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ABSTRACT

With the sudden rise and popularity of the Tea Party, many on the Left of the American political spectrum have looked on with scorn and some degree of envy. Originally dismissed as conspiracy theorists and radicals, Tea Party supporters, who represent many different demographics and organizations, have exerted substantial influence on national political discourse and decision making.

This thesis employs scholarly arguments, primary sources and public opinion survey data to study the extent to which the Tea Party's approach can be copied by activists on the Left in order to promote their own political agenda. Only by taking the Tea Party seriously, can the Left hope to transfer some of its successful strategies to their own causes.

This thesis examines the overall question: What would a Left version of the Tea Party look like? The answer lies in a series of sub-questions, which include: How did a group of tax day protesters turn into a household name and a feared faction of the Republican Party? How have historical American populist movements garnered influence in the past? What cautionary advice can the 1970's decline of the New Left and Organized Labor provide? The answers to these questions offer advice for a Left Party in four areas: 1) Ideas and National Discourse, 2) Electoral Strategy, 3) Coalition Building, and 4) Money & Media.

Finally, while many suggest that the Occupy Wall Street protests could be to President Obama's Democrats what the Tea Party has been to the Republican Party, this movement has pursued a distinctly non-electoral methodology. Beginning with a quick history of Occupy Wall Street and its spin-off groups, this thesis assesses the Occupy Movement based on the framework constructed to describe a Left Party. Particular emphasis is devoted to the argument that the Occupy Movement could be more effective if it adopted an electoral strategy.

A Tea Party for the Left:

How Progressives Can Use the
Tea Party's Strategy to
Promote Their Own Political
Goals

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INTRODUCTION: WHAT CAN THE LEFT LEARN FROM THE TEA PARTY?

With the sudden rise and popularity of the Tea Party, many on the Left of the American political spectrum have looked on with scorn and some degree of envy. This has not gone unnoticed by Tea Partiers themselves, as Jacob Laksin of the Humboldt Tea Party explains:

Of all that the Tea Party has accomplished, perhaps the movement's most unlikely achievement to date is the admiration it has inspired on the activist Left. Disillusioned with President Obama and the rapid dissipation of a long-term left-wing dominance that Obama's victory was supposed to usher in, left-wing activists and commentators have come to look upon the Tea Party as a model to revive their faded political fortunes.¹

Originally dismissed as conspiracy theorists and radicals, Tea Party supporters, who represent a variety of distinct organizations, have exerted substantial influence on national political discourse and decision making.

This thesis employs scholarly arguments, primary sources and public opinion survey data to study the extent to which the Tea Party's approach might be copied by activists on the Left in order to promote their own political agenda. Only by taking the Tea Party seriously can the Left hope to transfer some of its successful strategies to its own causes.

To answer the overall question of what a Left version of the Tea Party would look like, this thesis will answer a series of sub-questions: How did a group

¹ Laksin, Jacob. "Van Jones' Tea Party Envy." *Humboldt Tea Party*. 10/8/11. <http://humboldt-tea-party-patriots.blogspot.com/2011/10/van-jones-tea-party-envy.html>

of tax day protesters turn into a household name and a feared faction of the Republican Party? How have historical American populist movements garnered influence in the past? What cautionary advice can the decline of the New Left and organized labor provide? The answers to these questions will offer advice for a Left Party in four areas: 1) ideas and national discourse, 2) electoral strategy, 3) coalition building, and 4) money and media.

Chapter one will focus on the factors that have contributed to the Tea Party's success. How did a motley band of protesters come to wield so much power within the Republican Party? The Tea Party's strategy brilliantly solves the problems faced by a small group that would like to run campaigns as a third party in the American electoral system. Its tactics take advantage of the fact that political authority comes in many forms, from affecting national discourse to outright electing its own Congressional representatives. Concrete policy demands were not necessary in the movement's initial stages, but have been developed to sustain momentum and achieve results. Financial backing and media exposure have also proved very important contributing factors to the influence of the Tea Party. The Left could also learn some lessons from the Tea Party on how to craft its own political message which will seek to unite people on the opposite end of the American political spectrum. The Tea Party brings together a loosely connected coalition of disparate people who share the same enthusiasm for a few specific topics.

Chapter two will explore historical populist movements that rose to national prominence on both the Right and Left. This helps shed light on some of the roots of the Tea Party. Such historical examples have a great deal to teach modern organizers about what types of messages connect with an American audience. They also provide strategic lessons for modern political movements, such as how a focused message more effectively impacts public dialogue, rather than attempting to introduce a broad platform. Finally, these movements have experienced a variety of relationships with the two major American political parties, which can provide guidelines for present day groups.

Chapter three examines several key strategic factors that contributed to the collapse of both Old and New Left in the United States. In order to spark a resurgence of popular enthusiasm for the Left, one must first examine its recent failures. A new Left movement can learn lessons about coalition building and organizing tactics from the limited success of twentieth-century organized labor and 1960's-1970's identity politics. Coalitions must be broad enough to reach a critical mass but must also not assume uniformity of members' interests based on identity characteristics such as race and gender. Without an understanding of the limits of its old strategies, the Left will fall into the same pitfalls as before. This chapter will also consider which demographic groups of the Old and New Left could be incorporated in a Left version of the Tea Party.

Chapter four will explain how the Tea Party's approach could be copied by activists on the Left, with a few important modifications. A Left Party will be

examined as a theoretical entity that incorporates all the political guidance gleaned from the earlier chapters. There are four crucial components for a flourishing Left Party: 1) ideas and national discourse, 2) electoral strategy, 3) coalition building, and 4) money and media. These four sections parallel the most significant factors underlying the success of the Tea Party.

Lastly, while many have put forward the idea that the Occupy Wall Street protests could be to President Obama's Democrats what the Tea Party has been to the Republican Party, this most recent movement has pursued a distinctly non-electoral methodology. Beginning with a quick history of Occupy Wall Street and its spin-off groups, the thesis assesses the Occupy Movement based on the framework constructed to describe a Left Party. Particular emphasis is devoted to the argument that the Occupy Movement could be more effective if it adopted an electoral strategy.

The closing section summarizes the ways in which a Left Party could employ the Tea Party's overall plan, taking into account the cautionary tale of organized labor and identity politics, while noting some of the unresolved challenges that such a group must address.

CHAPTER 1: UNDERSTANDING THE SUCCESS OF THE TEA PARTY

How has this relatively small political bloc become a household name across the country and a feared faction of the Republican Party? After a brief description and history of the Tea Party, this chapter will examine the factors that have contributed to its success: an appealing message, a clever electoral strategy, substantial monetary support, and extensive media exposure. This chapter will conclude with a summary of the lessons that a Left counterpart could learn from the Tea Party.

Who is the Tea Party?

Many polls have tried to assess the demographics of the movement. With some variation, they generally show that Tea Party supporters are largely white, male, married, older than 45, and are also likely to be more conservative, wealthy and highly educated than the general population.² The Bloomberg National Poll of adults 18 and over showed that 40% of Tea Party supporters are 55 or older, compared with 32% of all poll respondents. Also, Tea Partiers are 79% white,

² 1) Zernike, Kate and Megan Thee-Brenan. "Poll Finds Tea Party Backers Wealthier and More Educated". *New York Times*. 4/14/10. 2) "CBS/NY Times Poll: National Survey of Tea Party Supporters." *New York Times*. 4/12/10. 3) "Data Set: 2008 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates: Survey: American Community Survey." *U.S. Census Bureau*. 2008. 4) Vogel, Kenneth P. "Poll: Tea Partiers Like GOP." *Politico*. 3/23/10. 5) "National U.S. Poll * March 24, 2010." *Quinnipiac University, Office of Public Affairs*. 3/24/10.

61% men, and 44% identify as ‘born-again Christians’,³ compared with 75%,⁴ 48.5%,⁵ and 34%⁶ for the general population, respectively. A Gallup poll from March 2010 found that the strongest predictors of support for the Tea Party were gender, income, and political views.⁷ Supporters of, or participants in, the Tea Party movement are much more likely to be registered Republicans and have a favorable opinion of the GOP and an unfavorable opinion of the Democratic Party than the national average.⁸ The variety of poll results most likely reflects regional differences in Tea Party members. The grassroots organizations of the Tea Party, such as the Greater Boston Tea Party, often have regional foci. However, as a later section will discuss, the key agenda items that the Tea Party promotes are fairly unified and promoted nationally by groups such as the Tea Party Patriots, which coordinate local chapters.

History

Enthusiastic, conservative, grassroots organizing first proved itself to be a strong political force with the special Senate seat election of Scott Brown in

³ Przybyla, Heidi “Tea Party Advocates Who Scorn Socialism Want a Government Job.” *Bloomberg News*. 3/26/10.

⁴ 1) This number includes White Hispanic and Latino Americans. Excluding these, this category comprises 65.4%: “B02001. RACE, Universe: Total Population; 2008 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.” *United States Census Bureau*. 2) “B03002. Hispanic or Latino origin by race, Universe: Total population; 2008 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.” *United States Census Bureau*.

⁵ “CIA, The World Factbook, United States.” CIA. Retrieved February 16, 2010.

⁶ Kosmin, Barry A. and Ariela Keysar. “American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) 2008.” *Trinity College*.

⁷ Saad, Lydia. “Tea Partiers Are Fairly Mainstream in Their Demographics.” *Gallup Polls*. 4/5/10. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/127181/tea-partiers-fairly-mainstream-demographics.aspx>

⁸ 1) “CBS/NY Times Poll: National Survey of Tea Party Supporters.” *New York Times*. 4/12/10. 2) Miller, Sean “Survey: Four in Ten Tea Party members are Democrats or Independents.” *TheHill.com*. 4/4/10. <http://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/polls/90541-survey-four-in-10-tea-party-members-dem-or-indie>

Massachusetts on January 19, 2009.⁹ One month later, commentator Rick Santelli's now infamous rant gave the budding movement a name that would stick: Tea Party. *Rolling Stone* author Matt Taibbi explains the birth of the Tea Party in his lighthearted article:

This second-generation Tea Party came into being a month after Barack Obama moved into the Oval Office, when CNBC windbag Rick Santelli went on the air to denounce one of Obama's bailout programs and called for "tea parties" to protest. The impetus for Santelli's rant wasn't the billions in taxpayer money being spent to prop up the bad mortgage debts and unsecured derivatives losses of irresponsible investors like Goldman Sachs and AIG - massive government bailouts supported, incidentally, by Sarah Palin and many other prominent Republicans. No, what had Santelli all worked up was Obama's "Homeowner Affordability and Stability Plan," a \$75 billion program less than a hundredth the size of all the bank bailouts. This was one of the few bailout programs designed to directly benefit individual victims of the financial crisis; the money went to homeowners, many of whom were minorities, who were close to foreclosure. While the big bank bailouts may have been incomprehensible to ordinary voters, here was something that Middle America had no problem grasping: The financial crisis was caused by those lazy minorities next door who bought houses they couldn't afford - and now the government was going to bail them out.¹⁰

Taibbi captures some of the anger that animates the Tea Party's message. The movement began to catch national attention on April 15, 2009, when "hundreds of protests [were] held nationwide, with protestors often numbering in the hundreds or low thousands."¹¹ These tax day rallies showed that the emerging movement had national appeal.

The actual size of the Tea Party has been disputed, with estimates ranging widely. Poll analyst Nate Silver estimates the total number of Tea Party

⁹ Williamson, Vanessa, Theda Skocpol, and John Coggin "The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism." *Perspectives on Politics, Harvard University*. 2011. 5.

¹⁰ Taibbi, Matt. "The Truth About the Tea Party." *Rolling Stone*. 10/14/10. 4.

¹¹ Taibbi, "The Truth."

participants at its height to be more than 300,000 people.”¹² However, this picture is too simplistic. Leonard Zeskind and Devin Burghart, president and vice president of a progressive think tank called the Institute for Research & Education on Human Rights, importantly point out that the Tea Party can be more accurately understood as three levels of engagement: sympathizers, activists, and registered members.

Several national opinion polls point to support for the Tea Parties running at approximately 16% to 18% of the adult population, which would put the number of sympathizers in the tens of millions. That would be the outermost ring of support. At the next level is a smaller, less-defined group of a couple of million activists who go to meetings, buy the literature and attend the many local and national protests. At the core are the more than 250,000 members in all fifty states who have signed up on the websites of the six national organizational networks that form the core of this movement.¹³

Even the most generous definitions of Tea Party membership have not suggested that this new group could rival the power of the two established political parties in the U.S., though, as the Tea Party increased in size, it became clear that the new loosely-organized coalition would deploy an innovative electoral approach to flex more political muscle than its relatively small national numbers would otherwise suggest.

During the 2010 midterm elections the Tea Party proved that it indeed wanted to act like an electoral competitor and that it could impact politics at the federal level. Scholars have debated exactly how and to what extent the Tea Party

¹² Williamson, 19.

¹³ Burghart, Devin and Leonard Zeskind. “Tea Party Nationalism: A Critical Examination of the Tea Party Movement and the Size, Scope, and Focus of Its National Factions.” *Institute for Research & Education on Human Rights*. 2010. p. 8. <http://justanothercoverup.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/TeaPartyNationalism.pdf>

played a role in the 2010 Republican landslide in the House of Representatives. Bond et al. assert that the Tea Party had no statistically significant impact on the 2010 House election, because Tea Party-affiliated candidates did not have a considerably different likelihood of winning.¹⁴ Jacobson et al., on the other hand, argue that the Tea Party was successful in shifting the public discussion and consolidating opposition to President Obama which was crucial to the campaigns. They concluded that “The Tea Party movement, which promoted, articulated, and focused the opposition to Obama and his policies, played a major role in turning the election into a national referendum on the administration.”¹⁵ More subtle forms of influence, such as changing the national conversation, are harder to quantify but have very real effects on political outcomes.

Changing dialogical frames can be a powerful political force. Professor Nicol Rae suggests that the Tea Party successfully gave Republicans a fresh popular face so that they could be viable candidates in 2010 after their ousting in 2008.¹⁶ Nonetheless, the Tea Party is not just a reaction to President Obama; it is also the frustrated response of long-time fiscal conservatives to the failures of the Republican Party to represent their views. Ron Paul’s higher than usual popularity in the Republican Presidential primary indicates a new level of legitimacy for

¹⁴ Bond, Jon R. et al. “Was the Tea Party Responsible for the Republican Victory in the 2010 House Elections?” Prepared for delivery at the *2011 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association*, Seattle, Washington. Sept 1-4, 2011. Print.

¹⁵ Jacobson, Gary C.. “The President, the Tea Party, and Voting Behavior in 2010: Insights from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study.” Prepared for delivery at the *2011 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association*, Seattle, Washington. Sept 1-4, 2011. Print. p 3.

¹⁶ Rae, Nicol C. “The Return of Conservative Populism: The Rise of the Tea Party and Its Impact on American Politics.” Presented at the *2011 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association*, Seattle, Washington. Sept 1-4, 2011. Print.

serious fiscal conservatism.¹⁷ The Tea Party continues to wield significant influence in the 2012 Presidential campaign through the Republican primary.¹⁸

The question for scholars now is not so much *what* is the Tea Party, but *how* has this coalition of mostly older, white, fiscal conservatives,¹⁹ unemployed middle class workers, and conspiracy theorists²⁰ come to exert so much influence in American politics. This chapter will discuss four factors which have contributed to the influence of the Tea Party: an appealing message, an innovative electoral strategy, substantial monetary support, and an effective use of media and communications.

An Appealing Message

First, the Tea Party developed a message which attracted and excited its potential members. The name in itself is a brilliant recasting of history, claiming that our Founding Fathers resented all taxes outright. Anti-tax rhetoric gives an outlet to widespread anger and fear due to economic uncertainty in the aftermath of the Great Recession.²¹ The Tea Party squarely placed the blame for all economic concerns on the largess of government. “‘God did not create us to be wards of the state,’ said Colleen Holmes, a former Lakewood [OH] resident who

¹⁷ However, Ron Paul will suffer from the decided disinterestedness from almost all media sources. (“Indecision 2012 - Corn Polled Edition - Ron Paul & the Top Tier.” *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. 8/15/11. Video. <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-august-15-2011/indecision-2012---corn-polled-edition---ron-paul---the-top-tier>)

¹⁸ Bai, Matt. “The Tea Party’s Not-So-Civil War.” *The New York Times*. 1/12/12. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/15/magazine/tea-party-south-carolina.html?pagewanted=1&_r=4&hp

¹⁹ Williamson, Vanessa. Theda Skocpol, and John Coggin “The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism.” *Perspectives on Politics, 2011*. Harvard University. Print.

