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Bernie Sanders and the Socialist Vision for America

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Abstract

Senator Bernie Sanders is an outsider in American politics as he does not endorse capitalism because he deems it a fundamentally flawed economic system that generates massive income and wealth inequality. Instead, Sanders advocates socialism and is an admirer of Scandinavian social democracy and Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal as they symbolize, from his point of view, an economic system in which every group of society can live a decent life based on the principles of social equality. Sanders has twice attempted to win the Democratic Party's nomination for president in the effort to realize his vision of a United States that guarantees every American economic rights that would create a more just and equitable society. Despite his failure to achieve these aims, Sanders has proven that socialist policies are popular in a country that has historically never accepted the ideology and has given his potential successors a strategy that could generate future electoral success on the national level.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

In April 2015, Senator Bernie Sanders, representing the state of Vermont as an independent in the United States Senate, entered the 2016 United States presidential election as a self-declared democratic socialist who was challenging the Democratic Party establishment in a bid to win the party's nomination for president. Sanders ran a campaign that involved confronting the country's economic elite, and focused on a set of issues - such as income and wealth inequality, trade, banking, health care – that the political establishment “had swept under the rug for far too long,”¹ according to the Senator. Sanders expressed that the aim of the campaign was not simply about electing him president of the United States but also about “transforming the country and enabling a “political revolution”² in which millions of ordinary Americans would take part in the political process in order to create significant structural changes in the American political and economic system to the benefit of the masses.³ Sanders ultimately lost the Democratic nomination for president to Hillary Clinton in June 2016, and subsequently endorsed Clinton the following month.⁴ Nonetheless, the senator had run an impressive campaign as he came in second in the primaries, winning 22 states and receiving over 13 million votes, and 1,846 delegates.⁵ In February 2019, Sanders announced once more that he was running for president and would again attempt to win the Democratic Party's nomination in the 2020 United States presidential election.⁶ Similar to four years earlier, Sanders came in second in the primaries after losing to Joe Biden, whom he endorsed shortly after suspending his campaign in April 2020.⁷ In his speech at the 2020 Democratic National Convention Sanders, despite his defeat, asserted that despite the fact that his presidential campaign had ended “our movement continues and is getting

¹ Bernie Sanders, *Our Revolution: A Future to Believe in* (London, 2017), pp. 1-2.

² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 181-182.

⁵ Bernie Sanders, *Where We Go From Here: Two Years in the Resistance* (London, 2018), pp. 9-10.

⁶ Bernie Sanders, “I’m Running For President”: (*YouTube*, website, published 19.02.2019). Accessed 15.12.2020 from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7DRwz0cAt0&ab_channel=CBSThisMorning

⁷ C-SPAN, “Sen. Bernie Sanders Endorses Joe Biden”: (*YouTube*, website, published 13.04.2020). Accessed 16.12.2020 from:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdfP6UZ9EoE&ab_channel=TheLateShowwithStephenColbert

stronger every day”⁸ as many of the proposals he and his supporters had fought for were now popular among the American people, according to the Senator.⁹

1.2. Aims and Scope

The objective of this thesis is to comprehend who Senator Sanders is and what he wants to achieve. At center of this analysis is the ideology of democratic socialism that Sanders advocates and the Senator’s profound differences with the Democratic Party on an ideological and political level. This entails examining what democratic socialism signifies and how it differs from the neoliberal ideology that the Democratic Party primarily embodies. An important aspect of this analysis is to examine why the Democratic Party gradually abandoned the New Deal coalition of the 1930s in favor of neoliberalism during the last decades of the twentieth century. This is essential in order to comprehend not only the differences between Sanders and the Democrats but also to understand why Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal serves as a very important inspiration to Sanders.¹⁰ Another factor that is significant in this context is Sanders’s admiration for the Scandinavian nations of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark as he has expressed support for the social democratic systems that these countries established during the twentieth century.¹¹ These two major factors – the New Deal and social democratic principles – require considerable examination and thus they constitute a significant part of the thesis. A final significant element is the Democratic Party’s opposition to Sanders’s policies and the obstacles within the party that hinder Sanders from achieving his aims. This is relevant in order to determine the legacy that Sanders leaves behind following his two presidential campaigns.

I have developed the following research question:

What makes Sanders a singular politician and what is his vision for the United States?

⁸ C-SPAN, “Senator Bernie Sanders complete remarks at the 2020 Democratic National Convention”: (*YouTube*, website, published 18.08.2020). Accessed 20.12.2020 from:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kil5Bgg4cac&ab_channel=C-SPAN (n.p.)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Georgetown University, “Sen. Sanders Speaks at Georgetown”: (*YouTube*, website, published 24.11.2015). Accessed 19.12.2020 from:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9OP0gfmPgA&ab_channel=GeorgetownUniversity

¹¹ ABC News, “Sen. Bernie Sanders Says U.S. Should Look More Like Scandinavia”: (*YouTube*, website, published 03.05.2015). Accessed 17.12.2020 from:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cz0u2FH5Bnk&ab_channel=ABCNews

