leftist movement building made people desensitized to the need for actual on-the-ground action, for example the sheer volume of Facebook events being distributed may overwhelm people and make them shut down altogether: "I think there's just like too much of things happening, and so I wonder if there are ways around that", she said.

When Henry and I talked about it, he pointed out that what he thought was important when it came to activist's use of social media, was their intent while using it. The effectiveness of it, for him, depended on whether they were actually trying to inspire people to act, or if they just wanted to create an impression that they were doing something. Those people who were just trying to create an impression of doing something were the "armchair activist" type of people, as he called them, or so-called "slacktivists". He did point out that he did not feel like there were a lot of those types in their DSA chapter, but that there might be some of them. Henry explained that:

I think that if you're posting on social media, just expressing opinion, its good. That's a good thing. Like, if you're pretending to be doing something or not, that's one thing, but if you're just expressing opinion about something and someone accuses me of being an armchair

activist, then that's dumb. Like, I don't have enough time to do a lot of things. I still talk about it. Like, I really, really care about immigration rights and stuff like that. I talk about it, but I'm not doing a damn thing about it. But, that's because I'm doing a lot of other things. […] Like, if someone accused me of being an armchair activist when it comes to immigration politics, so be it.[20]

"But, like", he continued, "if someone was to call me that, then I'd be like 'what's the point?' What is the point of yelling at someone and calling them an armchair activist?"

Zach, on the other hand, told me on a couple of occasions that he was frustrated with the difficulty he himself had experienced when trying to get people in the group to show up for actual on-the-ground actions. On one occasion, when I was accompanying one of the working groups lobbying for a bill at a state house, Zach had seemed a bit disappointed with the turnout for the day. He said that, even though the lobbying day had been coordinated by the working group in question, it was still open for everyone in the DSA chapter to come, not just those belonging to the working group. The working group was a coalition formed by several organizations in the local community, and so DSA was only part of the group. There were three people from DSA who had attended that day. Zach said that he felt that this was a problem sometimes, to actually get people to show up for actions. An illustration of this was the weekend before the lobbying day, when he had tried to arrange a canvassing action for a bill that was scheduled to come up for a vote in the city council soon, and the only ones who had showed up for the canvassing was Zach and one of the other members. It had been a disaster, Zack said. He explained that for him it was important that they, as a chapter, were able to come up with a strategy to get people to show up for on-the-ground actions, so that situations such as these could be avoided. The reason why he thought people, in his experience, did not show up, was partly because they were a start-up chapter, and thus that those in the group did not have very much organizing experience.

When Zach and I were having coffee one afternoon, he referred back to the talk we had that day when got into the subject of social media. He said that yes, he did have frustrations with people who were politically involved online, but not on-the-ground, but also pointed out that he did not blame social media for that. Those people, he said, were probably people who prior to social media would take no action at all, online or off, and explained that for him: "The issue is more that we need to use both tools, offline and on, to mobilize people

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[20] This also ties into the discussion on time. For more on this, see Chapter 2.

to take collective action. For me, that's the challenge, that's just like a challenge that exists independently of social media. I don't think social media is like making people slacktivists". However, Zach did also point out that he had to work really hard to get people to show up for the second canvassing that he had been trying to get as many in the group as possible to show up for:

> We had a great turnout, but I shouldn't have to work that hard to get eight people. Anything we're gonna do in the future, getting people elected to office, or getting legislation passed, or whatever, is gonna require the capacity to get people into the state legislature, knocking on doors, like that's where our power is. And, if we don't have that power, then we don't have power. So, I'd like us to develop some systems to turn people out.

Johnny and Louisa also pointed out to me on another occasion that one of the problems with social media was that often, when people posted things on the various social media platforms, it ran the risk of becoming an echo chamber in that you only posted things on sites or profiles where people would agree with you. They pointed out that this happened a lot during the presidential election in 2016, where one would just unfollow or unfriend those who did not agree with you, and so you were not forced to engage with their opinions: "You can cherry pick what you see, and that sort of promotes this like false idea that everyone agrees with you", Louisa said. "I think it's an important tool to foster dialogue, foster discourse", Johnny said about social media. "If people use it that way", he pointed out.