²⁰ McGrath, Ben. “The Movement, the Rise of Tea Party Activism.” *The New Yorker*. 2/1/10. http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/02/01/100201fa_fact_mcgrath?currentPage=all

²¹ McGrath.

is now the executive director of the Eagle Forum, a Washington, D.C.-based political-action group.”²² This fits nicely with Americans’ historical suspicion of government and the particular mistrust of government being co-opted by some malicious “other” group which prevents it from responding to the interests of “real” Americans.²³ Rodney Bond, of the “Kentuckiana Patriots,” explains what it means to be a real American:

We are real-Americans people who trust in god, country, and the constitution, ex[ample] the 2nd amendment, we believe in smaller gov-less taxes, and our right to bare arms, our right to defend our family and property, and our beloved constitution, (GOD BLESS AMERICA).²⁴

There are also strong rhetorical themes of returning to the founding principles of the country. Tea Party activists generally revere the Founding Fathers and disparage modern liberal presidents. Mark Alexander’s writings on the creation of “President’s Day” are typical:

Today, the once-reverent observance of George Washington has devolved into a holiday that lumps Washington together with more recent presidential featherweights like Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton and Barack Hussein Obama. The comparison is laughable, but given the implications, it is also appalling.²⁵

²² Sams, Tonya. “Don’t Tread on Me’ say Tea Party supporters who are on Mall C.” *Cleveland.com*. 4/15/10.

http://blog.cleveland.com/metro/2010/04/dont_tread_on_me_say_tea_party.html

²³ Hofstadter, Richard. *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*. Harper’s Web. 1964. <http://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/0014706>

²⁴ Bond, Rodney. “Kentuckiana Patriots Information.” *TeaParty.org* 2/29/12. <http://teapartyorg.ning.com/group/kentuckianapatriots>

²⁵ Alexander, Mark. “The Model for Presidential Character -- George Washington.” 2/23/12. *The Patriot Post: Voices of Essential Liberty*. <http://patriotpost.us/alexander/2012/02/23/the-model-for-presidential-character-george-washington/>

Such an emphasis on the past also includes the U.S. Constitution, which, as interpreted by Tea Party activists, prescribes limited government.²⁶ The Tea Party is an unusual combination of popular constitutionalism, in which the people decide what the Constitution means, as discussed by Goldstein,²⁷ and constitutional originalism, in which a literal reading of the document is the only legitimate interpretation, as discussed by Zietlow.²⁸ The Coweta Tea Party Patriots explain that, “We think the country is ready for direct and civil discourse on what the Constitution says about the proper role of the federal government in our lives.”²⁹ Taking the Constitution as its moral authority, the Tea Party has developed a narrow understanding of the proper role of government, which includes reducing federal spending and taxes, while simultaneously limiting the overall power of the government.

Many observers of the Tea Party’s growth have pointed to what they regard as inconsistencies in the movement’s ideology. Signs at rallies, such as “Keep your Government Hands off my Medicare,” would seem to suggest that Tea Partiers are very ill informed. However, this apparently paradoxical statement represents a longstanding conceptual division in the American mainstream political consciousness between universal entitlements for “hard-working

²⁶ Foley, Elizabeth Price. “Sovereignty, Rebalanced, The Tea Party & Constitutional Amendments.” *Tennessee Law Review*. 2011. Vol. 78. 751-764.

²⁷ Goldstein, Jared A. “Can Popular Constitutionalism Outlive the Tea Party Movement?” *Northwestern University Law Review Colloquy*. 2011. Vol. 105.

²⁸ Zietlow, Rebecca E. “Draft: Popular Originalism? The Tea Party Movement and Constitutional Theory.” *Social Science Research Network*. 8/3/2011. <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1905824>

²⁹ “Tea Party Leaders to DNC Chair: Stop Lying About Us.” *Coweta Tea Party Patriots*. 1/13/12. <http://www.cowetateaparty.org/news/news/tea-party-leaders-to-dnc-chair-stop-lying-about-us.html>

Americans” and means-tested “government” programs for the “undeserving.”³⁰

This sentiment appears in conversations like this one which Matt Taibbi had with a tax assessor named David after a rally:

"Let me get this straight," I say to David. "You've been picking up a check from the government for decades, as a tax assessor, and your wife is on Medicare. How can you complain about the welfare state?"

"Well," he says, "There's a lot of people on welfare who don't deserve it. Too many people are living off the government."

"But," I protest, "You live off the government. And have been your whole life!"

"Yeah," he says, "But I don't make very much."³¹

Tea Partiers regularly defend programs that benefit them, while at the same time attacking the largess of the welfare state. This became most obvious in the Healthcare debate during the summer of 2009. “Tea Parties emerged to defend their material interests in health coverage, and to oppose the redistributive principles motivating health insurance reform, which they saw as inconsistent with those that underpin Social Security and Medicare.”³² All of this may seem like simple self-interest, until one reflects upon the political rhetoric of the 1990’s welfare debates in which the stereotype of a “welfare queen” living large off the government became a key feature.³³ The Tea Party is merely reiterating a mainstream American obsession with separating the “deserving” from the

³⁰ Quadagno, Jill. *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty*. Oxford: Oxford UP. 1994. Print. p. vi.

³¹ Taibbi, “The Truth,” 2.

³² Disch, 2.

³³ Means-tested programs for the “undeserving,” include Medicaid, food stamps and the old AFDC program. All of these would be considered handouts by many in the Tea Party. “Getting something for nothing” and “freeloading” off of other people’s tax revenues are considered unfair. (Williamson, 31)

“undeserving.”³⁴ For his part, “David” sees programs like Medicare as supported by tax-payer contributions, whereas means-tested programs like Food Stamps are thought to be handouts at the expense of “the rest of us” hardworking taxpayers. For Tea Party members, the issue is one of fairness.

The Tea Party does not explicitly talk about social issues, preferring to focus on fiscal matters, which provide a common ground for libertarians and social conservatives. Yet many have noted that: “The Tea Party dichotomy of the ‘freeloader’ versus the ‘hardworking taxpayer’ often has racial undertones that distinguish it from a simple reiteration of the longstanding American creed.”³⁵ So is the Tea Party simply a racist organization? Williamson concludes that this assessment is too simplistic:

Rather than conscious, deliberate, and publicly expressed racism, these racial resentments form part of a nebulous fear about generational societal change – fears that are crystallized in Tea Party opposition to President Obama. As we’ve seen, many Tea Partiers are deeply concerned that the country they live in is not the country of their youth – and that they themselves are no longer represented by the U.S. government.³⁶

Much of the Tea Party’s potency stems from its ability to convince its members to turn these fears, which are inherently reactionary, into positive action. Tea Partiers are reacting to what they see as a sea change in American life, but the rhetoric does not cast them as powerless victims but rather encourages them to

³⁴ Many in the Tea Party defend universal programs for the “deserving” because they consider that they have paid into these programs, even if they derive more benefit than they actually paid for. (McGrath, “The Movement.”)

³⁵ Williamson, 31.

³⁶ Williamson, 31-33.

“take back America.” This frame clearly assigns blame for the nation’s troubles and also empowers its members with hope for “restoring” the country.

Electoral Strategy

Along with its appealing message, the Tea Party has also developed a clever electoral strategy. In the United States, our “winner-take-all” voting structure means that whoever garners the most votes will win an entire district or state. By contrast, the proportional representation systems that many other countries use allows smaller parties to gain some seats in a legislative body as long as they receive a minimum percentage of votes, for example over 5% or 10%. The U.S. system practically ensures that we have only two major parties. Therefore, any group at the outer ends of the left-right political spectrum that wishes to shake up the status quo must deal with the dominant position of the two major parties.

To begin with, each of the two major parties takes its “base” for granted while fighting to control the independent, centrist swing voters. The winner-take-all system guarantees that each of the two major parties will move to capture the center, since the more fringe elements on their side of the spectrum have nowhere else to go. Very conservative voters in the Republican Party and very progressive voters in the Democratic Party have no choice but to vote for one of the “big two.” Relatively small factions of each party can complain all they want, but if they do not support the party that is closest to their views, they run the risk of living with the greater evil of the two.

Choosing the lesser of two evils is not a satisfying choice, but third parties do not offer a good alternative option either. New and therefore small, third parties cannot elect any of their candidates in the winner-take-all system, since a majority or plurality would be necessary to win the election. The impossibility of electing third party candidates discourages voters from supporting new parties, thereby reinforcing their powerlessness.

Finally, a third party within the United States leads to the “spoiler problem,” now infamously associated with Ralph Nader and the 2000 Presidential election.³⁷ Nader and the Green Party wanted to give leftist, environmentally-minded Democrats a voice in our political system. Yet Nader only succeeded in splitting the Democratic vote and thus aiding the victory of the Republican, who actually was farthest from the wishes of those leftist, environmentally-minded Democrats who voted for Nader in the first place. Running as a third party in U.S. general elections is difficult at best and self-defeating at worst.

The Tea Party’s electoral strategy, which uses Republican primaries to challenge moderate Republicans, skillfully avoids the chokehold of the “big two” by forcing Republican primary voters to pick only one candidate on the right side of the political spectrum. This approach works for the ultra-conservative Tea Party, because primary voters tend to be on the extremes of the political spectrum.

³⁷ In Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Mississippi, New York, Oregon, South Carolina, and Vermont systems of “fusion voting” are legal in which candidates can run with multiple party labels and voters can designate which label they are choosing when they choose to the candidate. This was most prominently used in the 1890’s when the Progressives took over the Democratic Party. (“History of Fusion.” *Center for Working Families*. 10/15/11. <http://www.cwfny.org/issues/democracy/fusion/history/>)

Once a Tea Party candidate receives a nomination, the general election voters will be given the choice of a Tea Party candidate or a Democratic candidate. When faced with this polarized choice, moderate Republicans typically support the Tea Party candidate, who is closer to their views than the Democratic candidate. This electoral strategy has proven effective in nominating and electing certain candidates. It could be adopted by a Left Tea Party.

There has been considerable debate among scholars about the extent to which the Tea Party is basically a subset of the Republican Party. Abramowitz argues that Tea Partiers are distinctly more conservative, slightly more racially hostile, and more politically active than average Republicans,³⁸ and Ekins states that they are “less loyal Republicans, have less trust in government and are angrier at DC Politics.”³⁹ It is exactly the Tea Party’s unusual relationship with the larger Republican Party which gives it so much influence. Tea Partiers themselves emphasize their role in keeping Republicans, especially those with Tea Party affiliations, accountable to their campaign promises: “Just because they have an R behind their name doesn’t mean they will do the right thing.”⁴⁰ The Tea Party uses its primary election strategy to play the sometimes-disloyal ally of the Republican Party.

³⁸ Abramowitz, Alan. “Partisan Polarization and the Rise of the Tea Party Movement.” Presented at the *2011 Annual meeting of the American Political Science Association*, Seattle Washington, Sept 1-4, 2011.

³⁹ Ekins, Emily McClintock. “The Character and Economic Morality of the Tea Party Movement.” *Social Science Research Network*. <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1920840>

⁴⁰ Honeycutt, Greg. “Good News and Lessons Learned.” *Roanoke Tea Party*. 2/24/12. <http://www.roanoketeaparty.com/pages/contact-us/>

Influence comes in many forms, and the Tea Party uses all of them. Bailey et al. assert that “A movement such as the Tea Party can influence government’s policy decisions in multiple ways. Activists and groups can elect more like-minded individuals to Congress, pressure representatives to vote their way or persuade elites to self-identify with the movement.”⁴¹ During the primary election process, candidates can seek endorsements from the major national organizations, such as the Tea Party Patriots. Newly elected Tea Party-affiliated Congresspersons have shown uncommon obstinacy in sticking to their professed principles on the movement’s particular issues. In the House of Representatives, the Tea Party House Caucus gives Congress people the ability to self-identify as Tea Party members. These Congresspersons obviously hope to capitalize on the popularity of the movement for their own gain. But this self-imposed label has a “real, but limited, [effect on] congressional voting.”⁴² Those identifying with the Tea Party label are likely to already be very conservative, and therefore their votes may not be much different before and after their declaration of Tea Party affiliation. Since the 2010 midterm elections, Speaker Boehner has often relied on Tea Party members of the House for their support on crucial votes, thus making them disproportionately influential for their small numbers.

Money

⁴¹ Bailey, Michael A., Jonathan Mummolo and Hans Noel “The Tea Party and Congressional Representation: Tracking the influence of Activists, Groups and Elites.” *Dept. of Gov't & Public Policy Institute, Georgetown University*. 5/16/11.
http://nw08.american.edu/~dhayes/index_files/bailey_etal_workshop.pdf

⁴² Bailey, 1.

Several other factors have helped the Tea Party become more influential than one might expect. Some Tea Party organizations receive significant funding from private outside donors. This includes a huge amount of below-the-radar funding from big business, particularly the Koch brothers.⁴³ Such donations have simultaneously proven extremely useful in the organizing process and raised a good deal of suspicion from Tea Party critics. The money goes through organizations such as Americans for Prosperity into publicity campaigns and conferences to train organizers.⁴⁴ Additionally, privately funded think tanks produce scholarly research which can then be cited by Tea Party candidates to bolster the credibility of their policy claims.⁴⁵ In addition to its powerful backers, the Tea Party also is an expression of genuine popular outrage.

The Tea Party encompasses both grassroots and top-down structures. The two most important national Tea Party organizations give us a sense of the two different flavors of the Tea Party: Republican Party outsiders and insiders. The first type is typified by the Tea Party Patriots (TPP), who represent the populist side. Local chapters voluntarily sign up with the TPP. “According to TPP national coordinator Jenny Beth Martin, the organization employs nine national coordinators to help guide and coordinate these local groups’ actions.” Ms. Martin is quick to emphasize TPP’s role as the “official grassroots American movement”

⁴³ Mayer, Jane. “Covert Operations, The billionaire brothers who are waging a war against Obama.” *The New Yorker*. 8/30/10.

http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/08/30/100830fa_fact_mayer?currentPage=all

⁴⁴ Abeshouse, Bob. “People and Power.” *Aljazeera English*. 11/1/11.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2011/10/2011102683719370179.html>

⁴⁵ Mayer.

of the Tea Party.⁴⁶ The Tea Party Patriots stress their populist credentials in part to separate themselves from the other big organization on the national scene: The Tea Party Express.

The Tea Party Express (TPE) is primarily known for its bus of organizers that travels the country visiting Tea Party events. Williamson explains that “[The TPE] is a project of the Republican-run PAC ‘Our Country Deserves Better,’ which has provided hundreds of thousands of dollars of support to conservative candidates like Senator Scott Brown in Massachusetts and Sharron Angle in Nevada. The TPE also channeled big money into Republican primaries.”⁴⁷ Although this kind of support has undoubtedly increased the national profile of the generic “Tea Party” label, the TPE is not welcome in some grassroots Tea Party circles. “Jenny Beth Martin [national coordinator of TPP] derides the Tea Party Express as ‘five people on a bus,’” which implies that it is an elite and small group, unlike her group, the TPP, which draws upon real popular support.⁴⁸

These two groups are quick to point out their differences, yet they are not as distinct as they may first appear. As far as monetary support from the conservative establishment and pro-business funders goes, they are surprisingly intertwined. When pressed on the point, the TPP’s national coordinator admitted that TPP is not as strictly-grassroots as it claims to be. Williamson gives us a better understanding of the messy interconnectedness:

⁴⁶ Williamson, 15.

⁴⁷ Williamson, 15.

⁴⁸ Williamson, 15.

TPP is very closely intertwined with FreedomWorks, a multimillion dollar conservative nonprofit led by former House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-TX). Tea Party Patriots operate under the motto “Fiscal Responsibility, Limited Government, Free Market,” similar to the FreedomWorks slogan of “Lower Taxes, Less Government, More Freedom.” As Jenny Beth Martin acknowledges, FreedomWorks was crucial to the group’s original launch and was a primary funder for their national rallies. Martin also reports that operational funding for Tea Party Patriots is scant, limiting the capacity of the group to take independent action. Leaked emails have suggested that, at least in mid-2009, FreedomWorks retained control over significant aspects of TPP messaging.

Tea Party Express, Tea Party Patriots, and FreedomWorks are not the only Tea Party -linked conservative groups, however. Other national advocacy organizations fishing in these waters include Americans for Prosperity, an advocacy group that, like FreedomWorks, is a spin-off of the 1980s free-market industry-funded think tank Citizens for a Sound Economy; Newt Gingrich’s American Solutions for Winning the Future; and the American Liberty Alliance, an organization run by the conservative campaign veteran Eric Odom. Several of these organizations, along with right-wing think tanks like the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute, have been bankrolled by a small number of far-right businessmen, most notably the libertarian Koch brothers, sons of Fred Koch, a founding member of the John Birch Society.⁴⁹

These Tea Party organizations are indebted to their financial backers, just as the two major parties always are. In this way the Tea Party is rather similar to those “establishment politicians” they are railing against. However, the behind-the-scenes nature of these donations means that many average Tea Party members do not know about such elite connections:

It is not clear how much grassroots Tea Partiers know about the national advocacy and funding organizations promoting and trying to capitalize on their efforts. Most Tea Party activists we interviewed knew little or nothing about FreedomWorks or the other national free-market organizations promoting the Tea Party brand. Nationally, at least some local Tea Party groups have sought to distance themselves from FreedomWorks.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Williamson, 15.

⁵⁰ Williamson, 15.

In this way, the Tea Party is an interesting combination of grassroots enthusiasm, elite funding and organizing know-how. Such a formula gives the Tea Party as a whole an organizing edge without having to tarnish its average-American persona.

Media

Two final factors related to communications have contributed to the movement, one corporate and one grassroots. The first is Fox News. As a regionally dispersed group, the Tea Party needed the common language and viewpoint that Fox has provided. The ongoing network exposure contributes to a continuing sense of momentum even when no large events are actually occurring. Also, the national reach of Fox News provides unified and free advertising to organized key events. Fox often reports on rallies before they happen; contrasting with other networks, which only report on them after the fact, if at all.⁵¹ Additionally, the network almost always has a headline questioning or criticizing the Obama Administration as a lead story on their website homepage. Fox News has helped rally the dispirited Republican Party which had been so discredited just a few years before.