1.3. Theory

In order to determine who Sanders is and what he represents, I will use the “liberal tradition” as primarily described by Richard Hofstadter and Louis Hartz in *The American Political Tradition* and *The Liberal Tradition*, respectively. The liberal tradition is based on the argument that the true political tradition in the United States, according to Hartz, is that of capitalism and democracy. As the European peasantries, proletariats, and aristocracies did not exist in American society as it evolved through the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian stages, every American – including the industrial laborer – had the mindset of an autonomous entrepreneur. Hartz explains that “the mass of the people, in other words, are bound to be capitalistic, and capitalism, with its spirit disseminated widely, is bound to be democratic”.¹² Socialism, according to Hartz, was not present in America. He argues that since the United States has lacked a “feudal tradition”¹³, due to its separation from Europe, the country has additionally lacked a “socialist tradition”.¹⁴ All this is due to the United States not having a tradition of revolution because of the concept of being “born equal”¹⁵ is so fundamental to the country’s origins, and thus the United States additionally lacks a tradition of reaction.¹⁶ Hofstadter argues the same as Hartz, stating that the fervor of the American political struggles has frequently been deceptive. Instead, the dominant parties have invariably adhered to the core ideals of “property and enterprise”.¹⁷ Despite the disputes regarding distinct issues, the dominant “political traditions have shared a belief in the rights of property, the philosophy of economic individualism, the value of competition; they have accepted the economic virtues of capitalist culture as necessary qualities of man”,¹⁸ according to Hofstadter. The divinity of private property, the claim of the individual in terms of disposing of and investing it, the significance of opportunity, and the pure development of self-interest and self-assertion, within wide legal boundaries, “into a beneficent social order have been staple tenets of the central faith in American political ideologies”.¹⁹ Furthermore, the task

¹² Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* (New York, 1991 edition), p. 89.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.6.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.5.

¹⁶ *Ibid*. p.5.

¹⁷ Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York, 1989 edition), pp. xxxvi.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. xxxvii.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. xxxvii.

of politics, according to this tenet, is to defend this universe of competition, to assist it occasionally, to repair its random offenses, but not to impair it with a program for “common collective action”.²⁰

1.4. Outline

Chapter 2 explains the differences between Sanders and the Democratic Party. The chapter starts with an overview of the New Deal coalition, how the Democratic Party eventually abandoned it during the presidency of Bill Clinton and instead adopted neoliberalism. The second half of the chapter explains Sanders’s ideological beliefs and how democratic socialism relates to social democracy and the New Deal.

Chapter 3 delves deeper into the social democratic principles that Sanders supports. The chapter begins by examining social democracy in greater detail and how the New Deal incorporated social democratic principles while also realizing some of the progressive movement’s objectives. The second half of the chapter explains how Sanders is similar and yet different to Senator Elizabeth Warren as the two of them share similar policies but represent different ideologies.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of Sanders’s legacy. The chapter explains the future prospects for socialism in America, why a socialist majority within the American electorate is necessary to achieve Sanders’s aims, and how obstacles within the Democratic Party pose a significant challenge to accomplishing those aims.

The Conclusion presents a summation and some final remarks on this thesis.

²⁰ Ibid, p. xxxvii.

2. Sanders and Neoliberalism

Senator Sanders attempted twice to win the Democratic Party nomination for president and an important part of his campaigns was his ideological opposition to the Democratic establishment. To understand the differences that constitute this ideological opposition requires an examination of the Democratic Party's history, the evolution of its core values, and a study Sanders's own political principles. I start with explaining the New Deal coalition of the 1930s, and why the Democrats ultimately abandoned it and instead adopted neoliberalism during the presidency of Bill Clinton in the 1990s. In the next section, I explain why Sanders opposes the party's neoliberal realignment, and how democratic socialism is closely linked to social democratic principles and the unrealized Second Bill of Rights proposed by President Roosevelt in 1944. I end the chapter with some final remarks concerning the complex relationship between Sanders and the Democratic Party.

2.1. The Democratic Party and Neoliberalism

2.1.1. Roosevelt and the New Deal

From the 1930s up until the late 1960s, the Democratic Party was centered around the New Deal coalition under President Roosevelt - with its foundation of organized labor as well as its penchant to view matters from the perspective of social class.²¹ Hofstadter interprets the first New Deal as a program that had something for every faction of the economy. Farmers received the AAA – an agency that resulted in increased farm prices and a restoration of farm income; business received another agency - the NRA – which involved business receiving state sanction “for sweeping price agreements and production quotas”²² and would in return accept wage clauses that improved the arrangement for numerous laborers who were among the poorest paid; labor received wage-and-hour arrangements as well as the collective bargaining assurance; and those unemployed received an assortment of relief measures.²³ The author writes that the 1935 Wagner Act – which established the Labour Relations Board with a solid pledge to collective bargaining and contributed to unions growing and flourishing – constituted the core of the second New Deal and was part of Roosevelt's alliance with the political left and his

²¹ Frank, *Listen, Liberal*, p. 44.

²² Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, pp. 432-433.

²³ *Ibid*, pp. 433-434.

rapprochement with labor, even though he seemingly never showed any great interest for it. Hofstadter argues that Roosevelt was more concerned with maintaining a strong democracy and avert autocracy due to his sympathies for “the great masses of the people”²⁴, which entailed curbing the power of big business. The New Deal – both the first and the second – had been created for a capitalistic economy, as Roosevelt needed to restore, in Hofstadter’s words, the “health of capitalism”²⁵ in order to achieve his objectives of prosperity and distributive justice. The New Deal had been so successful that it produced the principle “that the entire community through the agency of the federal government has some responsibility for mass welfare”²⁶, even though Roosevelt was not successful in achieving distributive justice as well as “sound, stable prosperity”.²⁷ Moreover, Hofstadter writes that Roosevelt perceived the structure of political and economic power from an extensive social context. The former president viewed private power as a threat to the democratic state as concentrated private power would significantly impair the efficiency of private enterprise. Roosevelt believed that private enterprise would cease to be free enterprise and that the power of the few either had to be distributed among the masses or assigned to the public and the democratically elected government. However, Hofstadter asserts that even though Roosevelt’s argument bordered on socialism the president’s proposal was not socialist as he did not attempt to dissolve big business.²⁸ Although Roosevelt spoke of guaranteeing extensive welfare and security by producing an economic bill of rights (more on that in section 1.2.3.), Hofstadter emphasizes that the president’s belief in full production and full employment was based on his faith in private enterprise and that he deemed government intervention useful to support free enterprise.²⁹

2.1.2. The Rejection of the New Deal

From the late 1960s until the early 1990s, the Democratic Party started believing that the New Deal coalition was no longer viable in terms of achieving electoral success. Thomas Frank writes that, from the perspective of the Democrats, the New Deal during the early 1970s was rapidly becoming insignificant as the 1930s and the Great Depression were seen as a period of history

²⁴ Ibid, pp. 438-439.