What Zach said about getting out and knocking on people's doors, and generally showing up for actions, illustrates the general attitude most of my interlocutors had when it came to how they went about their organization's daily operational work, which is what I will discuss in the following section.

"This is what democracy looks like!"- On-The-Ground Actions: The Most Important Element in Creating Long-Lasting Change

Even though my interlocutors did use social media, and saw it as something important to engage with, it was always seen as secondary to physically showing up for actions and having a coordinated presence at events. My interlocutors attended everything from town hall meetings and canvassing actions to protests and press conferences and put a strong emphasis on the importance of being out amongst other people within the communities to make

themselves visible as an organization. It was also very important for them to interact with the other members of the chapter in person, and to get to know each other. After each monthly general meeting, those of my interlocutors who were on the Executive Committee made an effort to get everyone to come to one of the bars in the area for a drink and conversation. This was very important to them, and even though it was mostly those on the Executive Committee who usually joined, they never stopped trying to get the rest of the chapter members to join as well. Alice pointed out on one occasion that they should agree ahead of the meeting where they were going to go for drinks so that there would not be any confusion after the meeting as to where they were going. The other members often ended up leaving directly after the meeting whilst the Executive Committee were trying to decide where they were going to go for drinks. This was exactly what Alice and the rest of the Executive Committee wanted to avoid. After Alice pointed this out, they became more coordinated in organizing it, and they started writing the time and place for the drinks in the information e-mail they sent out to members in advance of the meeting. Melissa was also concerned with them having brochures and actual pens and paper at the meeting for people to take notes, so that not everything would be Internet and technology based. This was important for the older members who did not use computers and electronics that much in their everyday lives, she pointed out, but also for those who did not want to use technology.

In order to illustrate the importance my interlocutors attributed to grassroots actions, I wish to draw out two specific events they participated in which serves as a good illustration of this. One of them, a town hall meeting, was one of the largest actions that almost all of my main interlocutors attended. The meeting was arranged at a high school and set up so that people within the community could confront their state elected officials on whatever issues they wanted, and for the state elected officials to hear the concerns of their constituents. The town hall meeting was arranged at the height of the investigation into links between President Donald Trump and President Vladimir Putin of Russia and Russia's suspected involvement in the US general election in 2016, and so tensions were high at the time. When we got to the venue, we stood in line outside the high school with a large crowd of protesters from other organizations, as well as with other people from the local community. Some of my interlocutors had worn DSA buttons and other props for the occasion. As we were standing outside waiting, one of the volunteers from one of the other local grassroots organizations started initiating chants for the crowd to shout out. Johnny has a quite loud and strong voice, and really put effort into shouting out loud with the crowd, and after a while he was asked by the volunteer if he would lead the chants, to which he agreed. After standing outside for a