Finally, the Tea Party successfully uses social media, blogs and other websites to galvanize members and promote its message. “At the grassroots level, Tea Parties are small, loosely interrelated networks, assembled at the initiative of local and regional organizers, who often use online organizing tools [such as

⁵¹ Williamson, 9.

MeetUp.com].”⁵² Organizers have also very effectively used Twitter to arrange rallies.⁵³ Online blogs, in which anyone can say anything, have also been used by many on the fringe of the Tea Party to make some outrageous claims: “One Tea Party blog, from Arizona to Michigan, claims that President Obama intends to grant amnesty to all illegal immigrants in order to develop a new bloc of potential voters. The support of these new voters, Tea Partiers argue, would allow the Obama Administration to continue to ignore the interests of current American citizens.”⁵⁴ While the internet promotes “liberty” by allowing anyone to speak, it detracts from “responsibility” by disseminating dubious information, which has helped the conspiracy theorist segment of the Tea Party.

Conclusion: Lessons for a Left Counterpart

Any strong political movement must begin with a strong message. This has certainly been the case for the Tea Party, and, as we will see in chapter two, it has been true for most other historical American populist movements. The Tea Party’s message is appealing because it addresses American’s fears and assigns specific blame for our current plight. The Tea Party also frames its message in a positive way, with phrases such as “Taking Back America,” which provides a hopeful vision of the future. Although vague at first, the Tea Party evolved to taking a stand on particular issues when they came up in Congress. While it

⁵² Williamson, 13.

⁵³ Livne, Avishay, Matthew P. Simmons, Eytan Adar, Lada A. Adamic. “The Party is Over Here: Structure and Content in the 2010 Election.” Proceedings of the *Fifth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media, Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence*. 2011.

⁵⁴ Williamson, 29.

started out as a series of popular protests, the Tea Party really gained national influence through its electoral strategy, which allows it to exert disproportionate control over the Republican Party on certain issues. Chapters four and five will examine the extent to which the progressives could play the same role inside the Democratic Party. Still, it is important first to examine a sampling of successful Right and Left populist movements in the U.S. in order to put the Tea Party into historical context.

CHAPTER 2: INFLUENTIAL HISTORICAL MOVEMENTS

Before describing the possibilities for a Left version of the Tea Party, it is important to discuss American populist movements on both the Right and Left to reveal the historical roots of the Tea Party and provide some direction for a Tea Party for the Left. Popular outcries in the United States have a long history of shaping public discourse and political culture. Populism has been a strong force for both the right and left ends of the political spectrum. This chapter will glean some lessons about social movement agendas and strategies from a sample of past groups that were successful in turning their popular enthusiasm into national political influence. In particular, it will explore messages and themes which were successfully promoted. The modern Tea Party has roots in these notable movements and so too could a Left version of the Tea Party.

Populism on the Right

The Tea Party's conspiracy theorists descend from a long line of Americans concerned about the undue influence of either elites or outsiders controlling the government. This propensity was famously named the "Paranoid Style" by historian Richard Hofstadter.⁵⁵ Throughout the 19th into the early 20th century, there were many anti-elite and nativist groups. The Anti-Masonic Party, for example, was formed in the Northeast in the mid-1800's around the idea that

⁵⁵ Hofstadter, Richard. *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*. Harper's Web. 1964. <http://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/0014706>

Masons were overly influential in maintaining the status quo for their own economic benefit. During the Great Depression, large numbers of nativist groups were organized based on their common resentment of certain ethnicities, some newly arrived and others less so. Since very early on, racial and ethnic resentment has been a staple of American politics.⁵⁶

After World War II, preoccupation with the infiltration of government by a secretive, privileged enemy was typified by McCarthyism and the John Birch Society. This reflected a strong focus on Communism as the new adversary and a particular suspicion of government. Fred Koch, father of the current Tea-Party-funding brothers, was a founding member of the libertarian John Birch Society. Seymour Lipset and Earl Raab explain that, “The John Birch Society, which was created in 1958, combined economic liberalism with anti-Communism. The founder, Robert Welch, Jr., believed that the greatest enemy of man was government, and the more extensive the government, the greater the enemy. To him, government was inherently corrupt and a threat to peace. He advocated private institutions, local government, and rigid individuality.”⁵⁷ There are many theoretical links here with some modern Tea Party groups. Even now the hunt for communist infiltrators goes on. The torch has been taken up by conservative pundit Glen Beck.⁵⁸ Many of the Fox News host’s “lessons” on the state of our government employ the sort of paranoid scapegoating that the Birchers would

⁵⁶ Lipset, Seymour Martin. Raab, Earl. *The Politics of Unreason: Right Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1970*. New York: Harper & Row, 1970. Print. 47-58.

⁵⁷ Lipset and Raab, 248-250.

⁵⁸ Greenley, Larry. “Glenn Beck Recapitulates The John Birch Society.” *The John Birch Society*. 5/2510. <http://www.jbs.org/commentary/glenn-beck-recapitulates-the-john-birch-society>

likely have promoted. Such a long history of viewing government as the source of the nation's ills makes it easier for the current Tea Party to use this tactic now, because it is already in some people's minds.

The Tea Party's fiscal conservatives also can trace their roots back to the middle of the 20th Century. Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign inspired a surge in the popularity of libertarian ideas within the Republican Party. Goldwater's platform represented an anti-communism, anti-labor union, and anti-welfare state reaction to New Deal liberalism.⁵⁹ His loss in the presidential election paved the way for the Great Society, but he also set the stage for conservatism revival in the form of Ronald Reagan's presidency.⁶⁰

There are two lessons any social movement can learn from the Goldwater experience. Firstly, a vocal minority can have more impact on national discourse than is proportional to its size by shifting the national conversation.⁶¹ Second, although the movement lost momentum on the national stage with Goldwater's defeat, many libertarians entered and worked from within the Republican Party for the first time. In this way, the Goldwater movement gave fiscal conservatism an increased level of influence inside the Republican Party. From Reagan through George W. Bush, fiscal conservatives have been disappointed with Republican administrations' failure actually to shrink the overall size of the government, as

⁵⁹ Robert Poole, "In memoriam: Barry Goldwater – Obituary," *Reason Magazine*, August–Sept, 1998. Print.

⁶⁰ Goldstein, Dana. "Progressives, Meet Goldwater." 9/21/06. www.CampusProgress.org

⁶¹ Hofstadter, Richard. *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*. Harper's Web. 1964. <http://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/0014706>

measured by federal expenditures. The Tea Party brings these libertarians together on the debt issue.

Populism on the Left

Past social movements also have a lot to teach a prospective Left counterpart to the Tea Party. Back in the 1890's, the Populist Party warned that the common people of the United States were being duped by the gold speculators of Europe and America.⁶² In this case, paranoia was used by the populace to target wealthy elites.⁶³ The economic theory was simple: speculators and elitists in power were using the current gold-backed system to push prices ever higher for their own profit, at the expense of ordinary people. The movement also developed a specific demand: the minting of silver to diversify the country's currency. The issue was so salient that the Democratic Party was forced to adopt the Populist Party's platform in 1896.⁶⁴ The success of the Populists as a third party was based on several factors. First of all, the group focused on one particular issue and provided a clearly-explainable cause and effect story about how monetary monopoly was hurting the economy. This offered a specific object of blame in the face of economic hardship and particular solutions: government regulation of business and a diversified currency. Furthermore, the movement used fusion voting, discussed in chapter one, to challenge the Democratic Party, while

⁶² Rae, "The Return."

⁶³ Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* New York: Vintage Books, 1955. Print.

⁶⁴ Rae, "Conservative Populism."

avoiding the problems third parties face in running directly against a major party. This parallels the Tea Party's electoral approach.

The beginning of the twentieth century would witness the rise of another Left social movement. While the Populists had largely been farmers, changes in the mechanization of the urban workplace led "more urban and middle-class" workers to join the early 1900's Progressive Movement and Teddy Roosevelt's Bull Moose Party, which echoed some of the Populist rhetoric: "...the exclusion of privileged interests from political and economic control, the expansion of democracy and the use of government to benefit the weak and oppressed members of American society."⁶⁵ Many of the specific demands of the progressives promoted greater regulation of business, which dovetailed with Populists' earlier calls for government to push back against monopoly.⁶⁶ "More specifically, the standard list of the Progressive movement's objectives includes: constraints on monopolies, trusts and big banking interests; regulation of the railroad rate; lower tariffs; the direct primary; initiative, referendum and recall; direct election of U.S. Senators; women's suffrage; child- and female-labor laws; pure food and drug laws and conservation."⁶⁷ The Progressives, although not as extreme as the Populists, were able to reshape nationwide dialogue in a way that neither of the major parties could ignore. This was partly achieved by Teddy Roosevelt, when he led the Progressives away from the Republican Party which was controlled by

⁶⁵ DeWitt, Benjamin Parke. *The Progressive Movement: A Non-Partisan Comprehensive Discussion of Current Tendencies in American Politics*. New York: Hackett, 1915. Print. p. 4-5.

⁶⁶ Hofstadter. *The Age*.

⁶⁷ Filene, Peter G. "An Obituary for "The Progressive Movement"." *American Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 1, Johns Hopkins University Press. 1970. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2711670> p. 21.

William Howard Taft. The anti-establishment flavor of his campaign is still a trope in modern American politics. The movement successfully achieved many fundamental workplace regulations which are now taken for granted.

Several smaller movements during the New Deal Era pushed President Franklin D. Roosevelt to the Left and helped him pass Social Security and other new programs. These included Huey Long's "Share the Wealth" campaign and Father Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice, which attacked big business, calling for economic reform. The Townsend Movement also focused on pensions for the elderly.⁶⁸ Some of these activities unfortunately carried racist and anti-Semitic undertones.⁶⁹ Once again, these actions began as a response to economic crisis and pushed for more government involvement, including public employment, relief and direct stimulus, to improve the quality of life for average Americans. Such movements were careful to describe their goals in particularly American terms. The emphasis on "a hand up, not a hand out" fits neatly with ideals of self sufficiency and a strong work ethic.⁷⁰ Thus, these ideals adapted to the surroundings of the time to produce a message that fit with Americans' existing values and vernacular but still pressed for change. Through these early Left movements, redistribution of wealth and increasing government's role in people's lives became generally more acceptable.

⁶⁸ Amenta, Edwin and Yvonne Zylan "It Happened Here: Political Opportunity, the New Institutionalism, and the Townsend Movement." *American Sociological Review*. Vol. 56, No. 2, 1991. p. 250-265. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2095783>

⁶⁹ Shenton, James P. "Fascism and Father Coughlin." *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*. Vol. 44, No. 1, 1960. p. 6-11. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4633567>

⁷⁰ Weber, Max. *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Scribner's Sons, 1958. Print.

The most recent truly progressive movements in the United States was the “New Left” of the 1960’s and 1970’s. The Civil Rights, Black Power, Anti-War and Women’s movements possess several features from which a resurgent Left could learn. Initially, they each addressed an injustice, and their messages had the potential to garner broad support. The involvement of students and young people was essential for creating the momentum and numbers significant enough to capture national attention. Thirdly, dispersed leadership allowed the movements to continue, albeit with diminished strength, in the face of state oppression and popular backlash. Many current Progressives look back to the 1960’s and 1970’s as their glory days.

Conclusion: Lessons for a Left Counterpart

It is about time that the Left reasserted itself. Four lessons about messages and strategy are provided by historical social movements in the American context, both Left and Right. To begin with, a movement must provide a clear explanation of the cause of the problems at hand which will help citizens direct and channel their frustration. This usually includes blaming a specific group, person or policy. Next, developing a prescription of solutions, even if they are vague, is necessary for the movement to gain momentum. Thirdly, focusing on a narrow set of issues concentrates national discourse by bringing those issues to the fore. Finally, diffuse leadership and broad alliances ensure maximum impact and staying power.

CHAPTER 3: LESSONS FROM THE DECLINE OF THE OLD AND NEW LEFT

A Left version of the Tea Party must learn from the decline of the Old and New Left if it is to develop a workable political strategy and message. The 1960's and 1970's was the last hey day of the American Left, and the decline of those movements provide lessons of a cautionary tale to contemporary activists. This chapter will examine the internal weaknesses of the organized labor movement - an essential element of the American Old Left - and also identity politics, the formative principle of much of the American New Left. Several factors led to the demise of each. A Left Tea Party must avoid these failings if it is to successfully revive the progressive Left.

Organized Labor

Organized labor was one of the crucial members of Left movements during the first half of the 20th century, but the latter half of that century has seen a steady decline in its influence and numbers. "In 2011, the union membership rate--the percent of wage and salary workers who were members of a union--was 11.8 percent, essentially unchanged from 11.9 percent in 2010...[Comparatively,] in 1983, the first year for which comparable union data are available, the union membership rate was 20.1 percent and there were 17.7 million union workers."⁷¹

⁷¹ "Economic News Release: Union Members Summary, Union Members 2011." *US Bureau of Labor Statistics*. 1/27/12. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm>

Such a decrease in membership is matched by historically low public opinion of unions. “In 2009, Gallup found union approval dropping to 48%, an all-time low in its series dating back to the 1930s.”⁷²

Once-major unions, like the UAW, are no longer associated with cutting edge progressive campaigns; neither rank and file members nor politicians look to labor as a major player in Left politics. That is due to both the internal weakness and an external crackdown. The union-busting campaigns of late 20th century were enacted by business management and permitted by free-market-loving presidential administrations. Steve Early explains that “Corporate America’s multifaceted assault on the pay, benefits, and job conditions of millions of workers continues to this day.”⁷³ Such a coordinated assault is well documented elsewhere and is not the focus of this chapter.

The strategic political decisions of unions going forward are vitally important for their future as they seek to capture more policy power. Labor as a whole has lost influence for three reasons: 1) It is taken for granted by the Democratic Party, 2) it has not worked with, and sometimes even worked against, other Left movements, and 3) it has focused more on workplace benefits than a broader political strategy. This section will explore each of these factors.

⁷² Allen, Jodie T. “A Century After Triangle, Unions Face Uncertain Future” *Public Opinion History*, Pew Research Center. 3/23/11. <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1938/triangle-shirtwaist-factory-fire-public-opinion-about-labor-unions-trend>

⁷³ Early, Steve. *Embedded with Organized Labor*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009. Print. p. 9.

In the American two-party system, labor has always looked to the Democratic Party to carry its platform.⁷⁴ However, because the Democrats know labor has nowhere else to turn, they have taken labor's support, both electoral and financial, for granted. This became very clear at the end of the 1970's, when Democrats had control of both the White House and Congress but still promoted neo-liberal, market-based policies.⁷⁵ To counter this lack of respect, Lichtenstein has called upon labor to act "as a sometimes disloyal component of the Democratic Party coalition."⁷⁶ Labor could actually withhold support from the Democrats on particular issues if it did not see its interests sufficiently satisfied. Labor currently lacks the ability to bargain with the Democratic Party because it has nowhere else to go in the Democrat versus Republican elections. The Tea Party's strategy of contesting mainstream party members during primaries might provide just the right approach to get the Democrats' attention. Labor cannot establish their own party, as it faces the third party problems discussed earlier, but a Tea Party-like strategy would allow it to endorse more pro-labor Democratic candidates. The "party-within-a-party" approach can be used by any significant organization or movement that seeks to influence one of the two major parties on issues of particular interest to the insurgent group.

Labor's lost of influence also intensified when it strategically distanced itself from some of the 1960's strongest movements: anti-war and civil rights.

⁷⁴ Lichtenstein, Nelson. *State of the Union*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002. Print. p. 146.

⁷⁵ Lichtenstein, 236.

⁷⁶ Lichtenstein, 276.

Boyle puts the beginning of labor's decline at the presidential election of 1968. In that the year, the AFL-CIO came down on the side of the pro-war Democrat Hubert Humphrey and divided itself from the progressive vanguard of the Left. Major union leaders underestimated the significance of the antiwar movement to their progressive supporters, who began to feel that labor was “‘missing in action’ from the key political struggles of the time.”⁷⁷ When labor showed its true political colors, its progressive members and external allies began to look elsewhere for political partners.

Racial tensions also pushed some union members in a more conservative direction. American labor unions had generally maintained racial segregation, and this pattern continued into the 1960's and 1970's. As unions produced real material gains for their members, those members became more concerned about maintaining their new-found social standing. Conservative politicians such as Richard Nixon used racially coded language to convince the newly unionized, white middle-class that The Great Society's programs were costing the majority of “average” Americans, i.e. white and middle-class, too much.⁷⁸ In this way, labor and the Civil Rights movement did not become effective allies. When key unions such as the UAW and AFL-CIO, sided with the pro-war, subtly-racist candidate in the 1968 election, they no longer could claim to be the

⁷⁷ Early, 11.

⁷⁸ Boyle, Kevin. *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995. Print. p. 255.

representatives of progressive politics. Organized labor's greatest political strength had always been that it was on the cutting edge of the Left.

The more that labor turned conservative politically, the more it limited its focus to “workplace issues” instead of pushing for social-democratic, domestic policies such as universal healthcare or other government benefits that unions in Europe demanded.⁷⁹ This lack of a broad political agenda has placed labor on the sidelines of many policy battles. Unions hardly protested President Clinton’s “workfare” welfare reform in 1996, even though its support for minimum wage jobs would undercut union work. Since unions have focused narrowly on the workplace concerns of their members, they have not stood up for the rights of all workers, thus endangering their own gains.⁸⁰ Steve Early explains that labor has three most urgent tasks, and they are all broader than workplace benefits for current members: 1) “organizing the unorganized, 2) defending what’s left of the welfare state and 3) developing new labor-based alternatives to market-based domination of economic and social life.”⁸¹ It is only with this sort of expansive platform and an improved political strategy that unions can have influence on national discourse and effect Federal policy as they did in the early to mid 20th century.