²⁵ Ibid. pp. 439-440.

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 440-441.

²⁷ Ibid. P. 442.

²⁸ Ibid, pp. 441-443.

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 448-449.

that was not relevant for the future of the Party. Instead, the future of the party would be found in the young, educated professionals who had a more affluent background. At the time, US prosperity seemed everlasting, and old economic class issues appeared outdated. These new educated voters were not interested in the rights of laborers or the minimum wage, but rather more abstract issues concerning authenticity and personal fulfillment. Laborers, the group that constituted the foundation of the New Deal coalition, were even viewed as the adversary to the party due to their supposed opposition to a world that was changing as jobs were becoming obsolete. Instead, the future belonged to white-collar workers, the college-educated faction. Frank writes that because the Democrats chose to reject working people's organizations they also rejected working people's issues, which resulted in future generations of American citizens living in a community that resembled the Gilded Age as opposed to the prosperous 1960s.³⁰ What this realignment of the Democratic Party signified was "the erasure of economic egalitarianism from American politics",³¹ according to Frank.

As Democratic presidential candidates lost successive elections during the 1980s, the country's mainstream political commentators deemed the failure to be the result of the New Deal's exhaustion and irrelevance – even though these candidates had dissociated themselves from the New Deal. These sentiments were reiterated by the new, younger generation of Democrats, who believed that labor unions had become a political liability and that industrial society belonged in the past. The faction within the Democratic Party that eventually became the dominant force during the early 1990s was the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC). The organization believed that the Democratic Party's future was dependent on moving the party to the center of the political spectrum, which entailed adopting certain free-market policies of the Republican Party, following successive electoral defeats in the 1980s presidential elections. Frank describes the DLC's success as due to it managing the inconsistencies that it espoused: it was a frank pro-business organization that was cordial with lobbyists and funded by corporate benefactors and yet it declared itself to be as a champion of the working class. The ideology that the DLC embraced was neoliberalism.³²

³⁰ Frank, *Listen, Liberal*, pp. 44-51.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 51.

³² *Ibid*, pp. 55-57.

2.1.3. Neoliberalism in Theory

Neoliberalism, as described by Paul Michael Garrett, entails the state furnishing an apparatus with the basic objective to expedite conditions for favorable capital aggregation on behalf of both national and international capital. Accordingly, remaking the state apparatus entails a significant change in government assurances from protecting the welfare of citizens to expediting the circulation of capital, which is achieved by a depoliticized discourse of competitiveness, balanced budgets, and deficits. Garrett rejects the belief that neoliberalism advocates reducing the state in favor of the market taking over society, and instead argues that the state is remade to become more attentive and active in advocating the market economy. From this perspective, an unemployed individual should not be viewed as a social victim but rather as a laborer in transit amid unprofitable venture and more profitable venture. Furthermore, the underlying objective of neoliberalism is to reestablish class authority by extensive transfers of income to the wealthiest factions in society. Altogether, the main essential accomplishment of neoliberalism has been to redistribute, as opposed to produce, wealth and income. An additional element of the neoliberal ideology is the goal of infusing new types of uncertainty into people's working lives.

Unemployment is a significant factor in this context as it forces the working class to tolerate a reduced wage rate and substandard terms and mediocre environment for employment. Another aspect of strengthening capitalism at the expense of the working class is accumulation by dispossession, which entails revoking essential assurances negotiated with trade unions in regard to salaries as well as the terms and conditions of employment. The basic goal is to establish a favorable business climate and accordingly optimize the environment for capital accumulation regardless of the fallout for employment or social well-being. A large part of welfare reform and the broader reconstruction of welfare is also based on the neoliberal mindset. Therefore, the neoliberal logic goes further than the market as it extends and disseminates market principles to every institution and social action so that people are molded as logical, entrepreneurial actors who have ethical authority that is dictated by their ability for independence and self-care.³³

Neoliberalism as described by Garrett fits with Hartz and Hofstadter's liberal tradition argument as both entail a belief in capitalism being the optimal economic system. Thus, the Democratic Party's embrace of neoliberalism signifies an acknowledgement that support of

³³ Paul Michael Garrett, "What are we talking about when we talk about 'neoliberalism'", *European Journal of Social Work*, 22 (2019).

capitalism is fundamental to the party's identity. Indeed, the Democrats were capitalist innovators - Bill Clinton was the chairperson of the DLC and thus attained nationwide prominence in the years before he was elected president. Clinton and the DLC were part of the New Democrat faction within the Democratic Party that believed in the following concept: change in the form of globalization, a world without economic borders, was upon the United States, which made American manual labor redundant. Thus, the solution to the economic challenges that the U.S. was facing would be education – what you could learn was the key to earning high wages and competing in global markets. Frank argues that this is at the core of Bill Clinton and the New Democrats' ideology: "Only individual self-improvement is capable of lifting you up – not collective action, not politics, not changing how the economy is structured. Americans can only succeed by winning the market's favor."³⁴