while waiting, we were let into the high school and into a great hall where the meeting was to take place. The state representatives were positioned on stage in the front, and the sides of the room were lined with Secret Service agents in both civilian clothes and suits. There were four microphones set up in different parts of the hall for people to form lines to ask questions. I was there with Johnny, Rita, Louisa, Frederick, David and Henry. We all found seats and sat down, and after a little while of waiting for people to take their seats, the meeting started. The hall was completely full, and there were people standing all the way in the back as well who had not been able to get seats. All the representatives started off by each giving a little speech. I quickly noticed which of the representatives were more popular than others as the crowd adjusted their applause accordingly when they were talking on stage. The crowd was polite and respectful, but at the same time very confrontational towards the representatives. As soon as they said something that the crowd did not agree with, they would boo them and shout out critical comments. After a while of talking, the state representatives opened for questions from the crowd. A line was formed behind each of the microphones, and the lines were long. Both Johnny and Henry got in line to ask questions, and we were all interested to see whether or not they would get the chance to ask their questions. There were clear directions for those asking questions, only one question was permitted per person. This was to ensure that as many of the attendees as possible would have the opportunity to ask questions. One woman tried asking a follow-up question when it was her turn, to which the crowd loudly booed her until her microphone was shut off. This incident serves as an illustration of the kind of approach my interlocutors and several other grassroots activists in the area had towards political engagement. In their view, everyone should have the opportunity to state their opinion and speak their mind. And so, when the woman in question tried asking a second question that day and thus taking time away from one of the others in line, she was met with strong social sanctions from the rest of the attendees. After waiting for a while, it was finally Johnny's turn. As he spoke into the microphone, he introduced himself as a member of DSA, to which the crowd cheered. Johnny's question was about the fifteen dollar minimum-wage, and he wanted to know which specific steps the representatives were going to take to actively work towards realizing it on the state-level. Johnny's question generated cheer from the crowd, and especially from his fellow DSA'ers. The representatives were quite vague when trying to answer Johnny's question, and did not really answer it at all. In the time after the town hall meeting, my interlocutors talked a lot about how glad they were that Johnny was able to get a question asked at all with all the people there. The fact that Johnny had been able to put such an important issue for them on the agenda that day, and to introduce himself as

part of DSA while doing so, was seen as a win by my interlocutors. This serves as an illustration of the type of direct effect that my interlocutors believed showing up for actions and being out amongst people had. Being visible and active within the communities was the best way to get people to join their cause and organization. And, for them, this type of effect and involvement was not something that could be achieved in the same way online through engagement on various social media platforms.

The other "direct action event"[21] I wish to shed light on in this chapter was a protest and press conference that was arranged at a state house in the region. One of the larger grassroots organizations in the area had organized a press conference to hand over a petition claiming that one of the bills that had recently been introduced into the state legislature concerning illegal immigrants, needed to be dropped. A group from the DSA chapter were there that day, including David and Johnny. I arrived first, and after waiting for a little while, and helping to make signs, Johnny and David arrived. We had offered our help previously via e-mail to the other volunteers if they needed help setting up, and so I ended up helping out by standing by the steps going up to the state assembly with a sheet for people to sign in on so that the organization hosting the press conference would have an overview over how many people were there that day. Johnny, as well as Karen, one of my interlocutors from the YDSA group, were standing by the entrance on the other side of the building trying to get people to sign in as they were arriving. David was wearing a shirt with DSA's logo on it, and he was standing next to me as I was getting people to sign in. There were a couple of newscasters there, as well as a live Facebook chat which was set up by the organization who had arranged the protest/press conference. As part of the press conference, they had set up speakers with immigrant backgrounds telling their stories about how they personally experienced living in America as immigrants, or for some, being American citizens with an immigrant background. When the speakers were finished, we started walking in unison up to the House Floor to deliver the petition together before the state assembly session was set to start. Large parts of the crowd were carrying signs with writings on them showing solidarity with immigrants, and everyone was chanting slogans as we were walking up towards the assembly. As we were walking up, Johnny suddenly took charge of the chants, and started chanting slogans for the crowd to repeat. Johnny got the crowd very excited, and their chants only got louder and louder as we were approaching the House Floor. We all kept chanting as we were walking in.

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[21] The term "direct action" was used as an umbrella term by my interlocutors to describe all of their grassroots work, such as protests and actions that did not involve engagement in elections.