As far as their internal organizational methods, unions are badly in need of an innovative strategy and structure if they hope to regain political clout. Leaders

⁷⁹ For example, socialist parties in France, Germany, and the Labor Party in the UK.

⁸⁰ Early, 105.

⁸¹ Early, 106. Numbers added.

and the general membership have become more conservative over time, mostly interested in preserving workplace gains rather than pursuing larger goals. For these reasons, Schiavone believes that unions must take on a new structure altogether: Social Justice Unionism, in which unions partner with a social movement to press for bread and butter issues that cannot be ignored. In the American context this may take the form of Central Labor Councils: “local federations of AFL-CIO unions that ‘work actively with community groups and academics to educate working people, create jobs (often for women, African Americans, Latinos and all immigrants, as in Atlanta during the 1996 Olympics), to improve community life (unionists and environmentalists have cooperated in Los Angeles to stop corporate outlaws from polluting working-class communities), and to organize workers.’”⁸² It is through this kind of coalition building that labor can hope to once more become a prominent force in American politics. Living wage campaigns, such as those run by Jobs with Justice,⁸³ are some of the most successful examples of labor partnering with social justice organizations to convince local governments to pass legislation.⁸⁴ The two major factors that will affect labor’s revitalization are the union’s ability to reflect national growing demographics and its capability to influence government policy at the local, state and federal levels. Just like historical popular movements, labor would be most effective as part of a broad coalition.

⁸² Fernando Gapasin and Michael Yates, “Organizing the Unorganized: will Promises become Practices?” in *Rising from the Ashes? Labor in the Age of “Global” Capital*, ed. Ellen Meiksins Wood. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998. p. 80-81.

⁸³ <http://www.jwj.org/>

⁸⁴ Schiavone, 83.

Identity Politics

Inherent weaknesses in political theory and strategy led to the limited effectiveness of the 1960's and 1970's movements concerning the identities of race or sex. The fundamental idea behind the Civil Rights, Black Power, and Feminist movements was that by banding together, each separate identity group could finally achieve the political power and influence which it deserved. This approach is now known as "identity politics." By emphasizing what they had in common, political strategists hoped that they could unite all of the members of their identity group to push for certain policies. However, this plan unraveled for several internal and external reasons.

Internally, not all members of each of these identity groups had the same political interests. Feminist theorists, for example, learned to critique each other for "essentializing," meaning that one has assumed that all women were fundamentally the same.⁸⁵ Essentialism undermined feminists' political strategy in two ways. First of all, claiming an essence of woman-ness was easily turned by their opponents into an explanation of why women should be subordinated. Secondly, glossing over differences ostracized some groups of women. Black feminists, in particular, readily critiqued the complaints of white, middle-class

⁸⁵ Grillo, Trina. "Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality" *Theorizing Feminisms: A Reader*. Elizabeth Hackett and Sally Haslanger, eds. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. Print. p. 30-40.

housewives about their oppression.⁸⁶ In this way, the essentialism inherent in the identity politics of the Feminist movement alienated some people whom it supposedly represented, driving wedges into the solidarity that identity politics was supposed to promote. Feminist theory has fortunately incorporated these critiques to evolve into a more inclusive and expansive theory.

The Black Power movement provides another example of how identity can be a limited organizing principle. Black Power activists expressed their pride in their identity through the concept of cultural nationalism, which promoted a novel unified sense of racial identity based on cultural signifiers which supposedly derived from “African” culture. The activists hoped that the unity resulting from this identity would increase the influence of black people in politics and therefore wring economic and political gains out of the existent system. Dean Robinson and Cedric Johnson, on the other hand, explain that this theory of ethnic unity actually undermined the political power of the group to win real quality-of-life improvements for its communities.⁸⁷ The emphasis on racial or ethnic identity overshadowed other analyses, particularly a class critique of capitalism.⁸⁸ Since racial identity was paramount, concrete economic gains for poor and working class blacks were not as central to the later Black Power movement as they might have been in an inter-racial coalition of poor and working-class activists.

⁸⁶ Collins, Hill. “The Politics of Black Feminist Thought” *Theorizing Feminisms: A Reader*. Elizabeth Hackett and Sally Haslanger, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Print. p. 51-62.

⁸⁷ Johnson, Cedric. *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Makings of African American Politics*. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2007. Print. p. 219.

⁸⁸ Johnson, 43.

Identity politics also demonstrated its external limitations. Although somewhat effective in gaining legal protections from discrimination for distinct groups such as African Americans and women, identity politics inherently narrowed the focus of any particular movement and discouraged allies. It is here that the debate begins between those who reject identity politics altogether and those who would reshape it to create a more nuanced theory.

Todd Gitlin exemplifies those who reject it altogether. He sees identity politics as divisive and detrimental to universal “ideals of a common humanity that have animated [the Left] for more than two centuries.” This leads to a “troubling irony: the Right, traditionally the custodian of the privileges of the few, now speaks in an apparently general language of merit, reason, individual rights, and virtue that transcends politics, whereas much of the Left is so preoccupied with debunking generalizations and affirming the differences among groups—real as they often are—that it has ceded the very language of universality that is its birthright.”⁸⁹ While Gitlin admits that “identity politics deserves credit for inspiring powerful studies in history, literature, and all manner of ideas,”⁹⁰ he worries that it had less concrete influence outside of legal and social debates. Gitlin also claims that identity politics “proved more exciting and more energizing to activists than the politics of commonality—especially in the 1980s, with fights over hiring, requirements, curricula, and so forth taking place during a

⁸⁹ Gitlin, Todd. “The Left, lost in the politics of identity.” *Harper’s Magazine*. 9/93. <http://harpers.org/archive/1993/09/0001380>

⁹⁰ Gitlin, “The Left, lost.”

time of increasingly scarce resources,”⁹¹ but fragmented groups that claimed to represent entire identities lost credibility with those they supposedly represented when they refused to listen effectively or deliver on their promises. According to Gitlin, identity politics puts too much emphasis on the differences between groups, which limits both understanding of the diversity within groups and the coalition-building options of those groups.

On the other hand, Kelley points out that scholars, like Gitlin, who complain about the popularity and importance of “race, gender, sexuality, and disability” in the New Left would like to see what they consider to be “universal” identities, like socio-economic class, as the organizing principle of a resurgent Left. Kelley wants us to realize that class is merely another identity and, although it is a powerful one, it must not be promoted to the exclusion of all others.⁹² Kelley explains that “universalism” has often historically meant Enlightenment-style majoritarianism which overlooks oppressed peoples in the name of “progress” as defined by colonial powers.

[Gitlin, etc.] assume that the universal humanism they find so endearing and radical can be easily separated from the historical context of its making; indeed, that it is precisely what can undo the racism and modern imperialism it help to justify. The racialism of the west, slavery, imperialism, the destruction of indigenous cultures in the name of “progress,” are treated as aberrations, coincidences, or not treated at all. They insist that these historical developments do not render the Enlightenment radical universalism any less radical, and those who take up this critique are simply rejecting Enlightenment philosophers because they are ‘dead white males.’⁹³

⁹¹ Gitlin, “The Left, lost”

⁹² Kelley, Robin. *Yo' mama's disfunkcional!: fighting the culture wars in urban America*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1997. Print. p. 109.

⁹³ Kelley, 106.

Kelley urges us to realize that old-school universalist ideals can easily be twisted by those in power for the benefit of privileged groups, as it fundamentally debases the claims of oppressed groups. He deconstructs Gitlins' dichotomy between radical humanist universalism and a "“multicultural left' wedded to 'identity politics,'”⁹⁴ saying that this dichotomy is in fact unnecessarily framing white males as the “universalists” in opposition to all “other” identities:

The implications are frightening: the only people who can speak the language of universalism are white men (since they have no investment in identity politics beyond a certain white working-class ethnic movements) and women and colored people who have transcended or rejected politics of identity...The idea that race, gender, and sexuality are particular whereas class is universal not only presumes that class struggle is some sort of race- and gender-neutral terrain but takes for granted that movements focused on race, gender or sexuality necessarily undermine class unity...⁹⁵

A movement based on class as the only legitimate identity will fall into the same traps as the Black Power and Feminist movements. For this reason, Kelley and others advocate for a more complex theory which comprehends that people experience multiple identities simultaneously.

Kelley would like to combine identity politics' capacity to analyze systemic oppression with the concept of intersectionality so that no one identity is privileged over others. Intersectionality comes out of Feminist theory. As explained by Grillo, intersectionality is an understanding that all people have multiple identities. One identity may take precedence over the others in certain situations, but every person is fundamentally located at the intersection of their

⁹⁴ Kelley, 104-5.

⁹⁵ Kelley, 109.

multifaceted identities.⁹⁶ Therefore, one can be both oppressed and the oppressor at the same time. White, middle-class feminists insightfully attacked patriarchy yet, at the same time, their organizations often excluded women of color and white working-class perspectives, thereby reinforcing other forms of oppression. Intersectionality could improve identity politics' ability to fight multiple injustices and therefore would help overcome its oversimplified internal strategy and limiting external strategy. However, recognition of contemporary systems of oppression, while simultaneously bringing people together across many identities, will be a distinct challenge for a resurgent Left.

Conclusion: Lessons for a Left Counterpart

A Left version of the Tea Party must embrace a diverse coalition as a source of its strength. Identity politics reached the limits of its effectiveness when activists assumed that shared characteristics necessarily resulted in a shared political constituency. This, however, was not the case. Not all people of one identity group will benefit from the same policies. Similarly, organizing around identity is also ineffective because it also excludes possible allies. The Tea Party, on the other hand, successfully organizes people from a variety of backgrounds around their shared viewpoint on a certain limited set of political issues, without regard to their identity. Again, this is why it is important for the Tea Party to focus on only several issues. The Tea Party's social conservatives would drive the libertarians mad if they discussed abortion or other socially controversial issues,

⁹⁶ Grillo, Trina. "Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality: Tools to Dismantle the Master's House." *Theorizing Feminisms*. ed. Hackett and Haslanger. New York: Oxford UP, 2006. Print. p. 30-39.

and that is exactly why their coalition is organized around mutually agreeable issues.

Organized labor has also had a constituency problem in recent years. Labor must reflect increasingly diverse national demographics if they want to possess enough members to influence government policy. This fits nicely with the lesson the Left has learned from identity politics about celebrating diversity while going after certain political issues. By allowing itself to become another taken-for-granted faction of the Democratic Party, labor has lost much of its power in political arenas. Just like historical popular movements, labor would be most successful as part of a broader coalition organized around social justice issues such as the living wage campaign. Labor could develop into a powerful ally to a Left counterpart of the Tea Party, contributing funding and organizing capacity. Nonetheless, it must be willing to shake up its relationship with the Democrats and join a sometimes-disloyal faction, just as the Tea Party has done with the Republicans.

CHAPTER 4: WHAT MIGHT A “TEA PARTY FOR THE LEFT” LOOK LIKE?

In recent decades, activists on the Left have been attempting to recreate the level of popular engagement that was the hallmark of the 1960’s and 1970’s Civil Rights and Anti-War campaigns. Since the emergence of the Tea Party in 2009, many have wondered if the Left could pull together its own group which could combine some degree of grassroots organization and a national electoral strategy. For the purpose of this chapter, this theoretical group will be referred to as a “Left Party” which will indicate that it would adopt a similar approach to the Tea Party but promote very dissimilar political positions. This chapter will examine four crucial components for a successful Left Party: 1) ideas and national discourse, 2) electoral strategy, 3) building a coalition, and 4) money and media.

An Appealing Message

The Power of Positive Framing

At its deepest level, every political movement or ideology has a basic way of looking at the world. The importance of these “frames,” as George Lakoff calls them, cannot be underestimated.

About framing: It’s normal. Everybody engages in it all the time. Frames are just structures of thought that we use every day. All words in all languages are defined in terms of frame-circuits in the brain. But ultimately, framing is about ideas, about how we see the world, which determines how we act.

In politics, frames are part of competing moral systems that are used in political discourse and in charting political action. In short, framing is a moral enterprise: it says what the character of a movement is. All

politics are moral. Political figures and movements always make policy recommendations claiming they are the right things to do. No political figure ever says, “Do what I say because it’s wrong! Or because it doesn’t matter!” Some moral principles or other lie behind every political policy agenda.⁹⁷

While frames are mundane enough to be used every day, they also have extreme potency when used to support a particular political position. A policy proposal that is based in a frame that makes sense to, and is persuasive of, its target audience will be much more likely to succeed.

The proper frame for a Left Party would be crucial in determining whether or not it would motivate the necessary numbers of participants to have an actual impact. This is why it must be framed in a positive light. Even movements that are inherently reactionary and “against” something are generally framed in an optimistic way in order to motivate people. In the case of the Tea Party, which is essentially anti-government, positive rhetoric about returning to the principles of the Constitution, in order to revitalize a romanticized version of America’s past, gives activists something to support. A good motivational story is framed as a strategy to eradicate something that we currently have, but do not want, while demanding something that we want, but do not have. The Civil Rights movement sought racial equality by rejecting discriminatory practices.

An example of such a current-day movement that is struggling with positive framing is the environmental movement, according to Frances Moore Lappe. In particular, she deconstructs the common environmental activists’ adage, “Endless growth is destroying our beautiful planet, so we must shift to no growth

⁹⁷ Lakoff, George. “by George Lakoff” *Occupy Writers*. <http://occupywriters.com/works/by-george-lakoff>

economies.”⁹⁸ Lappe explains that this framing of the problem is fundamentally discouraging to would-be environmentalists, thus shrinking the size of the interest group. Instead of focusing on the scarcity of our resources, Lappe suggests calling for a more efficient use of what we already have. By reducing our waste of resources, she sees a future of abundance. In this way, Lappe wants us to see that a cause’s popularity connects with its positive frame.

A negative frame may also reduce the impact of a movement if it misconstrues a proper structural analysis of the root causes of a problem. The Occupy Movement has been warned against merely placing blame on "corporate greed" instead of including broader structural factors. Lappe explains that bad rules made by a corrupt government have allowed for Wall Street’s risky bet making and extravagant bonuses.

[A] greed frame diverts eyes from the rules that have enabled all that nasty greed free reign. Surely our species should know by now that not just a few of us but most of us will behave badly given the right - i.e. wrong – conditions...So let's call the crisis what it is: the rise of privately held government.⁹⁹

In the case of the Occupy Movement, bankers are most likely taking advantage of the political and corporate climate in which they find themselves. “It is the rules and norms we as a society put in place that determine how most of us behave.”¹⁰⁰

For this reason, the problem is actually the deregulation of a highly competitive

⁹⁸ Lappe, Frances Moore. *EcoMind: Changing the Way We Think, to Create the World We Want*. New York: Nation Books, 2011. Print.

⁹⁹ Lappe, Frances Moore. “Don't Think of a Pig: Why "Corporate Greed" Is the Wrong Frame” *Small Planet Institute*. 10/13/11. <http://smallplanet.org/feeds/dont-think-pig-why-corporate-greed-wrong-frame>

¹⁰⁰ Lappe, *Ecomind*, 117.

industry. Occupiers must shift their focus if they truly want their cause to make a difference. The proper frame can both motivate a movement and make sure that it attacks the real source of its concerns.

A Left Party's Frame: Economic Justice and Responsive Democracy

A Left Party does not need to cater to a majority of Americans. Just like the Tea Party, it only requires a small segment of the population in order to have disproportionate national influence, although it may need to be somewhat larger than the Tea Party because it will not have the same advantages of money and media which will be discussed later in this chapter. To ensure that a Left Party can galvanize a quorum of active participants, it should pay attention to themes and ideologies that will appeal in some manner to the majority of Americans. This section will discuss two major frames: Economic Justice and Responsive Democracy.

Economic Justice

The contemporary understanding of the market outcomes of our economy is based on the premise that we are in essence economically insecure and lack the necessary wealth to provide basic necessities to all Americans. The idea that there is simply not enough to go around leads to an apathy towards poverty and deprivation, when in fact it is unequal distribution of resources that is creating hardship for many within wealthy nations like the United States. A Left Party would promote policies of economic justice, not merely economic opportunity, including government intervention to limit income and wealth inequality as well

as universal federal programs that can provide what Americans consider to be basic necessities: a job with a decent living wage, education, health insurance, and retirement income.

A Left Party would seek to insure that all U.S. citizens receive their fair share of economic growth and wealth. This differs substantially from our current premise that markets should simply “pursue what brings the most immediate and highest return to existing wealth holders.”¹⁰¹ Many might argue that Americans have been historically resistant to ideas of universalism, to the extent that this sounds to them like that dirty word: Communism. Yet this is where the importance of a proper frame comes in. Americans are in fact very much in support of the ideals of economic justice.

First of all, our citizens are not as “unconcerned about rising economic inequality”¹⁰² as conventional wisdom has characterized them. As early as 1986, Kluegel and Smith found that although Americans were comfortable with some degree of inequality in theory, “substantial majorities evaluate the average income for some (generally low-paid) occupations as unfairly low and for other occupations as unfairly high relative to the contributions made to society, implying a preference for a less unequal income distribution.”¹⁰³ Americans approve of some income hierarchy, with higher pay for what they consider more valuable work, but they also feel that market outcomes are creating a distribution

¹⁰¹ Lappe, *Ecomind*, 23

¹⁰² Page, Benjamin and Lawrence Jacobs. “No Class War.” *The Unsustainable American State*. ed. Jacobs, Lawrence and Desmond King. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009. Print. 135.