2.1.4. The Clinton Presidency

Under President Clinton, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was passed in 1993 based on the president's argument that it would remove trade barriers and create hundreds of thousands of new jobs in America. However, Frank writes that removing tariffs was not the main objective of the agreement but rather to "make it safe for American firms to invest in Mexico – meaning, to move factories and jobs there without the fear of expropriation and then to import those factories' products back into the U.S."³⁵ The agreement was supposed to stimulate American exports to Mexico and augment employment in the United States but the opposite occurred.³⁶ According to Robert E. Scott in a 2010 study, over 680 000 American jobs have been displaced due to NAFTA³⁷, and Frank argues that the accord provided one class – employers – a significant advantage over another – employees – as the former frequently intimidate to relocate their factories to Mexico if the latter organize.³⁸

Clinton would also prove to be tough on crime with the 1994 Crime Bill that resulted in the establishment of numerous new prisons, the creation of over a hundred new compulsory minimum sentences, the right of prosecutors to arraign thirteen-year-olds as adults in certain

³⁴ Frank, *Listen, Liberal*, pp. 66-68.

³⁵ Ibid, pp. 86-87.

³⁶ Ibid, pp. 86-87.

³⁷ Robert E. Scott, "Heading South: U.S.-Mexico Trade and Job Displacement after NAFTA": (*Economic Policy Institute*, website, published 03.05.2011). Accessed 16.01.2021 from:

https://www.epi.org/publication/heading_south_u-s-mexico_trade_and_job_displacement_after_nafta/

³⁸ Frank, *Listen, Liberal*, p. 88.

circumstances, and forced the states to minimize parole. The bill also expanded the number of federal death penalties to sixty (from previously three), which included certain nonlethal transgressions. Frank points out another aspect of the bill that involved Clinton approving the “infamous 100-to-1 sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine”.³⁹ Crack was perceived to be the plague of the country – nearly 90 percent of the individuals who were arrested for possessing it were African-American – while powder cocaine, although it was basically the identical drug, was perceived as simply another innocuous yuppie infraction.⁴⁰

Another essential part of the Clinton presidency was welfare reform. In 1996 Clinton signed The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). The initial welfare system (which originated in 1935) had a program named Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) as its nucleus that allocated relief to destitute single mothers. The program was one of the fundamental assurances of the U.S. welfare system but became increasingly unpopular with time. Accordingly, Clinton would sign a Republican bill categorically abolishing the program rather than amending it. The Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program became the replacement in which welfare is controlled by the states, which have considerable incentive to eject people off the program.⁴¹

Finally, President Clinton also deregulated the U.S. banking system with the 1999 repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act that had severed investment and commercial banking since the early 1930s. Clinton’s Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin contended that the law needed to be repealed in order for Wall Street to reach revenue diversification and remain competitive with foreign banking institutions. Frank writes that lobbyists representing big-money interests, including insurance industry as well as banking lobbyists, concurred with Rubin. The author asserts that the deregulated financial system resulted in the most profound flow of insider looting in Wall Street history and that it led directly to the 2008 recession.⁴²

³⁹ Ibid, pp. 92-93.

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 93-94.

⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 94-95.

⁴² Ibid, pp. 102-103.

2.1.5. Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden

Hillary Clinton, at the time of her husband's presidency, also supported NAFTA as well as the crime bill of 1994 and welfare reform in 1996⁴³, but during her 2016 presidential campaign she changed her position on NAFTA, apologized for the outcome of the 1994 crime bill⁴⁴, and has acknowledged that some aspects of the 1996 welfare reform were flawed.⁴⁵ Like her husband, Mrs. Clinton is known for her close relationship with Wall Street banks. For several years, she received millions of dollars for paid speeches as well as campaign contributions from Wall Street executives and other wealthy donors.⁴⁶ Mrs. Clinton has also defended America's tradition of capitalism:

“When I think about capitalism, I think about all the small businesses that were started because we have the opportunity and the freedom in our country for people to do that and to make a good living for themselves and their families. And I don't think we should confuse what we do have every so often in America, which is save capitalism from itself. (...)We are the United States of America and it's our job to reign in the excesses of capitalism so that it doesn't run amok.⁴⁷

In this passage, an underlying theme is present, which is that Mrs. Clinton, like her husband, truly does believe in and adhere to the liberal tradition outlined by Hofstadter and Hartz. Clinton views the United States as a special country with a unique political tradition that is based on the conviction that capitalism in the form of opportunity and competition is what defines the country and its history. This adherence to the liberal tradition is complete with Clinton's opinion that capitalism must be restrained but only to a certain extent and her wish not to embrace socialism.

Joe Biden is also part of the same centrist-wing of the Democratic Party and he not only expressed support for Bill Clinton's approach to politics but also supported welfare reform, the 1994 crime bill, NAFTA, and the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act during his time in the US

⁴³ Frank, *Listen, Liberal*, pp. 218-219.