During this incident, by me taking active part in the chanting, I in many ways felt like I crossed the line as a participant-observer, and became a fellow activist instead. I spent a lot of time reflecting on this afterwards, and realized that I would have to be even more reflexive and conscious of my role within the group at future political events. Most of the politicians and the rest of the staff were standing awkwardly in the back of the room, clearly flustered and stressed. The chants went on for quite some time after we had entered the room, and Johnny started shouting: "Show me what democracy looks like!" to which the crowd replied: "This is what democracy looks like!" This chant, I noticed, was often used during protests and similar on-the-ground actions. Johnny seemed to me to really be in his element when chanting alongside the crowd. As the chants died down, several of the protesters cornered politicians in the back of the room and confronted them on the bill they were about to pass. Some of them handled the situation quite well and tried answering the protesters as adequately as possible, but one of them, who caught my attention as he was clearly getting frustrated with being confronted in this manner, was about to walk away. After standing and listening for a while, he eventually said that he was not going to stand there and listen anymore, to which the crowd shouted "Shame! Shame! Shame!" after him as he was walking away. Shortly after this, the session was about to start, and so we were forced to leave. Johnny led the chants on the way out as well.

These types of events described above was something that my interlocutors were always working towards arranging, or being a part of. Being active participants in those kinds of actions was seen as crucial for them in order to build their organization, and to realize actual and real social and political change. Indeed, in the time after the protest, two Democrats in the state legislature who had initially voted to pass the bill, had withdrawn their support of it. My interlocutors were very strong in their conviction that this would not have happened had it not been for the pressure the different groups had all put on the representatives that day. They saw face-to-face action as absolutely crucial to effect the kind of political and social change they are working towards. Putnam (2000) can help us think about this when he writes that:

> A politics without face-to-face socializing and organizing might take the form of a Perot-style electronic town hall, a kind of plebiscitary democracy. Many opinions would be heard, but only as a muddle of disembodied voices, neither engaging with one another nor offering much guidance to decision makers. TV-based politics is to political action as watching ER is to saving someone in distress. Just as one cannot restart a heart with one's remote control, one

cannot jump-start republican citizenship without direct, face-to-face participation. Citizenship is not a spectator sport. (Putnam 2000, 341).

Putnam's (2000) point here about citizenship not being a spectator sport can help us think about why my interlocutors were so strongly convinced that on-the-ground actions was the only way to create real change. For them, the most important thing when doing activism was direct face-to-face interaction and participation, as illustrated in the centrality of town hall meetings in American political and civic life and engagement. Based on my interlocutors' emphasis on on-the-ground, face-to-face action versus the use of social media when going about their activism work, perhaps this can in part be due to the democratic traditions they are a part of which Putnam (2000) writes about, a long-lasting tradition within US society of civic participation and volunteerism. For my interlocutors, on-the-ground actions is how they enact their democratic rights, how they enact a sense of democracy, by being out there and physically present to work towards real and significant change. One of the most used slogans in the various protests my interlocutors attended, as I mentioned above, was "Show me what democracy looks like!", to which the crowd always replied: "This is what democracy looks like!" The chant illustrates this point well. The type of change that my interlocutors are working towards realizing can only be accomplished through face-to-face action. Social media is vital as a supplemental tool, but not as a legitimate activism arena in and of itself, independent of on-the-ground action. A long-standing tradition in US society of volunteering and civic participation helps us understand my interlocutors' strong commitment to, and emphasis on, on-the-ground action when working towards realizing social change.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the difference in the importance my interlocutors attributed to engagement on social media platforms versus engagement in on-the-ground actions in their work to create political and social change. Through a critical discussion of the use of social media within social movements, I have argued that the most important thing for my interlocutors when going about their activism work was real on-the-ground action and face-to-face participation. Certain vital parts of their organization's daily operational work, such as being around fellow DSA members and being out in the communities and talking to people, could not be realized through the use of social media. However, in certain contexts, such as

when it came to mobilizing people and members to attend protests and events and distributing information, social media was seen a crucial tool.