¹⁰³ Kluegel, James and Eliot Smith. *Beliefs about Inequality: American’s views of what is and what ought to be*. New York: Gruyter, 1986. Print. 124.

of income that is too spread out. That is, there are too many people who make too little and also too many who make too much. Therefore, they are expressing a subtle distinction between a low level of inequality which is “good for the economy” and benefits society and a higher level of inequality which is unjust. From the 1980’s into the 1990’s, Americans generally felt that “the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer,”¹⁰⁴ which would indicate an increasingly unequal, and therefore increasingly unfair, distribution of wealth. These trends continued into the new millennium.

As of 2007, Krugman wrote that Americans were aware that levels of inequality were relatively very high. “Corporate profits soared - they’re now at the highest level, as a percentage of GDP, since 1929 - and so have incomes at the top of the scale. But the wages of most workers have barely kept up with inflation.”¹⁰⁵ So if Americans recognize that the country’s income distribution has been and continues to become widening, what, if anything, do they think should be done about it?

Initially, Page and Jacobs found in their 2007 study that “Americans definitely do not want to ‘level’ all incomes.” However, “72 percent of our interviewees strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that “differences in income in America are too large.”¹⁰⁶ This echoes what Kluegel and Smith found in the 1980’s. Some of the study’s most interesting findings suggest that the majority of

¹⁰⁴ Ladd, Everett and Karlyn Bowman. *Attitudes toward economic Inequality*. Washington: American Enterprise Institute. 1998. Print. 99.

¹⁰⁵ Krugman, Paul. *The Conscience of a Liberal*. New York: Norton. 2007. Print. 201-2.

¹⁰⁶ Page and Jacobs, 136, 139.

Americans want the income distribution for different occupations “to be compressed significantly” which would mean that low-income employees would be paid more and the “highest-income occupations, i.e., heart surgeons and corporate CEOs,” should be paid a fraction of what they actually earn currently.¹⁰⁷ Newman and Jacobs concluded from questions in the General Social Survey that, between 1987 and 2000, Americans have become more likely to agree that “Government has a responsibility to Reduce Differences between Rich and Poor.”¹⁰⁸ As of December 2011, after the 2008 recession and Occupy Wall Street movement raised awareness about growing financial inequality, a Gallup poll found that 46% of all Americans and 72% of Democrats “believe it is extremely or very important that the federal government in Washington reduce the income and wealth gap between rich and poor.”¹⁰⁹ Inequality is a vital concern, especially to members of the Democratic coalition that a Left Party would hope to attract.

Not only are large numbers of Americans displeased with widely unequal incomes, they also favor government playing a role in equalizing economic outcomes, to a certain extent. Page and Jacobs found in their 2007 study that in fact “Most Americans are *not* opposed to egalitarian government programs; majorities support a wide range of measures that would dramatically reduce

¹⁰⁷ Page and Jacobs, 140-141.

¹⁰⁸ Newman, Katherine and Elizabeth Jacobs. *Who Cares? Public Ambivalence and Government activism from the New Deal to the Second Gilded Age*. Princeton: Princeton UP. 2012. Print. 143.

¹⁰⁹ Newport, Frank. “Americans Prioritize Economy Over Reducing Wealth Gap, Fifty-two percent say having rich and poor is an acceptable part of the system.” *Gallup.com*. 12/16/11. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/151568/americans-prioritize-growing-economy-reducing-wealth-gap.aspx>

inequality.”¹¹⁰ Americans predominantly would generally accept federal intervention to promote economic equality in two ways: 1) redistributing income and wealth and 2) providing universal programs that insure basic needs are met in the areas of jobs, education, health and retirement income.

To begin with, despite the common assumption that Americans are opposed to all taxes, which is often deduced from the fact that most citizens say their own taxes are too high, Page and Jacobs found that Americans actually largely support progressive taxes to help even out unfair income or wealth accumulation: “They favor a progressive tax system that redistributes income from higher- to lower-income people.”¹¹¹ The majority of Americans want the government to raise most of its revenue from progressive taxes, in which those who earn more pay a larger share, such as corporate income, individual income and estate taxes, as opposed to regressive taxes like the payroll taxes for Social Security and Medicare.¹¹² These opinions reflect the principle of vertical equity, by which taxes are proportionately higher on those with a greater ability to pay them.

Americans also support government programs that they see as promoting equitable access to basic needs, which could be framed by a Left Party as a fulfillment of living in a just and equitable society. Employment is at the forefront of citizens’ concerns today. A majority of our citizens, even before the recession,

¹¹⁰ Page and Jacobs, 135.

¹¹¹ Page and Jacobs, 153.

¹¹² Page and Jacobs, 159.

thought that the government should protect every American's right to work. "A large majority (67%) say that the government in Washington should 'see to it' that everyone who wants to work can find a job."¹¹³ Americans' emphasis on work also means that most of them support a high enough minimum wage "that no family with a full time worker falls below the official poverty line."¹¹⁴ This would require a significant raise in the minimum wage as there are many families that struggle to get by on two incomes, much less one.

In other countries, a basic guaranteed income has been regarded as the best way to keep people out of poverty. British economist Guy Standing promotes a fundamental income guarantee from a large welfare state as the solution to poverty and insecurity in the wealthy UK.¹¹⁵ Although such a proposal stems from a concept of economic justice, this particular scheme is not likely to be a popular idea with mainstream America. Jacobs and Page found that, "Most Americans believe that the able-bodied *should* work. There is little support for a 'guaranteed income' without work."¹¹⁶ A Left Party would not require majority approval in order to be influential, and thereby could support a guaranteed income for the sake of moving the national discourse to the left, even while knowing that they would not likely achieve that demand. Nonetheless, the decrease in legitimacy for sustaining a demand that does not mesh with the majority of

¹¹³ Page and Jacobs, 143.

¹¹⁴ Page and Jacobs, 144.

¹¹⁵ Standing, Guy. *The Precariat*. London: Bloomsbury, 2011. Print. 171-3.

¹¹⁶ Page and Jacobs, 143.

America's values would probably be more costly than the benefit of changing political discourse would justify.

That said, most of the opposition to “guaranteed incomes” and insistence that “the able-bodied *should* work” does not mean that people oppose government programs for the poor.¹¹⁷ “Americans want their government to provide basic necessities to the poor...[including] food, clothing and shelter.” They even support the use of their own tax dollars for such programs.¹¹⁸ It can be stated that, in general, Americans do not wish any of their fellow citizens to be truly deprived. Three other areas in which citizens are willing to have their tax dollars spent in order to ensure a minimum quality of life for their countrymen include education, health insurance, and retirement income, and a Left Party should support related programs.

First, Americans recognize that education is crucial to earning a decent living in our advanced and increasingly globalized economy; 83% say that “the federal government should spend whatever is necessary to ensure that children have really good public schools they can go to.”¹¹⁹ A somewhat smaller majority think it is a “good idea” to use “tax money to provide a college education for those who cannot afford it.”¹²⁰ Secondly, regarding health insurance, most Americans maintain that government involvement in providing health insurance

¹¹⁷ Page and Jacobs, 143.

¹¹⁸ Page and Jacobs, 145.

¹¹⁹ Page and Jacobs, 146.

¹²⁰ Page and Jacobs, 147.

for the uninsured is warranted.¹²¹ Lastly, “Americans expect seniors, after a lifetime of work, to be able to retire with dignity and economic security.”

Whether it is with employer-based pensions or Social Security, most Americans want the government to ensure everyone is looked after in their retirement years.¹²²

The American Political Science Association’s Task force on Inequality and American Democracy found in 2004 that younger Americans, known as “millennials,” were even more supportive of the “government getting more involved” with improving public schools (75%), making college affordable (73%), reducing poverty (67%) and ensuring access to affordable health care (56%).¹²³ As a generally more pro-government demographic, young people would be more likely to endorse a Left Party platform than Americans more generally.

Taken all together, we can see that a good number of Americans wish their government was working harder to promote economic justice and ensure that all of its citizens have the access to what are considered basic needs. A Left Party would support programs in all of these areas, as well as a more progressive tax structure, in which those with greater ability to pay would contribute a greater share of their income. Progressive taxation not only makes philosophical sense with themes of equality and justice, but it is also the best way to pay for the other programs that the Left Party desires. A significant reframing of the role of taxes

¹²¹ Page and Jacobs, 149.

¹²² Page and Jacobs, 151.

¹²³ Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy. “American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality.” *American Political Science Association*. 2004. Appendix. <http://www.apsanet.org/imgtest/taskforcereport.pdf>

will be necessary to convince Americans to agree with Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. when he said: “I like to pay taxes. With them I buy civilization.”¹²⁴ If Americans desire these changes and the solutions are so obvious, why have we not moved in this direction already? Mostly, our vast government, particularly the Federal level, has a huge public relations problem, to which many conservative efforts also contribute. As of June 2011, a Gallup Poll found that only 12% of Americans have some or a lot of confidence in Congress, which ranked last in a list of 15 national institutions, behind big business, organized labor and health maintenance organizations.¹²⁵ The next section will explore some of the structural reasons that Americans feel their government is indifferent.

Responsive Democracy

Not only is economic inequality a concern of fair outcomes; the American Political Science Association’s Task force on Inequality and American Democracy concluded that it was actively harmful to representative democracy.

Economic inequality distorts political participation, hence affecting political outcomes. Interest groups and parties exaggerate the influence of the relatively well-off to the detriment of the relatively poor. Economic equality is therefore a sine qua non condition for democratic politics...Citizens with lower or moderate incomes speak with a whisper that is lost on the ears of inattentive government officials, while the advantaged roar with a clarity and consistency that policy-makers readily hear and routinely follow.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Amy, Douglas. “Taxes are Good.” *GovernmentIsGood.com*. 2007.
<http://www.governmentisgood.com/articles.php?aid=17>

¹²⁵ Jones, Jeffrey. “Americans Most Confident in Military, Least in Congress, Confidence in most institutions below their historical average.” *Gallup Polls*. 6/23/11.
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/148163/Americans-Confident-Military-Least-Congress.aspx>

¹²⁶ Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy. “American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality.” *American Political Science Association*. 2004. Abstract and p. 1.

In order to implement policies which most Americans regard as economically just, the existing American political system will also have to be reformed so that citizens without Super PACs and lobbyists can be heard. A Left Party could revive a progressive definition of democracy which protects the interests of the public instead of business elites.¹²⁷ This is based on the premise that public interests, including a healthy economy, are not served by “privately held government.” Terms like “corporate personhood” have become popular since the Supreme Court’s *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* decision which allowed corporations and unions to give unlimited contributions to political campaigns.

In reporting the decision, The New York Times called Citizens United ‘a sharp doctrinal shift [having] major political and practical consequences [that would] reshape the way elections were conducted.’ The opinion drew immediate attention at the highest level. President Barack Obama was highly critical of the result, calling it ‘a major victory for big oil, Wall Street banks, health insurance companies and the other powerful interests that marshal their power every day in Washington to drown out the voices of everyday Americans.’¹²⁸

This ruling has opened the floodgates of private money into public elections and will logically give disproportionate influence to lobbying organizations in our political system. Americans are very justified in feeling that their government, particularly the Federal government, ignores the opinions of average citizens.

A Left Party would help Americans envision a government that they could truly rely upon and trust. This is crucial since Americans disapprove of how their

¹²⁷ Lappe, *Ecomind*, 153.

¹²⁸ Wilson, Molly J. Walker. “Too much of a good thing: campaign speech after Citizens United.” *Cardozo Law Review: Yeshiva University*. 31 *Cardozo L. Rev.* 2365.

government is run by overwhelming margins.¹²⁹ Such an ideal form of democracy is described by George Lakoff:

Democracy starts with citizens caring about one another and acting responsibly on that sense of care, taking responsibility both for themselves and for their family, community, country, people in general, and the planet. The role of government is to protect and empower all citizens equally via The Public: public infrastructure, laws and enforcement, health, education, scientific research, protection, public lands, transportation, resources, art and culture, trade policies, safety nets, and on and on.¹³⁰

This definition makes it clear the government is designed to benefit all members of society and should not favor large corporations simply because they make big campaign contributions. Indeed, political theorist Dworkin has argued that the most generally accepted definition of justice is “necessarily about treating people as equals.”¹³¹ Based on this implication, Americans are probably partially dissatisfied with their government because they feel that they are not treated fairly or heard equally. The most important part of this new understanding of government is that average citizens will feel ownership for their government. A Left Party would strive to open people’s minds to the possibilities of a radically democratic government which is, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, “government of the people, by the people, for the people.”¹³² This will mean much greater direct participation of citizens in the decision making process. Such a message

¹²⁹ Saad, Lydia. “Americans Express Historic Negativity Toward U.S. Government.” *Gallup Poll*. 9/26/11. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/149678/americans-express-historic-negativity-toward-government.aspx>

¹³⁰ Lakoff, “by George Lakoff.”

¹³¹ Brown, Alexander. *Ronald Dworkin’s Theory of Equality: Domestic and Global Perspectives*. London: Palgrave, 2009. Print. 17.

¹³² Lincoln, Abraham. “Gettysburg Address.” 11/19/1863. *Abraham Lincoln Online*. <http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm>

will simultaneously increase popular demand for a responsive government and motivate potential supporters of a Left Party to begin building this new vision by first joining the movement. One example of the way this vision could be played out is participatory budgeting, which has already been tested with significant success in Brooklyn, New York. Participatory budgeting allows residents to determine which improvement projects would receive some of the one million dollars of their council members' discretionary budgets which is up for grabs.

Soni Sangha reports for *The New York Times*:

Participatory budgeting is as much about involving disenfranchised members of the public as it is about financing projects, and the elections were intended to draw maximum participation. People did not have to be registered to vote to cast ballots, and citizenship status and prior criminal convictions were irrelevant.

“This told people you could still have an opinion in your community if you’ve done your time. We’re not holding that against you,” said Kim Lloyd, who knocked on doors in a senior citizen housing complex in East Harlem. “If you’re an immigrant, you can still have an opinion in your community.”

To further increase participation, voting took place over several days, and efforts were made to reach people in their own languages. In Kensington, for instance, where there is a large population of Bangladeshi immigrants, fliers were translated into Bengali. This outreach particularly helped bring in women in the community.

“Men felt like they have a power that they can make a choice, but for the first time the women felt like, ‘Oh, I can do that too,’ ” said a resident, Annie Ferdous, who translated the voter information into Bengali. “They saw the ballot in Bengali and thought, ‘O.K., maybe I can understand and get involved.’ ”...

In the 2009 Council election, 1 percent of district voters had annual household incomes of less than \$25,000, according to data provided by the Community Development Project at the Urban Justice Center. In the participatory budget process, 10 percent of the voters were from such households.

Meanwhile, in the district represented by Councilwoman Melissa Mark-Viverito, which includes East Harlem, 47 percent of the voters in the budget process were Latino, compared with 39 percent who voted from that district in the 2009 Council elections — and 21 percent who

voted citywide that year, according to the data from the Justice Center and exit polls conducted by Edison Research.

In East Flatbush, staff members in Councilman Jumaane Williams's office said they were surprised that the largest number of votes came from Flatbush Gardens, a low-income housing complex. The polling site was near where people pick up mail and do laundry.

"We're hoping some of these methods translate into traditional civic engagement mechanisms," said Sondra Youdelman, executive director of Community Voices Heard, a group that helps mobilize low-income New Yorkers and that worked on outreach for the budgeting vote.¹³³

These sorts of participatory budgeting processes have been very popular in deciding municipal budgets in Brazil¹³⁴ and are examples of the sorts of innovative methods that could help people feel more connected to their government while simultaneously fostering better decisions.

For those who believe that they do not require government assistance at all, Lappe explains the ways in which everyone is indebted to the government for the many public goods it provides:

Nobody makes it on their own. If you got wealthy, you depended on The Public, and you have a responsibility to contribute significantly to The Public so that others can benefit in the future. Moreover, the wealthy depend on those who work, and who deserve a fair return for their contribution to our national life. Corporations exist to make life better for most people. Their reason for existing is as public as it is private.¹³⁵

Such a definition makes it clear that those who have benefited from the investments of our government in the past will have a responsibility for contributing to it in the future. A Left Party could help Americans re-

¹³³ Sangha, Soni. "Update, The Voters Speak." *The New York Times*. 5/6/12. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/08/nyregion/voters-speak-in-budget-experiment-saying-yes-to-bathrooms.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=participatory%20budget%20&st=cse

¹³⁴ Sangha, Soni. "Putting In Their 2 Cents." *The New York Times*. 4/31/12. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/01/nyregion/for-some-new-yorkers-a-grand-experiment-in-participatory-budgeting.html?ref=nyregion>

¹³⁵ Lakoff, "by George Lakoff."

conceptualize our relationship with our government. A truly responsive government gives equal weight to the interests of all of its citizenry.

The number one way to decrease the influence of monied interests in our political system is to clean up the election process. This can be accomplished through a variety of means, including holding voluntary clean elections, in which candidates pledge not to use donations from “special interests,” full public financing of elections whereby candidates who raise a certain number of small donations from individuals get a bonus from public coffers, and overturning the *Citizens United* decision, which allows unlimited corporate campaign contributions.¹³⁶ A Left Party could use the slogan “separation of corporation and state” to explain, in a distinctively American context, that businesses currently have an undesirably enormous amount of influence on policy makers at every level of our government.