⁴⁴ Bryce Covert, “Why Hillary Has Never Apologized for Welfare Reform”: (*The Atlantic*, website, published 14.06.2016). Accessed 02.03.2021 from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/06/welfare-reform-and-the-forging-of-hillary-clintons-political-realism/486449/>

⁴⁵ Dylan Matthews, “Hillary Clinton lobbied Congress to pass welfare reform. Now she barely tries to defend it”: (*Vox*, website, published 11.07.2016). Accessed 02.03.2021 from: <https://www.vox.com/2016/7/11/12067542/hillary-clinton-welfare-reform>

⁴⁶ Patrick Healy, “Wall St. Ties Linger as Image Issue for Hillary Clinton”: (*The New York Times*, website, published 21.11.2015). Accessed 02.03.2021 from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/22/us/politics/wall-st-ties-linger-as-image-issue-for-hillary-clinton.html>

⁴⁷ CNN, “CNN Democratic Debate – Full Transcript”: (*CNN Press Room*, website, published 13.10.2015). Accessed 20.02.2021 from: [https://cnnpressroom.blogs.cnn.com/2015/10/13/cnn-democratic-debate-full-transcript/\(n.p.\)](https://cnnpressroom.blogs.cnn.com/2015/10/13/cnn-democratic-debate-full-transcript/(n.p.))

senate. He has also received large donations from the credit card company MBNA as well as other lobbyists as a senator.⁴⁸ During the Democratic Primaries in 2020, Biden went on to say that he believes ordinary Americans can accomplish “extraordinary things if they’re given a chance”.⁴⁹ This part is significant in order to comprehend how Biden views politics: he is talking about providing the average American an *opportunity* to achieve what they want. Thus, Biden – like the Clintons – adheres to the liberal tradition as he believes Americans should be given the opportunity to succeed based on their individual and independent efforts.

2.2. Sanders on the Democratic Party

Bernie Sanders, on the other hand, does not fit the liberal tradition of Hartz and Hofstadter as he does not share their perception of capitalism, nor does he embody the neoliberal ideology of the Clintons and Biden. He has maintained an outsider image for most of his political career as he has been elected as mayor, congressman, and senator as an independent, and has never been an official member of the Democratic Party despite listing it as his party of affiliation in his statement of candidacy in both of his presidential campaigns.⁵⁰ Sanders is critical of capitalism as he deems it responsible for creating massive income and wealth inequality in the United States.⁵¹ He describes the Clinton method as the attempt to consolidate the interest of corporate America and Wall Street with the needs of the American middle class, and thus very much echoes what Frank argued on the same topic. Although Sanders endorsed Bill Clinton in both of the latter’s campaigns, he asserts that there were several significant policy failures at the time of the Clinton administration due to the former president’s affiliations with big-money interests, policies that Hillary Clinton also endorsed. The repeal of the Glass Steagall Act, in the words of Sanders, “unleashed the greed of the major financial institutions and their contempt for the law”⁵², a position that is in general agreement with Frank’s contention that it resulted in the 2008 Wall Street crash and the recession that followed. Furthermore, Sanders deems NAFTA

⁴⁸ Branko Marcetic, “Joe Biden, Neoliberal”: (*Jacobin*, website, published 07.08.2018). Accessed 05.03.2021 from: <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2018/08/joe-biden-neoliberal-democrat-conservative-lobbying>

⁴⁹ Today, “Watch Joe Biden’s Full Interview with Craig Melvin”: (*YouTube*, website, published 27.02.2020). Accessed 08.02.2021 from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYp6EBsFZ68&ab_channel=TODAY

⁵⁰ Louis Jacobson, “How Bernie Sanders runs in the Democratic primary when he’s an independent in the Senate”: (*PolitiFact*, website, published 02.03.2020). Accessed 28.05.2021 from: <https://www.politifact.com/article/2020/mar/02/how-can-bernie-sanders-run-democratic-primary-when/>

⁵¹ Charlie Rose, “Senator Bernie Sanders”: (*Charlie Rose*, website, published 26.10.2015). Accessed 28.01.2021 from: <https://charlierose.com/videos/23740>

⁵² Bernie Sanders, *Our Revolution: A Future to Believe In* (London, 2017), pp. 50-51.

catastrophic due to the hundreds of thousands of jobs being lost. He has stated his opposition to the 1994 crime bill and the welfare reform of 1996 as well.⁵³

2.2.1. Political Approach

Sanders underlines that he and Hillary have significant differences of opinion in terms of not only policy but also in their fundamental political approaches. He writes that the Clintons' approach to policy is not the only issue as politics is also very essential in terms of how one provides true change in America. In his book, Sanders asks what kind of party should the Democratic Party be, and is critical to the Clintons' close relationship with Wall Street and other wealthy individuals:

To me, a very basic political principle is that you cannot take on the establishment when you take their money. It is simply not credible to believe that candidates who receive significant amounts of financial support from some of the most powerful special interest in the world would make decisions that would negatively impact the bottom lines of these donors. The only way to bring about real change is to mobilize millions of people at the grassroots level *against* the establishment, *against* the big-money interests.⁵⁴

What this reveals about Sanders is that he very much views money as a critical element that is not only shaping American politics but also deciding the outcome of elections as the people who provide vast amounts of money to political candidates are automatically the ones who gain the most following the election of the candidates they endorsed. Thus, rejecting large campaign contributions from wealthy individuals and corporate interests is an essential aspect with regard to understanding Sanders's politics.

This is reflected in Sanders's 2016 presidential campaign and his need to raise money, which he describes as the "ugliest part of modern American politics"⁵⁵ and something he despises doing. He was not willing to follow in the footsteps of other presidential candidates and create a super PAC (Political Action Committee) due to it allowing endless contributions from wealthy individuals. Neither was he inclined to conduct fund-raisers in which a small number of individuals give enormous contributions as it was supposed to be a campaign that involved Sanders communicating with common people. Thus, the fund-raisers were "low-dollar"⁵⁶ events

⁵³ Ibid, p. 51.