The debate surrounding the use of social media in social movements is useful in this context because it places my interlocutors' use of, and engagement with, social media in a larger scholarly discussion. Even though there is no doubt that the use of social media by activists around the world has created new possibilities for organizational structure and strategy as Wolfson (2014) points out, it also has its limitations as Morozov (2011) points out, by activism on social media running the risk of becoming a shell activity, and taking focus and attention away from sorely needed on-the-ground and face-to-face action. In order to understand my interlocutors' emphasis on direct and on-the-ground action, I have drawn on Putnam's (2000) insights regarding a long-standing tradition within US society of high levels of civic participation and volunteering. I have argued that the reason why my interlocutors put a strong emphasis on on-the-ground actions versus activism on social media and saw it as much more effective in creating real and long-lasting change, may be because they are part of a long-standing and strong US tradition of civic participation, of physically being out and visible within the communities, and committing their time and money to helping other people.

Conclusion- Establishing a New "Common Sense"

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that through their activism and organizational work my interlocutors are working towards establishing a new common sense in Gramsci's terms (see Crehan 2016), that is, a new "self-evident truth" in people's minds concerning how society should be organized that directly challenges the current dominant, neoliberal narrative. They are in many ways fighting an uphill battle as they are part of a small organization with few members, seen in comparison with how large the US population is. At the same time, DSA is growing every day, and they are gaining more and more members and opening new chapters all across the country at an impressive rate. I was constantly amazed by my interlocutors' optimism and will to fight, and their genuine belief and faith in the effectiveness of the activism and organizational work they were doing. Not only are they leftists trying to challenge the neoliberal narrative, but also self-proclaimed socialists. Because of the way socialism is viewed in US mainstream society, these young political activists are in many ways fighting a double battle. Not only are they engaged in a movement trying to convince people that neoliberalism and the free market does more damage than good, they are also

trying to convince Americans, many of whom see state interference into their lives as a breach of their freedom and individuality, to have faith and trust in an intervening, strong, and encompassing state.

I began the thesis with a brief history of the American left so as to outline the context and political landscape my interlocutors are operating within. I also presented the region of New England and its history, where I highlighted certain characteristic traits of the region, and introduced the organization I followed and its history and structure.

In this thesis, I have argued that one of the arenas where the effects of capitalism is experienced the strongest and most immediate by my interlocutors is through the lack of time (chapter 2). Members of the DSA chapter were always stretched for time due to having to work large parts of the day, and often nights as well, and they were never able to get everything they wanted and needed done. By applying the concept of clock-time as an analytical category onto the time restraints that several of my interlocutors experienced in their daily lives, I have, through Shippen's (2014) insights argued that time can function as a useful tool to show how capitalism intervenes in people's lives in ways that are still under- and unexplored. I have argued that constant time pressure is a characteristic trait of a capitalist society and job market, and that it is precisely this conventional wisdom in the US as to how much time one is expected to put into ones job and how much it is expected of people to invest of themselves and their lives into their jobs that my interlocutors are actively challenging the general acceptance of through their words and actions. I also argued that the time constraints they faced in their daily lives affected their ability to engage politically, and that they are challenging the system of neoliberal time discipline they find themselves in.

I have also explored the interest in socialism among the young leftists I studied in New England. Even though my interlocutors had different ways of talking about socialism, as illustrated in chapter 3, they were still all working towards how they could make it work as a system in the everyday lives of ordinary people. I argued that the reason for their turn to socialism was due to them being tired of witnessing the alienation and individualization that capitalism, in their experience, brings with it. Free-market capitalism also creates large wealth and income inequality, going against my interlocutors' belief in equal opportunities for all despite ones appearance and social and economic status. Their turn to socialism also directly connects to the discussion about time (chapter 2), as my interlocutors repeatedly said that they wanted more time to spend on themselves, their loved ones, and on their organizational work, and felt that living under a socialist societal structure would make it possible for them to spend more time on these things as they would not have to work as long hours as they

currently did. My interlocutors are calling for the free market to once again be regulated under social and political controls, which is why I have also argued that Polanyi's (1944) theories on the countermovement can be analytically useful when trying to understand the members of the DSA chapter's turn to socialism. Turning people into commodities in the way that the free market does, will lead to resistance movements calling for the market to be re-embedded within social and political controls (Polanyi 1944).