A truly responsive government will also need to greatly increase its transparency. Page and Jacobs found that a majority of Americans would be willing to spend more of their tax dollars on certain programs that involve economic justice, but they also feel that their money is presently being wasted by big government.¹³⁷ The way in which policies are portrayed can also play a huge role in whether or not the public supports them. Newman and Jacobs concluded from questions in the General Social survey that, between 1987 and 2000, only

¹³⁶ The Fair Elections Bill was reintroduced to both houses of Congress in the 2011 session. <http://fairelectionsnow.org/>

¹³⁷ Page and Jacobs, 160.

about 20% of Americans thought the government spent too little on “welfare” while 56%-67% believed that the government spent too little on “the poor.” American support for a policy correlates to how clearly and explicitly that policy is defined. In the case of “welfare” vs. “the poor,” Americans are more supportive if they are told “who” the money is going to. More program-specific questions from 2000 about increasing spending on health, education and Social Security, received even greater approval with percentages of 71%, 76% and 61% respectively.¹³⁸ Many analyses of poll data simply examine responses to broad questions which seem to indicate that most Americans think their government is too large or wasteful. However, these analyses ignore the answers that suggest that Americans would support greater spending on particular projects, if only they could be sure where their tax money is actually going.

In order to justify certain programs, local, state and federal officials must make clear where revenue goes and who is responsible for making these decisions. Americans are currently woefully under-informed.¹³⁹ The tax system is also much too convoluted for the average voter to make it clear to her representatives what exactly she likes about the tax system and what she does not. When citizens actually understand how their government functions, they have more chance to expect it to coincide with their expectations. Colleen Shogan, of the Congressional Research Service, found that social media may provide just this

¹³⁸ Newman, 143-4.

¹³⁹ “Political Knowledge Update: Well-Known: Clinton and Gadhafi; Little Known: Who Controls Congress.” 3/31/11. *Pew Research Center*. <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1944/political-news-quiz-iq-congress-control-obesity-energy-facebook>

sort of link between members of Congress in particular and their constituents. Representative Honda of California's 15th district explained this new opportunity: "Instead of viewing the public as a customer, I believe that we should empower citizens to become our partners in shaping the future of our nation." The potential benefits of social media for a Left Party will be discussed in more detail later.

Building a Coalition

A Left Party would seek to bring together certain factions within the Democratic Party to promote a more progressive agenda, as the Tea Party brought together fiscal conservatives,

The new progressive coalition follows the lines of the "emerging Democratic majority" that Ruy Teixeira and John Judis predicted in their 2002 book of that name: minority, professionals, and younger voters, with help from a large gender gap. This is a coalition that can win without a majority of white working-class voters, whether union members or not. (Those who were union members were always solid Democrats.) In many ways, that's good because it helps to bring an end to the culture wars that limited the party's ability to speak clearly about matters of fundamental rights and justice.¹⁴⁰

The diversity of this coalition would be one of its core strengths. Professionals, with their advanced education, were a strong part of the New Left and would naturally fit with a Left Party. So would academics, who can provide an important source of innovative policy ideas.¹⁴¹ Young people, particularly college students and graduates, would be a key component of a Left Party. Members of the so-called millennial generation are substantially more pro-government than older generations which will make them more likely to support a progressive platform

¹⁴⁰ Schmitt, Mark. "Left Without Labor." *The American Prospect*. 8/14/09.

<http://prospect.org/article/left-without-labor-0>

¹⁴¹ Early, 105.

that sees a role for government in solving the nation's problems.¹⁴² A Left Party could draw together different groups that have been established around one interest area such as campaign finance, the environment, reformation of government groups and social justice. As we will see later in the section on money and media, the younger demographic of a Left Party will also be significant for its organizational strategy.

A Left Party would also try to give more voice to historically underrepresented groups, particularly racial-ethnic minorities and women. Research by Zoltan Hajnal, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of California, San Diego, and others has shown that African Americans specifically are not heard by government, even when they do vote.

Critics have long feared that America's winner-take-all electoral system would undermine the interests of minorities. Unfortunately, few available tests broadly assess how well minorities fare in a democracy. To gauge winners and losers in the American case, I introduce a new measure of representation. For any election, I count up how many voters from each demographic group vote for a candidate that loses. After comparing this new measure to its alternatives, I use data from the entire series of Voter News Service exit polls and a sample of mayoral elections to determine which kinds of voters end up losers. I find that across the range of American elections, African Americans are consistently more likely than other groups to end up losers, raising questions about equity in American democracy.¹⁴³

Professor Hajnal's new system of measurement confirms what can already be deduced from the relatively low numbers of people of color and women in the

¹⁴² Millennials: http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/07/pdf/dww_millennials_execsumm.pdf vs. Others: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/10/opinion/brooks-where-are-the-liberals.html?src=me&ref=general>

¹⁴³ Hajnal, Zoltan. "Who Loses in American Democracy? A Count of Votes Demonstrates the Limited Representation of African Americans." *American Political Science Review*. 2009, 103, 37.

country's legislatures. Disproportionately few women fill these positions all around the world, but especially in the U.S., as Nancy Millar explains in the *University of Miami Law Review*:

The United States is an advanced industrialized nation with a high standard of living, a vocal feminist movement, and broad constitutional guarantees of civil liberties, but its level of women's political representation in Congress (16% in the Senate, 16.1% in the House) lags behind the percent of women in the upper and lower houses of, for example, Afghanistan (27.3%), Argentina (35%), Rwanda (48.8%), and Sweden (47.3%).¹⁴⁴

American legislatures as a whole are failing to adequately represent the increasing demographic diversity of our nation, which can only increase the perception that the government is out of touch with most of its citizens. Suzanne Dovi of the University of Arizona also points out that token representation does not necessarily fill this void.¹⁴⁵ Ensuring that people from historically underrepresented groups are fully included will require active steps from a Left Party to make sure that all feel welcome to participate.

Learning Lessons from Identity Politics: Unity without Uniformity

If a Left Party is to successfully bring together many elements of the mid-century "New Left," it also must not rely on divisive identity politics to unite its members. Gitlin proposes that a Left Party should bring a universalist economic analysis to all forms of inequality in American society. "The precursors of today's advocates of identity politics were those scholars who, in the 1960s, were active

¹⁴⁴ Millar, Nancy. "Envisioning a U.S. Government that Isn't 84% Male: What the United States Can Learn from Sweden, Rwanda, Burundi, and Other Nations." *University of Miami Law Review*. 10/07, 62, 129.

¹⁴⁵ Dovi, Suzanne. "Preferable Descriptive Representatives: Will Just Any Woman, Black, of Latino Do?" *The American Political Science Review*. 12/02, 96, 4, PAIS. p. 729.

in the civil-rights and antiwar movements - movements predicated on the universal values of equality, justice, and peace.”¹⁴⁶ Gitlin argues that the Left can appeal to values of justice and the equal importance of all citizens. These could serve as the philosophical underpinnings of a Left Party’s frames of economic justice and responsive government.

Nevertheless, unlike older ideas of universalism, a new Left Party must also include an explicit acknowledgement of systems of oppression and privilege to make sure contemporary inequalities are addressed. A Left Party requires unity without uniformity. While its members would have many political opinions in common they would also have significant differences in their personal backgrounds. In order to value the diverse voices that its various constituencies bring to the table, a Left Party would have to accept the challenge of building consensus across socially-differentiated groups.

Does a Left Party Need Organized Labor?

A Left Party could greatly benefit from the financial and management power that organized labor still wields, even though it is greatly diminished from its glory days in the middle of the twentieth century. The trouble with integrating labor into a Left Party is that labor has, in some ways, become outmoded. Its historical focus on strictly workplace issues has prevented an examination of broader social issues which affect the quality of life of its members. If labor wishes to be a crucial component in a Left Party it needs to branch out to a wider

¹⁴⁶ Gitlin, “The Left, lost”

social justice form of unionism. As Schmitt explains, the issues that have traditionally worried unions should also be concerned with a truly progressive movement, but labor needs to change with the times in order to be a valuable member of this new progressive coalition. Schmitt explains the relationship between labor and progressives this way:

Reclaiming the labor movement's role at the center of progressivism might involve thinking beyond the traditional model of organizing workplaces for collective bargaining. Perhaps it involves creating more fluid, transactional means of politically empowering working people, like the AFL-CIO's Working America affiliate. Forms of organization evolve, with direct-mail single-issue organizations like the Sierra Club giving way to online, participatory structures like MoveOn.org, and the structure of the labor movement may have to change as well. The rest of the progressive world needs to feel a sense of moral obligation about questions like the future of American manufacturing and the working middle class. I can begin to imagine a progressive coalition that doesn't have organized labor, as we know it, at its core. But I don't want to imagine one that doesn't have those concerns at its heart.¹⁴⁷

A Left Party could potentially exist without Organized Labor, but it would be significantly stronger strategically and philosophically if this historical bastion of progressivism could be included. The fundamental question really is whether Labor is ready to evolve or whether it will be left behind.

Money and Media

A Left Party may not have the same obvious number of large donors that the Tea Party has had, such as the Koch brothers, yet it can still be effective with significantly less financial backing. Hopefully, some contributions will come from organized labor, which still has significant fundraising power, and established progressive organizations, but the strategic apparatus of a Left Party

¹⁴⁷ Schmitt, "Left Without Labor."

should be technologically savvy enough to have a significant impact on certain audiences using free organizing tools, such as online petitions and meet-up websites. Activists who have traditionally worked for the Democratic Party will also be able to bring their organizing expertise to bear on Left Party campaigns. Left Movements historically have not relied on support from huge benefactors and are more philosophically suited to relying on people power. For example, the Democratic Party does not pay its volunteers, while the Republican Party has been known to do so. The Associated Press documented this somewhat-dubious practice during the 2008 presidential election: “Four employees hired by a temporary staffing agency to encourage absentee voting for Sen. John McCain in Wisconsin say they were instructed to tell people they were Republican volunteers.”¹⁴⁸ The Left has always depended more on public participation than financial strength. However, the advent of social media may open up a new venue for a Left Party to raise funds in small sums. Occupy Wall Street used this method to sustain the encampment in Zucotti Park. This idea was pioneered by aid organizations, particularly the Red Cross, for collecting ten dollar donations for Haiti earthquake relief efforts.¹⁴⁹

While a Left Party would not have the same benefits from a dedicated cable television channel that the Tea Party has had from Fox News, social media

¹⁴⁸ “Paid GOP Workers Say They Misled Wisconsin Voters.” *Huffington Post*. 11/3/08. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/11/03/paid-gop-workers-say-they_n_140743.html

¹⁴⁹ Wortham, Jenna. “Burst of Mobile Giving Adds Millions in Relief” *The New York Times*. 1/14/10. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/15/technology/15mobile.html?scp=1&sq=donations%20haiti%20social%20media&st=cse>

can be used effectively to share a message and influence national discourse. In fact, internet-based communication is more suited to a Left Party, which would have a much younger demographic than that of the Tea Party, for whom television has been a more relatable medium. Occupy Wall Street is a prime example of how Facebook, Twitter, Meetup.com, and live streaming video can spread the word about an event or organization very quickly and very efficiently. All of this technology is much more user-friendly for young people than the older demographics which the Tea Party caters to. Social media does have its limitations, especially when introducing innovative ideas into new social circles, but it can also spark a popular trend which will then be reported on by the major networks and newspapers. Effectual use of new forms of media would be crucial to a Left Party's success.

Electoral Strategy

In order for a Left insurgence to have a comparable impact on electoral politics that the Tea Party has had, it should adopt the same electoral strategy. A Left Party would try to compel Democrats to subscribe to their particular outlook on a relatively limited number of issues.¹⁵⁰ This would involve running candidates in Democratic primaries, mirroring the way that the Tea Party challenged Republicans in their own recent primaries. Such an electoral approach is much more effective than attempting to strike out on their own as a third party,

¹⁵⁰ A Left Party, like the Tea Party, would avoid the old "culture war" issues of abortion and gay marriage as well as foreign policy, in order to keep the message clear and relevant to a domestic audience.

due to the American winner-take-all methods of voting, previously discussed in chapter one.

Such a general line of attack is based on the premise that each of the two major parties, Republicans and Democrats, are made up of an ever-changing and sometimes tense conglomeration of different factions. Lilla describes the “Right” and the “Left” as two tribes:

Within each tribe there are clans that do more than express more radical or modern versions of the same outlook. Most of the turmoil in American politics recently has been a result of changes in the clan structure of the right, with the decline of the reality-based conservatives, like William F. Buckley and George Will, and the ascendancy of new populist reactionaries like Glenn Beck, Ann Coulter, and other Tea Party favorites.¹⁵¹

The metaphor of the clan structure of the Republican Party can also be applied to the Democrats, who are just as much of a coalition as the GOP. The brilliance of the Tea Party strategy lies in its ability to give one clan in the Republican tribe a disproportionate amount of influence for its size by focusing on a limited number of issues of particular relevance to our tough economic climate. A Left Party could easily recreate this party-within-a-party approach by holding rallies, organizing local chapters of a national coalition, endorsing particular candidates and supporting those candidates in Congressional primaries. This tactic affects which members of Congress get elected, how they vote once in office, and forces more mainstream candidates to pay attention. In this way, a Left Party could play

¹⁵¹ Lilla, Mark. “Republicans for Revolution.” *The New York Review of Books*. 1/12/12. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/jan/12/republicans-revolution/>

the sometimes-disloyal opposition to the Democratic Party in the same way that the Tea Party has antagonized the Republican Party.

A Left Party will adopt an electoral strategy to try to gain as many concessions as it can while its popular enthusiasm lasts. Just as the Tea Party grew out of a grassroots movement, so too would a Left Party bring together a groundswell of public sentiment with an electoral strategy that is savvy enough to work within the system to garner real results. In their groundbreaking book, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*, Piven and Cloward provide a theoretical framework for the rise and fall of populist movements. First of all, they cite several conditions which create the appropriate recipe for an interest group. On a large scale, movements usually only occur during times of "great shift." This happens whenever society's daily routine, particularly its economic practices, are disturbed and this fissure can provide the opening for a group to push for a permanent change.¹⁵² Economic uncertainty is one of the most likely causes of a mass movement. The continued effects of the 2008 "great recession" provide this sort of unsettling force.

For a group to reach a minimum size where it can have national implications, the political status quo must also be discredited. Such was the case with the New Left of the 1960's when people of color and student activists argued that "power rooted in wealth and force overwhelmed the power of the

¹⁵² Piven, Frances Fox and Richard Cloward. *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*. New York: Vintage Books, 1977. Print. 5.

franchise.”¹⁵³ In our own time, there is so much suspicion of the nation’s decision making processes that people do not expect things to change without some new entity bringing in new ideas and putting pressure on current elites. In this time of economic and political uncertainty, especially in the year of a presidential election, the time is ripe for a Left Party to shake up the status quo.

Influencing National Discourse

Changing national political discourse is one of the most important effects a Left Party could have on how politicians decide which policy options are even possible, given public opinion. This has been one of the most striking achievements of the Tea Party. When President Obama was elected, there was very little discussion about the national debt and deficit and its effects on our economy. The Tea Party has reintroduced a certain lexicon about the excesses and wastefulness of government which will be hugely influential in debates about government spending going forward. Changing dialogical frames can be a powerful political force.

A Left Party should seek the Democratic adoption of some of their language and frame of reference. Political imperatives change over time and certainly vary across the world. Here is a prime example of how policy possibilities vary by political climate: The American political premise that business and government are inherently at odds could be shaken up by the Danish model, where corporate leaders credit their welfare state with providing the type

¹⁵³ Piven and Cloward, 2.

of social benefits, including health insurance and retirement plans, which American companies are currently saddled with.¹⁵⁴ A small Left Party could have a disproportionate influence in remapping our political conversations by providing a new language and conceptual framework for the Democratic Party.

Conclusion: A Left Party

This chapter has examined what a theoretical Left Party might look like. In conclusion, a Left Party could largely duplicate the Tea Party's electoral strategy, with a heavier reliance on free social and Internet media and individual campaign contributions, to build a coalition and gain disproportionate influence for its size. The essential premise here is about taking back America for the little guy, which ironically, or perhaps not so ironically, sounds very much like the positive rhetoric used by the Tea Party. Obviously, a Left Party would construct quite a different vision of what our relationship with our government should be. The next chapter will examine the extent to which the Occupy Wall Street Movement does and does not match this vision of a Left Party.

¹⁵⁴ Alberti, Mike. "Business interests lauding the welfare state?" *Remapping the Debate*. 9/7/11. <http://www.remappingdebate.org/article/business-interests-lauding-welfare-state>

CHAPTER 5: OCCUPY WALL STREET

*The after-tax income of the top 1 percent of American households jumped 139 percent, to more than \$700,000, from 1979 to 2001, according to the Congressional Budget Office.*¹⁵⁵

There has been great enthusiasm on the Left for the Occupy Movement.

Almost as soon as the protests began in lower Manhattan, authors like Todd Gitlin saw the movement's potential to shift the national conversation to the Left.