⁵⁴ Ibid, pp. 51-52.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 113.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 114.

that entailed people donating, for instance, \$25 in order to gain entry.⁵⁷ In March during the 2016 primaries, approximately three-quarters of the Sanders campaign contributions were below \$200, and even though he would return a contribution from a pharmaceutical CEO Sanders did receive support from a registered super PAC – established by National Nurses United – that provided at least \$2.3 million, although from smaller contributors as well as millionaires.⁵⁸ During the 2020 primaries, all of the Senator’s campaign contributions for March 2020 consisted of small individual donations of \$200 or less (48%) and more than \$200 capped at \$2,800 (52%), while receiving no support from super PACs.⁵⁹ Thus, for the most part, Sanders stayed true to his own campaign finance principles.

2.3. Sanders and Democratic Socialism

In contrast to the Democratic Party and its embrace of neoliberalism, Senator Sanders advocates what he calls democratic socialism. He describes socialism as government ownership or control over federal programs that he deems to be socialist. For instance, he regards Social Security, which Franklin Roosevelt’s administration introduced, as well as Medicare, which the administration of Lyndon Johnson established, as socialist programs. As the people of the United States have elected officials to govern the country and manage its federal programs, Sanders regards government ownership of these programs to mean ownership by the people. Moreover, Sanders maintains that the United States can learn from other countries, such as the Scandinavian social democracies of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, as they treat their working class better. One reason, according to the senator, is because these countries guarantee health care as a right to all of their citizens, something that he wants to achieve in the United State by expanding Medicare to include every American. Furthermore, Sanders rejects the argument of democratic socialism being related to state control of the entire market economy: “Well, if the argument is that I think the government should take over every mom and pop grocery store, no, that’s not my view. But do I believe that everybody is entitled to healthcare as a right? Yeah, I do”.⁶⁰ He also

⁵⁷ Ibid, pp. 114.

⁵⁸ Zoe Thomas, “US election 2016: Who’s funding Trump, Sanders and the rest?”: (*BBC*, website, published 17.03.2016). Accessed 14.03.2021 from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2016-35713168>

⁵⁹ Sean McMinn and Alyson Hurt, “Tracking The Money Race Behind The Presidential Campaign”: (*NPR*, website, published 21.04.2020). Accessed 14.03.2021 from: <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/16/711812314/tracking-the-money-race-behind-the-presidential-campaign>

⁶⁰ Charlie Rose, “Senator Bernie Sanders”: (*Charlie Rose*, website, published 26.10.2015). Accessed 28.01.2021 from: <https://charlierose.com/videos/23740> (n.p.)

acknowledges that the Scandinavian social democracies that serve as a source of inspiration to him have a solid market economy as capitalism is allowed to flourish but only to a certain extent, whereas in the United States capitalism has flourished too much and produced massive income inequality.⁶¹

2.3.1. Social Democracy

According to John Judis, author of *The Socialist Awakening*, there is no absolute definition of socialism. In general terms, socialist thinkers denoted people who repudiated the competitive individuality of American industrial capitalism. Socialism entailed cooperation as opposed to competition, and benevolence as opposed to self-indulgence. During the last two centuries, Judis argues that socialism has evolved into at least five various shapes.⁶² One of them is social democracy, which originated in the late 19th century with a leader of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), Eduard Bernstein. Bernstein rejected the idea of an impoverished blue-collar laboring class that would establish socialism through revolution. In contrast, Bernstein would argue that the white collar and small-propertied middle classes would maintain their growth collectively with the laboring class, and that both classes would flourish as opposed to deteriorate within a capitalist structure that had grasped how to avert crises. In this context, socialism would be established gradually as a result of the ballot and legislature – by reforms and by the gradual approval by capitalists themselves of socialist concepts. Bernstein would continue to embody Karl Marx’s objective of socialism but stated that this objective, regardless of whatever it was, meant nothing, as the movement itself was the significant factor. Judis regards Bernstein’s essential contribution was his effort to base socialist politics in the “realities of capitalism”.⁶³ This entailed recognizing that the evolution of capitalism was not resulting in an inevitable class conflict between a blue-collar proletariat and a white-collar bourgeoisie that would lead to a completely fresh community and economy.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² John B. Judis, *The Socialist Awakening: What’s Different Now About the Left* (New York, 2020), pp. 19-20.

⁶³ Ibid, pp.24-25.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 25.

2.3.2. Socialism within Capitalism

However, Bernstein was not correct in foreseeing capitalism surmounting crises nor correct in anticipating capitalists' gradual approval of socialism. Judis writes that the contemporary leading socialist politicians do not believe that socialism is inevitable. In contrast, they consider socialism to be evolving within capitalism in which the former establishes laws and institutions that achieve the ethical concepts of "liberty, equality, justice, democracy, and social solidarity".⁶⁵ Thus, socialist economic programs and organizations could evolve within capitalism that would transfer economic and social power from the wealthy to the working class. This could result in, for instance, a strict wealth tax that would finance governmental programs, the establishment of managerial bureaus to regulate corporate practice, and public ownership and administration of basic services or industries like education, energy production, and healthcare.⁶⁶ This final point concerning socialism evolving within capitalism is interesting as Sanders himself believes that the United States already has certain socialist programs, the aforementioned Social Security and Medicare among others. Thus, Sanders fits Judis' description of a contemporary socialist who believes socialism is gradually being established within capitalism.