My interlocutors are calling for an alternative vision as to how society should be structured, a model for a society that should be implemented in full (see chapter 3), but there was an ongoing tension within the group as to how they were to practically go about realizing this alternative vision, and what shape their countermovement was to take (chapter 4). This tension is reflected in the recurrent discussion among the members of the DSA chapter concerning how to be involved in elections. The main line of contention was whether to work through the Democratic Party structures or focus their efforts on building a movement large enough to establish a third-party. Due to the difficulties involved in establishing a third-party in the current two-party American political system as outlined in chapter 4, most of my interlocutors did not see a third-party track as a realistic option to gain political influence. Thus, I argued that the countermovement they are engaged in was in the first instance characterized by a high level of pragmatism in regards to the question of being involved in elections, but at the same time it also contained a long-term horizon for their future engagement with the issue.

In the last and final chapter, I focused on social media's role in my interlocutors' political activism work and also their civic engagement. Despite the fact that most members of the DSA chapter experienced large time constraints in their daily lives as illustrated in chapter 2, they were still very active in showing up for actions, protests, and participating in other organizational work as it was of high priority to them. Despite the fact that they regularly used social media platforms to distribute information to the chapter members, or to utter their political opinions, their main focus was always physically showing up for various actions and protests, and being visible within the communities. Social media was seen as an important supplemental tool, but not as a political activism arena in and of itself. I have thus argued that their commitment to showing up for actions, despite time-constraints and leading busy lives, ties back to a strong tradition of American civic engagement as Putnam's (2000) insights illustrates. Despite their use of social media, what really mattered for them when working to create long-lasting political and social change was real on-the-ground, face-to-face action.

I have throughout the thesis tried to show the complexity of the situation my interlocutors are finding themselves in. Their organizational work and political commitment, founded on a strong tradition of civic engagement in the US, all ties back to a genuine desire for a different social order which they believe will enable them and all other Americans to have more time to spend on their families, friends and organizational work, and thus as an extension of this an expectation that this will lead to a higher quality of life. At the same time, they are fighting against a stigma attached to the concept of socialism that in many ways inhibits this work. In the midst of this, they also have to scrapple with their contention with the Democratic Party and the dilemma of how to engage with it. Their navigation through the current political landscape in the US is a dynamic and pragmatic one, and in order to gain significant political influence in the US with all the challenges they face in the form of stigmas, American perceptions of how things "naturally" should be, and the electoral system, to them it also has to be. At the same time, they also have a long-term horizon for the activism work they are engaged in. The ultimate end goal is still to build a movement large enough to form an alternative societal structure, both as a challenge to the two-party political system, but also as a way of making people's everyday lives better. I have thus argued that my interlocutors are working towards establishing a new "common sense" in Gramsci's terms (see Crehan 2016) as to how American society should be structured that directly challenges the current neoliberal and capitalist narrative which has dominated within US society for such a long time.

To the millennials of New England who are actively engaged in leftist politics through the local DSA chapter, a move towards socialist and leftist political change in the US is entirely dependent on the continuing work and engagement of their chapter in co-operation with the larger leftist community. At the same time, for them, it is also dependent on the rest of the general population opening their minds and actively challenging and questioning a current societal structure which many of them see as something natural and given, as a type of common sense truth. They also have to be willing to let go of old stigmas attached to socialism. For the members of the DSA chapter, their continuing focus on putting pressure on their elected officials, working towards legislative change, fighting for a 15-dollar minimum wage, and working towards realizing a universal healthcare system all through their organizational and activism work is seen as absolutely crucial when working towards effecting the societal and political change that their alternative vision entails.

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