Here, finally, is what labor and the activist left have been waiting for. For two years, Barack Obama got the benefit of the doubt from fervent supporters — I'd bet that many of those in Lower Manhattan during these weeks went door-to-door for him in 2008 — and that support explains why no one occupied Wall Street in 2009. Now, as Jeremy Varon, a historian at the New School, said of Zuccotti Park: "This is the Obama generation declaring their independence from his administration."¹⁵⁶

While many suggest that Occupy Wall Street could be to Obama's Democrats what the Tea Party has been to the Republican Party, this movement has pursued distinctly non-electoral methods. Beginning with a quick history of the Occupy Movement, this chapter will discuss the extent to which this movement is like, and unlike, a Left Party as discussed in the previous chapter.

History

The Right Moment

Americans became widely dissatisfied with the state of the economy, and their financial positions in it, after the 2008 recession, setting the stage for OWS.

¹⁵⁵ Reynolds, Alan. "Income and Wealth." *Greenwood Guides to Business and Economics*. London: Greenwood Press. 2006. Print. 73.

¹⁵⁶ Gitlin, Todd. "The Left Declares Its Independence." *The New York Times*. 10/8/11. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/09/opinion/sunday/occupy-wall-street-and-the-tea-party.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all

By early 2011 it became clear that the economy was not rapidly rebounding, and Americans in large numbers began to despair of a quick recovery. Gallup polls in August and September 2011 leading up to the protests show that Americans' frustration was building. In August it was found that 1) more Americans disapproved than approved of the deal reached by U.S. lawmakers to raise the debt ceiling. 2) economic confidence plunged further following the debt ceiling debate and downgrade of the U.S. credit rating. 3) Americans' satisfaction with the way things were going in the U.S. fell back to 11%, the lowest level since December 2008 and 4) 3 in 10 U.S. workers feared being laid off, nearing the high seen in 2009. By September things were even grimmer, with Americans expressing historic negativity about how the nation was being governed and Americans rating their lives worse than at any time since July 2009.¹⁵⁷ With so much pessimism in the air about the economy and how the government was dealing with major issues like the debt ceiling, anger was bound to boil over.

The recession not only directly affected the majority of Americans, it also made Americans frustrated with Wall Street and the way in which the Federal government “bailed out” certain groups and not others. “In April 2009, shortly after the financial meltdown, [the Pew Research Center found that] many (67%) said that Wall Street cared only about making money for itself.”¹⁵⁸ By May 2011, more Americans were skeptical of their country’s center of banking and

¹⁵⁷ Morales, Lymari. “Gallup.com Year in Review: What we learned in 2011.” *Gallup Polls*. 12/30/11. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/151826/Gallup-com-Year-Review.aspx>

¹⁵⁸ “‘Staunch Conservatives’ Are Wary of Wall Street” *Pew Research Center*. 5/26/11. <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/2003/poll-wall-street-business-financial-crisis>

investment than were supportive of it. “Nearly half of Americans (47%) say that Wall Street hurts the U.S. economy more than it helps, while 38% say it helps more than hurts; 15% offer no opinion.” These findings, from Pew's May 2011 Political Typology survey, are consistent with past surveys showing public ambivalence about Wall Street.¹⁵⁹

Much of the scorn for Wall Street's big banking and investment firms derived from the way in which the Federal government stepped in to save the firms that were “too big to fail” while leaving the little guy high and dry. The Pew Research Center found that substantive majorities of Americans agree on who received the most government support.

The public sees clear winners and losers from the economic policies the government has implemented since the recession of 2008. Most Americans say these policies have helped large banks, large corporations and the wealthy, while providing little or no help for the poor, the middle class or small businesses.

Fully 74% say that government policies over the past two years have done a great deal (53%) or a fair amount (21%) to help large banks and financial institutions. Majorities also say that large corporations (70% great deal/fair amount) and wealthy people (57% great deal/fair amount) have been helped.

By contrast, 68% say government policies have helped small businesses not at all (29%) or not too much (39%); 68% also say middle-class people have received little or no help from these policies. And about the same percentage (64%) says poor people have not been helped.¹⁶⁰

With the economic recovery slow to bring tangible results and such a pervasive sense of frustration, perhaps it was inevitable that some sort of public reaction

¹⁵⁹ “Beyond Red vs. Blue: The Political Typology” *Pew Research Center*. 5/4/11.

<http://www.people-press.org/2011/05/04/beyond-red-vs-blue-the-political-typology/>

¹⁶⁰ “Government Economic Policies Seen as Boon for Banks and Big Business, Not Middle Class or Poor.” *Pew Research Center*. 7/19/10. <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1670/large-majorities-say-govt-stimulus-policies-mostly-helped-banks-financial-institutins-not-middle-class-or-poor>

would be required to make average citizen's feel like they were being heard.

However, no one quite expected the movement that would follow.

The Occupation Heard Round the World

The spark of the Occupy Movement came in the form of a call from Canadian “anti-consumerist” magazine *Adbusters* for an Arab-Spring-style protest of “the disproportionate power of the U.S. corporate elite.”¹⁶¹ The early protests received significant organizational and planning support from a group of international activists, including some from New Yorkers Against Budget Cuts, who had met regularly over the summer at an apartment on 16 Beaver Street. It would be this group that would introduce the idea of the General Assembly from its successful use in Spain.¹⁶² After the first few nights of the occupation of Zuccotti Park, people began to notice, and join. *Time Magazine* described the motley group: “the unemployed and the underemployed, scenesters and community organizers, middle-aged activists and folks who never bothered to vote. The crowds swelled, both online and beneath New York's skyscrapers. Camera crews arrived. Celebrities made pilgrimages. The spark started a fire.”¹⁶³ The movement really began to attract media attention with the arrest of hundreds on the Brooklyn Bridge on October 1st 2011 and a video of penned-in women

¹⁶¹ Scherer, “Taking It to The streets.”

¹⁶² *This Changes Everything: Occupy Wall Street and the 99% Movement*. Ed. Sarah van Gelder and the staff of *Yes! Magazine*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler. 2011. Print.

¹⁶³ Scherer, Michael. “Taking it to the streets.” *Time*. 10/17/11. Print.

getting pepper sprayed.¹⁶⁴ These were real news stories, and they were easy to cover for large news networks based in New York.

As news of the protest began to spread, copycat groups sprang up all over the United States and around the world. A large function of the movement involved spreading information and cultivating awareness about economic inequality. This included publishing “The Occupied Wall Street Journal”¹⁶⁵ and developing the most famous slogan, we are the 99%, meaning that 99% of Americans were being ruled over by 1% of wealthy elites.¹⁶⁶ Supporters from around the country sent in money for food and other supplies to Zuccotti Park. A central website “Occupy Together” was developed to help coordinate efforts across the country and around the world.¹⁶⁷ The Pew Research Center found in October that many Americans were likely to agree with OWS’s analysis of the country’s problems.

Among respondents who are paying very close attention to the story [of the OWS protests], there is significantly more approval than disapproval of the Occupy movement's goals. This may well be an indicator of how a broader slice of the public comes to view the movement, given the climate of opinion about the issues being raised. Three themes in the data suggest that the public may respond positively to the goals of the Occupy movement, but not necessarily its tactics.

First, fundamental views about economic inequality are long standing. Over the past two decades we have found a very large majority of respondents agreeing with the statement that "this is a country in which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer." And, since the late

¹⁶⁴ Devereaux, Ryan. “Wall Street protesters bullied by police.” *Aljazeera English*. 10/7/11. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/10/201110781816308874.html>

¹⁶⁵ Moynihan, Colin. “Occupying, and Now Publishing, Too.” *The New York Times*. 10/1/11. <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/01/occupying-and-now-publishing-too/>

¹⁶⁶ Baker, Al. Colin Moynihan and Sarah Maslin Nir. “Police Arrest More Than 700 Protesters on Brooklyn Bridge.” *The New York Times*. 10/1/11. <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/01/police-arresting-protesters-on-brooklyn-bridge/?hp>

¹⁶⁷ Occupy Together: www.occupytogether.org

1980s, a growing number of citizens have begun to see the U.S. as a nation divided into two groups: the “haves” and the “have nots.”

Secondly, the public has come to see government policies as catering to the rich and powerful. A forthcoming Pew Research Center report will show large majorities saying that while the government does not do enough for both the middle class and poor people, two in three think it does too much for the wealthy. Unlike the Republican Party, President Obama is not seen by most as catering to the rich. However, just 29 percent of respondents think the president is doing more to help the “have-nots” than to help the “haves.”

The third factor is of course the economic climate. Anxiety about economic conditions, and jobs in particular, puts the whole question of fairness front and center for the average American.¹⁶⁸

During the autumn of 2011, the occupations were simply grassroots protests, without any electoral strategy, and began to attract criticism for not spelling out specific demands. The camps were evicted or abandoned by the beginning of 2012 and thus left the protesters without clear direction.

An Appealing Message

Occupy groups have discussed themes of economic injustice and the corporate corruption of our democracy. As predicted in the last chapter, these two themes struck a chord with large numbers of Americans. As of October 17th, the growing movement was receiving promising poll support numbers. A *Time Magazine* article stated that 54% of Americans viewed the protests “favorably” while 22% viewed it “unfavorably” and 23% were “not sure.” In the same poll, the Tea Party received comparably less support with 27%, 33% and 39% respectively. Reporter Andrew Kohut therefore concluded that there was a silent

¹⁶⁸ Kohut, Andrew. “‘Haves’ and ‘Have-Nots’” President of the *Pew Research Center* written for the *New York Times*. 10/27/11. <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/10/18/the-psychology-of-occupy-wall-street/occupy-wall-streets-taps-into-longstanding-concerns?scp=1&sq=kohut&st=cse>

majority supporting the protests. This would suggest that a group based on ideals of economic justice and responsive democracy could garner at least as much support as the Tea Party, as long as it could maintain momentum.¹⁶⁹

OWS started with a strong focus on corporate greed, but soon shifted to a more structural analysis of the deregulated financial sector and loose campaign finance system as the causes of some of the bad behavior of bankers and politicians.¹⁷⁰ Once this appreciation of the causes of the issues at hand was achieved, the protesters could draw on a wealth of information that their concerns about economic inequality were justified.¹⁷¹

Occupy Wall Street has given voice to the rage and frustration that so many millions of Americans share over two closely related issues: the dangerous abuses by the financial and corporate elite and the shocking growth of economic inequality. Today, the top 1 percent of Americans take in 24 percent of all income and own 40 percent of all wealth. Twenty-five years ago those figures were 12 and 33 percent. One in every five American children grows up in poverty. Total student debt is now greater than total credit card debt.¹⁷²

OWS came to strongly support “regulation of the financial industry and reducing economic inequality” to solve America’s economic woes.¹⁷³ This message places the blame for current troubles on loose government oversight of corporations which take advantage of the average citizen. New data on the increased difficulty

¹⁶⁹ Scherer, “Taking It to The streets.”

¹⁷⁰ Lappé, Frances Moore and Anthony Lappé. “Don’t Think of a Pig: Why “Corporate Greed” Is the Wrong Frame.” *Small Planet Institute*. 10/13/11. <http://smallplanet.org/feeds/dont-think-pig-why-corporate-greed-wrong-frame>

¹⁷¹ Blodget, Henry. “What the Wall Street Protesters and So Angry About.” *Business Insider*. 10/11/11. <http://www.businessinsider.com/what-wall-street-protesters-are-so-angry-about-2011-10?op=1>

¹⁷² Czitrom, Daniel. “Taking the Long View of a New Protest.” *Questioning Authority*. 11/1/11. <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/news/stories/5683188>

¹⁷³ Buckley, Cara. “Beyond Seizing Parks, New Paths to Influence” *New York Times*. 11/15/11. 2. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/16/nyregion/occupy-wall-street-organizers-consider-value-of-camps.html?_r=3&hp

of actually moving up the social ranks of American society have bolstered OWS.¹⁷⁴

When the protests were taking off, inequality was on Americans' minds and they wanted the government to do something about it. 70% of people surveyed by *Time* in the middle of October favored raising taxes on those with annual incomes of \$1 million or more, which was one of the most high-profile issues being debated between President Obama and Congress at the time that OWS began.¹⁷⁵ A popular chant "we are the 99%, and so are you," simultaneously describes a situation of economic inequality and also invites a broad range of people to join the movement. The protesters successfully linked spiraling inequality to bad government economic policy made by lassie-faire elites more responsive to corporations than people. The Occupy Movement is like a Left Party in that it seeks economic justice and responsive government.

Going back to chapter three, Occupy Wall Street seems to fit most, if not all, of the lessons from successful, historical, social movements. The movement sticks to a few issues, addresses economic uncertainty and fear with a clear assignment of blame for our current plight and employs some paranoid aspects in calling for a return of a more golden American past. These include themes of

¹⁷⁴ DeParle, Jason. "Harder for Americans to Rise From Lower Rungs." *New York Times*. 1/4/12. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/05/us/harder-for-americans-to-rise-from-lower-rungs.html?src=me&ref=general>

¹⁷⁵ Scherer, "Taking It to The streets."

“fighting bankster greed”¹⁷⁶ which is reminiscent of the Progressives in the 1890’s. On the whole, the protesters believe that the problem is bankers and politicians trading favors. OWS proposes increased regulation and “getting money out of politics” as the solution. The message is easily understood and dispersed.

Building a Coalition: Who is Occupy Wall Street?

Occupy has invited people to join general assemblies, which remind Todd Gitlin of the most progressive groups of the 1970’s New Left who had been turned off by the divisive nature of identity politics.

Disgruntled by big-talking leaders, turned off by celebrity media, the Left of the ’70s developed a horizontal style, according limited authority to their own leaders, who were frequently at pains to deny that they were leaders at all. “Affinity groups” and “working groups” replaced organized factions and parties. Even movements that seemed to require some level of verticality — those with concrete goals, like banning nuclear power and weapons, or opposing apartheid — were mostly leaderless.¹⁷⁷

Dispersed leadership allows the Occupy movement to evolve and spread, a fact that they are very proud of. OWS strives to celebrate diversity and come up with decision making structures that are accountable to its members, in their own version of direct democracy: a general assembly. The Zucotti Park Occupiers became famous for their “human microphone” and emphasis on building consensus, characteristics which were adopted in Occupy demonstration all over the world. “In October, demonstrations in emulation of Occupy Wall Street were held in Europe, Asia and the Americas, drawing crowds in the hundreds and the

¹⁷⁶ Jaffe, Sarah “‘Occupy Wall Street’ Fighting Bankster Greed and the Surveillance State.” *Alternet*. 9/27/11. http://www.alternet.org/story/152554/%27occupy_wall_street%27_fighting_bankster_greed_and_the_surveillance_state?page=entire

¹⁷⁷ Gitlin, “The Left Declares.”

thousands.”¹⁷⁸ The human microphone is a method by which one person can speak to a whole crowd without any mechanized amplification. One person speaks in short phrases while the others repeat it with call and response. This can carry the speech over a whole crowd.

More broadly, all Occupy general assemblies are supposed to follow a consensus building strategy in which everyone gets to speak before a decision is made.¹⁷⁹ This type of process can be slow but keeps the movement together because it addresses challenges and nuances as they arise to make everyone feel included. Consensus strategy reduces the likelihood that there will be divisions in the movement and sounds like what Gitlin refers to as “commonality politics: a frame of understanding that acknowledges “difference” but sees it against the background of what is not different, what is shared among groups.”¹⁸⁰ The 99%, as a unit of class/power analysis provides a near-universal identity which invites almost anyone to join. These procedural strategies are good steps in the direction of direct democracy.

Some have argued that the 99% slogan seeks to unite too broad a spectrum of socioeconomic class interests. In fact, it actually works well in the American case, because such a large number of Americans identify as part of the middle class. The 99% actually gives a new legitimacy to the demands of the poor in that

¹⁷⁸ “Times Topic: Occupy Wall Street.” *New York Times*. Updated 1/11/12.

http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/o/occupy_wall_street/index.html?scp=1&sq=labor%20occupy&st=cse

¹⁷⁹ “Consensus (Direct Democracy @ Occupy Wall Street).” *You Tube*. 10/16/11. Web.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dtD8RnGaRQ>

¹⁸⁰ Gitlin, “The Left, lost.”

it places them on an equal theoretical footing with the needs of the middle class in a way that bridges the philosophical divide that has grown up in American politics between the needs of the middle class and everyone else since the welfare debates of the 1990s.

Unlike the Tea Party, which loves hierarchy, Gitlin says that OWS is rallied by a form of “anarchism, for the most part, [which] is not so much a theory of the absence of government, but a theory of self-organization, or direct democracy, as government.”¹⁸¹ Sick of a government that they feel is not responsive to the interests of average citizens, OWS created spaces for direct feedback and decision making processes. This can definitely be seen as a response to Americans’ historically low approval of their government. In this way, OWS evokes a “Take Back America” ethos when talking about government which is similar to the Tea Party.¹⁸²

The Occupy protesters seek to be very inclusive, as their 99% idea suggests. The group is demographically diverse and also brings a range of policy priorities to the discussion. *Time Magazine* described them as “a motley collection of punks, anarchists, socialists, hackers, liberals and artists.”¹⁸³ As a whole the various Occupations have used the consensus strategy to make sure that diverse viewpoints are heard, especially when composing important documents. The following excerpt was written by Hena Ashraf, an independent filmmaker based

¹⁸¹ Gitlin, “The Left Declares.”

¹⁸² Gitlin, “The Left Declares.”

¹⁸³ Scherer, “Taking It to The Streets.”

in New York, on September 30th 2011 and discusses her personal experience of helping make the “The Declaration of the Occupation of New York City” truly representative of the 99%.