Furthermore, the Scandinavian countries that Sanders refers to are notable for their great economic equality and the advancement of a universal welfare state in which the working classes have considerable power. Universal welfare policies function by enrolling numerous people as welfare state beneficiaries and have provided a great part of the electorate with benefits to endorse the welfare state. Therefore, universal welfare policies have resulted in a political connection between social democrats and the electorate, an essential tool for the politicians in their effort to generate political endorsement. The validity of each and every welfare state system is based on the system's capability to provide benefits and social services that is funded by tax payments. In the context of Sweden for instance, welfare programs such as public health care, the pension system, and primary schools are funded by taxation.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ibid, pp. 25-26.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 27.

⁶⁷ Michael Baggesen Kiltgaard, "Why are they doing it? Social democracy and market-oriented welfare state reforms", *West European Politics*, 30 (2007).

2.3.3. The Second Bill of Rights

Scandinavian social democracy is not the only aspect that is crucial in terms of understanding what Sanders wants to achieve. In a speech at Georgetown University during his presidential campaign in 2015, Sanders provided detailed information on democratic socialism as he linked the ideology to the Second Bill of Rights proposed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in his State of the Union Address of 1944. Sanders considers this speech to be one of the most essential ever made by any American president⁶⁸ as Roosevelt talked about the necessity for every American to achieve *economic security* through *economic rights* so that they can achieve *true individual freedom*.⁶⁹

2.3.4. State of the Union Address of 1944

In the speech, Roosevelt referenced the origins of the United States as he asserted that the strength of the country is based on its “inalienable political rights – among them the right of free speech, free press, free worship”⁷⁰, which provided Americans “the rights to life and liberty”.⁷¹ He argued that as the United States expanded in terms of size, prominence, and the industrial economy, the political rights became deficient to guarantee Americans equality in their pursuit of happiness. The president presented this proposal in the context of the Second World War in which he believed that an enduring world peace and the creation of a U.S. standard of living greater than in the past was a duty for the country. Roosevelt’s proposal entails “Rights under which a new basis of security and prosperity can be established for all regardless of station, race, or creed”.⁷² The proposal lists economic rights such as the right to advantageous and income-based employment; the right to earn sufficiently to afford decent food, clothing, and leisure; the right to sufficient healthcare; the right to sufficient security from economic concerns of affliction, accident, unemployment, and old age; the right of all farmers to collect and sell their merchandises for an income that will provide their families an adequate livelihood; the right of

⁶⁸ Georgetown University, “Sen. Bernie Sanders Speaks at Georgetown”: (*YouTube*, website, published 24.11.2015). Accessed 25.02.2021 from:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9OP0gfmPgA&ab_channel=GeorgetownUniversity

⁶⁹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “State of the Union Message to Congress”: (*Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum*, website). Accessed 25.02.2021 from: http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/archives/address_text.html (n.p.)

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

all entrepreneurs, great as well as small, to trade in a climate of independence from discriminatory rivalry and dominance by monopolies; and the right to a decent education.⁷³ What Roosevelt was proposing is very significant as economic rights, along with cultural, political, civil, and social rights, constitute human rights, according to Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.⁷⁴ However, the United States, despite all its wealth and resources, is the only developed nation that does not provide economic rights to its citizens despite having embraced and adopted the United Nations Declaration of 1948. Consequently, millions of people in present-day America experience hunger and live in poverty, something that is closely connected to widespread unemployment.⁷⁵

2.3.5. Economic Security

It is issues such as these that Sanders aims to tackle and his solution is guaranteeing all Americans the economic rights that Roosevelt proposed. Sanders connects these economic rights to individual freedom:

True freedom does not occur without economic security. People are not free, they are not truly free, when they are unable to feed their family; they are not truly free when they are unable to retire with dignity; they are not truly free when they are unemployed, underemployed, or when they are exhausted by working sixty, seventy hours a week; people are not truly free when they don't know how they're going to get medical help when they or a family member are sick.⁷⁶

Here, Sanders emphasizes how economics and economic issues are crucial to the lives of American in the contemporary United States, which underlines the materialistic aspect that constitutes the core of his politics. When asked after the speech to clarify the term “socialist”, Sanders connects it to democracy, stating that his goal is to create a more vibrant democracy and

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ United Nations, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”: (*United Nations*, website). Accessed 31.05.2021 from: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

⁷⁵ Rotem Litinski, “Economic Rights: Are They Justiciable, and Should They Be?”: (*American Bar Association*, website, published 30.11.2019). Accessed 31.05.2021 from: https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/economic-justice/economic-rights--are-they-justiciable--and-should-they-be-/

⁷⁶ Georgetown University, “Sen. Bernie Sanders Speaks at Georgetown”: (*YouTube*, website, published 24.11.2015). Accessed 25.02.2021 from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9OP0gfmPgA&ab_channel=GeorgetownUniversity (n.p.)

an economy that functions better for laboring people – and thus generating what he deems as “real change”.⁷⁷

2.3.6. A synthesis

This final point in which Sanders connects democracy with socialism is essential as it links the Second Bill of Rights with Scandinavian social democracy due their emphasis on the rights of workers. Another important connection to social democracy is Sanders’s belief in redistribution of wealth, as he describes wealth and income inequality as “the great moral issue of our time, it is the great economic issue of our time, and it is the great political issue of our time”.⁷⁸ Sanders explicitly expresses the need to redistribute wealth from “top one-tenth of [the] 1 percent”⁷⁹ to the middle class as he argues that there has been an enormous redistribution of wealth to the wealthiest people in America for decades.⁸⁰ This is a direct rejection of the neoliberal ideology as Sanders asserts the need to repudiate class domination of the wealthy in order to achieve social justice for the middle class. Moreover, Roosevelt’s State of the Union Address concerning the proposed Second Bill of Rights does mirror what Sanders is advocating, which is *guaranteeing* Americans a decent life that is based on Roosevelt’s concept of economic security. This entails not simply providing the opportunity to achieve economic success based on hard work – meritocracy – but ensuring all Americans a decent life whatever the circumstances and regardless of class – egalitarianism.