The general assembly read the document together, line by line. The GA has grown a lot in the past few days and has noticeably (finally?) gotten slightly more diverse. For me, reading the document together was a very powerful and moving moment, and I’ve never seen anything like it. Immediately after this I turned around and joined my friends Thanu and Sonny, who were with Manissa and Natasha. They had all just come back from the first local meeting for South Asians for Justice.

Without knowing we had spontaneously formed a bloc of South Asians present at the General Assembly...I, Thanu, Sonny, Manissa, and Natasha felt that some language needed to be urgently changed. Please keep in mind that this document is a living, working document, and is unpublished, and is being changed as I type with the (as they are called) “friendly amendments” that were proposed. The line was: “As one people, formerly divided by the color of our skin, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or lack thereof, political party and cultural background, we acknowledge the reality: that there is only one race, the human race, and our survival requires the cooperation of its members...”

The first major concern amongst us was that the phrase “formerly divided by” was unrealistic, and erased histories of oppression that marginalized communities have suffered. The second concern was that the “human race” language also felt very out of touch.

We debated amongst ourselves whether to speak up about this. As I mentioned, individual people were airing their concerns about the document, even though the facilitators had requested to email any changes to them, or to speak to them later. I felt though, that our thoughts needed to be shared with the general assembly, and not just to a few over email. I was urged by our impromptu bloc to be the one to speak up. So I did...

The facilitators asked if our issue was an ethical concern – if it was, then it would have to be addressed. I said, yes it was, meaning, we were blocking the document in order for this ethical concern to be addressed. Manissa then read out what we felt the change should be to the phrase, after thanking the crowd and facilitators for working with us. The change was instead of “formerly divided by” to have it be “despite” or “despite the divisions of...etc”. The change was accepted by the general assembly.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Ashraf, Hena. “Brown Power at Occupy Wall Street! 9/29/11.” *HenaAshraf.com*.
<http://henaashraf.com/2011/09/30/brown-power-at-occupy-wall-street/>

Ashraf found that the GA in Zucotti Park was willing to listen to her concerns but required some education to understand where she was coming from. The movement as whole has become generally more diverse over time and hopefully all of these assemblies have learned lessons from member of minority groups.

Ashraf summarized:

The protestors at Occupy Wall Street have been saying that there will be efforts to reach out to people of colour, to have communities of colour engage and be a part of the protests, to help create real change – because, let’s face it, the protests have been very white and people of colour need to be present, and need to speak up. Well, that’s exactly what we were doing, and I realized that we were helping to make that change happen.¹⁸⁵

In the case of Occupy Boston, similar conversations about recognizing histories of oppression lead to the document: “Statement of Commitment to Challenge Oppression” which states that “We acknowledge that it is important to honor these values in order to effectively challenge oppression and build a more just and equitable community” and provides facilitation guidelines for making Occupy Boston welcoming to people of all backgrounds.¹⁸⁶ This commitment to end systemic inequality without erasing the past seems to provide a good answer to the Gitlin-Kelley debate about using universalism as an organizing principle for the Left.

Money and Media

The Occupy Movement is extremely grassroots, in a way that the Tea Party can only marvel at, with no corporate funding or support. Support from

¹⁸⁵ Ashraf, “Brown Power.”

¹⁸⁶ “Occupy Boston Commits to Anti-Oppression.” *Occupy Boston*. 3/7/12.

<http://www.occupyboston.org/2012/03/07/occupy-boston-commits-anti-oppression/>

organized labor, starting after about its first month of existence, has been an important source of numbers and organizing power, which may indicate that some unions are willing to embrace a broader social-justice platform, like the one discussed in conjunction with a Left Party in chapter four.¹⁸⁷ Slogans of solidarity and the 99% fit very well with organized labor. In addition, OWS has also reached out to social justice groups¹⁸⁸ and environmentalists. OWS brings together a broad coalition, but has focused on the fundamental idea that the current relationship between government and economic elites is detrimental to average Americans and is therefore not sustainable.

Occupy groups are very similar to the potential Left Party discussed earlier in that they cannot expect help from corporate backers. Just like a Left Party, social media is essential for Occupy groups to spread facts and information about economic inequality and raise consciousness. OWS also uses an extensive amount of online communication to organize events and spread information about economic inequality and the relationship between money and politics. Since young people play such a large role in the Occupy Movement, this heavy use of internet communication is logical. Self-producing media coverage has also been very important to the movement because mainstream media has not been interested in covering them. Only the largest protests, like the November 17 Day of Action, ever made it to the evening network news broadcasts.

¹⁸⁷ Greenhouse, Steven. "Occupy Movement Inspires Unions to Embrace Bold Tactics." *New York Times*. 11/8/11. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/09/business/occupy-movement-inspires-unions-to-embrace-bold-tactics.html?pagewanted=all>

¹⁸⁸ Galindez, Scott. "Black Churches to Energize Occupy." *Reader Supported News*. 1/5/12. <http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/441-occupy/9281-black-churches-to-energize-occupy>

The physical occupation of spaces garnered publicity for the movement initially, especially when clashes with police provided a news story which kept the movement in the headlines. Potential protesters also could meet up at the camps. However, now that the encampments have been evicted, Occupy groups have lost a valuable media storyline and have lost a lot of the visibility they once enjoyed. There has been much debate since the evictions of the campsites about how the movement will go on.

Movement Strategy vs. Electoral Strategy

After establishing a certain minimum number of participants during the fall, OWS still has not taken its movement politics to the next level of electoral politics, the way the Tea Party's did. If OWS wishes to become a Left Party, then it must adopt the Tea Party's party-within-a-party approach to get its own influence and representatives. Although they have successfully increased discourse about economic inequality, OWS's movement strategy seems to have reached its limits of effectiveness.

How much influence can it have?

So far, the Occupiers have achieved some influence over national discourse by raising awareness about economic inequality and corporate influence in government, however that influence seems to be slipping. Their lexicon, although veiled, even made it into the President's rhetoric. "At the State of the Union address on January 24, President Obama spoke the language of the 99%, demanding a tax increase for millionaires and vowing to solve the problem of

widening income inequality.”¹⁸⁹ OWS has so far been most effective in two areas that cannot be precisely measured: political discourse of policy possibilities and citizen awareness of economic inequality. “As Brian Stelter wrote on Dec. 1, the phrase “the 99 percent” has stretched far beyond Occupy Wall Street protest signs to become an ingrained part of the cultural lexicon...The slogan was first chanted and blogged about in mid-September in New York and has become a national shorthand for the income disparity.”¹⁹⁰ The 99% vs. 1% idea has been widely circulated now, coming up in all sorts of news outlets. *The New York Times* even wrote an article investigating who is actually in the 1% and found that the nation’s top income earners were very familiar with the protests and their slogan. One such 1%-er responded to questions about his position in the country’s economic elite by asking: “It’s not very popular to be in the 1 percent these days, is it?”¹⁹¹ OWS has infiltrated the national conversation surrounding economic inequality.

Buckley reported in November that:

Union officials said the movement was a factor last week when Ohio residents voted overwhelmingly to repeal a state law limiting the collective bargaining rights of public workers. “They helped define what it was that was going on, and gave people a sense that you can do something about it,” said Damon Silvers, the policy director of the A.F.L.-C.I.O. Some Republicans, including presidential candidates, have sought to portray Occupy Wall Street protesters as a band of far-left

¹⁸⁹ Sacks, Jennifer. “#Occupied: Reports From the Front Lines.” *The Occupied Wall Street Journal*. 1/31/12. <http://occupiedmedia.us/2012/01/occupied-2/>

¹⁹⁰ Stelter, Brian. “The Spreading 99%.” *The New York Times*. 11/30/11.

http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2011/12/13/us/occupy_readerphotos.html

¹⁹¹ Dewan, Shaila and Robert Gebeloff. “Among the Wealthiest 1 Percent, Many Variations.” *The New York Times* 1/14/12. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/15/business/the-1-percent-paint-a-more-nuanced-portrait-of-the-rich.html>

rabble-rousers. All of which indicates that the protesters' message has trickled up, despite their tendency to reject the major political parties.¹⁹²

Similarly to the Tea Party in its early stages, OWS has had most of its success with subtly shaping how the nation thinks and talks about its concerns, but discussions of inequality have faded. OWS's aversion to electoral politics means that it has had little measurable impact on actual policy decisions.

Less certain is the movement's impact on party politics. The protests took off just as Mr. Obama and Congressional Democrats began trying to push Republicans to agree to a so-called millionaire's tax. Some Democrats cautiously embraced the movement for raising the issue of income inequality, and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee started a petition drive that it called "100,000 Strong Standing With Occupy Wall Street."¹⁹³

Now the Occupiers need to adopt an electoral strategy if they seek to shake up the Democrats and have a lasting impact similar to that of the Tea Party. Some in the movement see adopting an electoral strategy as giving into a corrupt system, but remaining too aloof will also not achieve any of OWS's goals. The Occupy Movement had a lot of potential to impact national discourse surrounding inequality when it started last fall, but its profile has fallen precipitously over the course of the winter since the encampments could not be maintained. Indeed, many Americans are unaware that Occupy groups do still meet around the country as an unfortunate side effect of relying on social media for publicity. If a topic is new and exciting, social media can spread it quickly, even to the point where the television and newspaper media covers the spread of the story as a story itself.

¹⁹² Buckley, Cara. "Beyond Seizing Parks, New Paths to Influence." *The New York Times*. 11/15/11. 2. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/16/nyregion/occupy-wall-street-organizers-consider-value-of-camps.html?pagewanted=2&_r=1&hp

¹⁹³ Buckley, "Beyond Seizing Parks," 2.

However, social media cannot maintain momentum unless users decide to follow the posts of a certain group. Once the initial buzz is gone, it is hard for groups to use social media to attract new members and spread ideas into new social circles.

Moving Forward: Why OWS Needs Concrete Demands

All over the country, Occupiers have used the winter to regroup indoors and plan what they hope will be “The 99% American Spring” of renewed protest, including a general strike on May 1st. If the planned demonstrations are significantly smaller than the original protests in the fall then it will be clear that the movement is losing momentum. Galston warns that protests without concrete proposals will only lose public support.

‘They’ve gotten the people’s attention, and now they have to say something more specific,’ said William A. Galston, a senior fellow and an expert on political strategy at the Brookings Institution in Washington. ‘Average Americans want solutions, not demonstrations, and their patience for the latter won’t last indefinitely.’¹⁹⁴

Many feel that the group needs to push for specific demands, but opponents of this option within the movement fear that will reduce the scope of the movement.

“The push for demands has generated a lot of controversy; there are ardent supporters and there are ardent opponents,” said Bill Dobbs, a member of the OWS’s public relations working group.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Eckholm, Erik. “Occupy Movement Regroups, Preparing for Its Next Phase.” *The New York Times*. 2/11/12. 1. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/12/us/occupy-movement-regroups-laying-plans-for-the-next-phase.html?_r=2&hp

¹⁹⁵ Leitsinger, Miranda. “To demand or not to demand? That is the 'Occupy' question.” *MSNBC*. 11/17/2011. http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/45260610/ns/us_news-life/t/demand-or-not-demand-occupy-question/

There has been no shortage of suggestions about demands they could make. Sticking to the themes of a Left Party as described in the last chapter, OWS should adopt several key demands in the areas of economic justice and responsive democracy. The demands surrounding economic justice will be framed as the pursuit of equality and security for every American. Concretely this means several things. In the realm of government services, Occupy groups should stand up for whatever programs or services are most important to their members, for example the protests of Occupy Boston surrounded proposed cuts to public transportation. The tax system will also certainly have to be reformed, including a more progressive income tax, closing of corporate tax loopholes and, as Nicholas Christof suggests, a small financial transactions tax to cut down on speculative trading.¹⁹⁶ These changes will all increase the vertical equity of the tax system and simultaneously provide revenue for the maintenance of social programs. There are many other specific policies which Occupy groups could support. African American pastors participating in the “Occupy the Dream” protests suggested “expanding Pell Grants” and “an immediate moratorium on foreclosures.”¹⁹⁷ All of these demands focus on issues of justice for average citizens while providing an alternative to the Tea Party’s cut-taxes-and-spending approach to balancing the budget.

¹⁹⁶ Kristof, Nicholas. “Opinion: Advice for the Wall Street Protesters.” *The New York Times*. Video. <http://video.nytimes.com/video/2011/10/02/opinion/100000001084589/advice-for-the-wall-street-protesters.html>

¹⁹⁷ Zeese, Kevin. “Occupy the Dream Pastors Spell Out Demands.” *October2011.com*. 1/17/12. <http://october2011.org/blogs/kevin-zeese/occupy-dream-pastors-spell-out-demands>

For responsive government, many speak of campaign finance reform as essential in creating more political accountability. The number one change that OWS should propose on this front is public financing of elections. The only way to truly get money out of politics is to overhaul the whole campaign finance system, not just patch up small parts of it. As Ms. Rainey, who is 85 and was pepper-sprayed by the police in November, said: “We’ve got to build a movement that will replace the type of government we have now.”¹⁹⁸ Occupiers would probably not be able to achieve this huge change quickly, if at all. However, it could radically shift the national discourse about government responsiveness and shake up the “government is the problem” narrative. It cannot be known where such an enlivened discussion might lead. While members of the Occupy Movement have been debating the kind of issues that a Left Party would lend itself to, it has avoided concerted engagement with electoral politics, to its detriment.

¹⁹⁸ Eckholm, Erik. “Occupy Movement Regroups, Preparing for Its Next Phase.” *The New York Times*. 2/11/12. 1. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/12/us/occupy-movement-regroups-laying-plans-for-the-next-phase.html?_r=2&hp

CONCLUSION: OCCUPY WALL STREET MUST LEARN FROM THE TEA PARTY

The big question for progressives ever since the New Left has been: Why can't popular opinion, which generally favors more generous social welfare programs and more progressive taxation, be transformed into victory at the polls? The answer appears to be two-fold. Firstly, public dissatisfaction with the status quo was not strong enough, particularly during the booming 1990s, to demand a change. Second, progressive elements of the Democratic Party were frustratingly taken for granted. The Tea Party is an expression of similar frustration on the Right, mixed with a brilliant electoral strategy that bestows influence unheard of for regular third parties in the American system. This thesis has drawn a portrait of a new Left Party, with all of the fundamental factors required for success comparable to what the Tea Party has achieved. The extent to which OWS fits this model has also been examined.

An Argument for an Electoral Strategy

The Left Party description fits the Occupy Movement nicely except that OWS has heretofore refused to engage with an important source of political power in our democracy: electoral politics. Of course the electoral system is imperfect, but it is what we have, and if OWS wants to really change how things are done it cannot remain detached. As Piven and Cloward explain, once a movement develops national influence it can expect to be first ignored and then

repressed as politicians try to manage it. In the past, if a movement was very strong it could hope to win some concessions from the powers that be, at the price of being reintegrated into the two-party framework, where it would become powerless.¹⁹⁹ With the advent of the Tea Party's strategy movements no longer need to give up their independence when working within the electoral system. The Tea Party exerts considerable influence within the Republican Party while retaining significant autonomy and remaining committed to its own principles. Engaging with electoral politics has not allowed the Tea Party to acquire everything that it wants, but it has won many more battles this way than it would have by only protesting on the sidelines.

The goal of the party-within-a-party strategy is not to take over outright a major party, but simply to gain victories on the certain issues that are most important to the group's members by changing the larger party's priorities and national discourse. This is why I encourage OWS to use the electoral strategy described for a Left Party, not with the unrealistic goal of entirely remaking our society and government, but with the more modest hope of changing those things that modern progressives think are most imperative: economic inequality and unresponsive government. To my mind, OWS can adopt demands and achieve some of them, or it can simply fizzle and realize no tangible goals.

OWS has experienced being both ignored and repressed, but does not seem to have been powerful enough to wring any concrete political or economic

¹⁹⁹ Piven and Cloward, 28.

concessions out of the powers that be. Occupiers can learn from the Tea Party how to strike a balance between grassroots organizing, which has been the basis for OWS, and a savvy electoral strategy, which actually influences power players. The leaderless quality of the Tea Party allows it to thwart attempts by many politicians to co-opt the movement while simultaneously integrating itself into two-party politics such that it can win political victories for its members. This could be copied by OWS, with some alterations due to their less abundant financial backers and the more diverse demographics of its members.

The time is now for a Left Party to shape the future of the nation. The great recession destabilized American's contentment with the political and economic status quo such that the upcoming presidential election provides the perfect moment to pull the Democratic Party to the Left. Piven and Cloward explain that an unstable political landscape gives a movement increased leverage.²⁰⁰ An Occupy Party can also definitely use the Tea Party's strategy on the 2012 Congressional contests.

The Occupy Movement has an appealing message that could attract a large following, but the longer it waits to develop concrete demands and delve into electoral politics, the more it loses momentum. Many people are not even aware that it still exists, since the camps were evicted and the national chapters have been reduced to small groups of core members. OWS can either adopt a Left

²⁰⁰ Piven and Cloward, 29.

Party electoral strategy and win some victories, or continue in its current state and simply sputter out.

If it really wants to generate change, the Occupy Movement must get into the business of electoral politics, where the power to make change stems from. Once an Occupy Party appears to be exerting real influence across the country and in Washington, it would be better able to maintain its momentum. Nothing fuels a movement like tangible results. OWS must add a savvy electoral strategy to its populist protests in order to become a strong and influential counterpart to the Tea Party.

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