Furthermore, what makes Sanders an even more distinct politician is his goal of inspiring and creating a political movement. He describes this effort as a “political revolution”⁸¹ that aims to further develop the grassroots momentum of his first presidential campaign and encourage more Americans to join the political process. This movement is centered around the ideals that Sanders embodies rather than the man himself. Accordingly, Sanders is very much concerned about the long-term perspective of the causes he champions and the gains that he envisions will be achieved at some point in the future. His endorsement of both Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden in the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, respectively, as well as his involvement in the shaping of the Democratic Party’s political platform, illustrate that Sanders believes he can

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Sanders, *Our Revolution*, p. 206.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 207.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 207.

⁸¹ Sanders, *Where We Go from Here*, p. 21.

influence the Party and gradually steer it in his preferred direction. A passage in his book underlines this point: “Unlike many other presidential candidates who had lost their elections, I did not intend to fade away into the sunset”.⁸² The effort to mobilize people into taking part in the political process and make Sanders’s policies a reality through the democratic process resembles the actual relationship that Scandinavian social democratic politicians have to their voters, and the social democratic historical goal of developing socialism within capitalism through reforms. It also mirrors Bernstein’s point that the movement and the cause are more important than the objective itself. Finally, Sanders’s assertion that Democratic socialism is about realizing Roosevelt’s Second Bill of Rights denotes that the Senator views the Roosevelt presidency and the New Deal as a political project that was gradually introducing socialism to United States, a project that Sanders believes he, along with others, have to finish. This does not correlate with the liberal tradition as Hofstadter argues that Roosevelt was attempting to save capitalism and safeguard free enterprise as opposed to establishing socialism, even with the Second Bill of Rights taken into consideration.

2.4. Chapter 2: Conclusion

In the end, Sanders is a politician who represents an ideology and political approach that is a sharp contrast to the Democratic Party, of which the Clintons and Joe Biden are some of the leaders. The reason is that Sanders’s democratic socialism, a synthesis of social democratic principles and Roosevelt’s Second Bill of Rights, is an ideology that is about securing and protecting the economic rights of the average American. Neoliberalism, on the other hand, is about remaking the state to the benefit of the market and allow wealthy individuals to accumulate more income at the expense of the working class and their economic well-being. Garrett’s point concerning neoliberalism’s goal of infusing uncertainty into people’s working lives symbolizes a definite contrast to Sanders’s ambition to provide certainty to the same group of people. Accordingly, Sanders not only does not fit within the liberal tradition, he finds himself in sharp opposition to it as he argues *against* capitalism, economic individualism, and self-interest and *for* socialism and collective action. Thus, the Senator is an outsider who embodies an ideology – socialism – that is not supposed to exist in the United States due to it not being present historically. That being said, the Senator’s endorsement of both Hillary Clinton and

⁸² Ibid, p. 21.

Biden shows that he is willing to cooperate with the Democrats and thus tolerate neoliberalism as well, which is a reflection of his belief that he can gradually, in the longer term, develop socialism within capitalism in America by reforming the Democratic Party.

3. Sanders, Social Democracy, and Elizabeth Warren

As Scandinavian social democracy is a significant inspiration for Senator Sanders and his perspective on American politics it is essential to examine what social democracy entails in greater detail. I start with an examination of social democratic principles and briefly recount how they materialized in Europe during the interwar period before moving on to the rise of the progressive movement in the United States in the early twentieth century, the causes that it championed, and how Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal realized some of the progressive movement's aims while also adopting social democratic principles. Lastly, I look at how the term "progressive" has changed and is used by present-day Democratic politicians and how one of them, Elizabeth Warren, compares to Sanders as the two endorse similar policies but represent different ideologies.

3.1. Social Democracy

The overarching belief at the center of social democracy is that socialism can develop within a political system marked by a market-based economy and democracy. It is also a consensus-based politics: its advocates extol political compromise that is beneficial to all classes. Although the objective of classical socialism is to achieve government ownership of the means of production, the goal of social democracy is to manage the means of production as opposed to owning it. This denotes that social democrats are satisfied with accepting private enterprise on the condition that it always benefits the laborers. Another significant aspect of the ideology is that its adherents acknowledge that human liberty is only possible when every individual has acceptable material resources and social rights. This demands collaboration amongst labor, capital, and the state to produce institutions and policies that improve material conditions necessary to the attainment of social equality. Furthermore, social democracy broadens the beliefs of equality and inclusion past the political spectrum (and the opportunity to vote in elections) "into the social and economic realms so that ordinary people (non-elites) have more choice over how they live their lives".⁸³ The basis of this economic system involves capitalists and laborers reaching an agreement that results in a universal or near-universal welfare state. Laborers are able to earn

⁸³ Devin Joshi and Neha Navlakha, "Social Democracy in Sweden", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45 (2010).

benefits in proportion to their work and capitalists are able to attain laborers' approval to seek profits and amass private property. The state is a critical part in this context as it collects large amounts of revenue by way of progressive taxation to finance universal welfare benefits.⁸⁴

In order for this system to function, the state needs to have a productive public administration and civil service meritocracy that has minimal amounts of corruption. Theoretically, the system is preserved as it is based on a growing market-based economy. Comprehensive welfare benefits and economic growth accordingly strengthen human liberties by enhancing the living standards, health, financial security, and skills for every group in society within a general framework marked by equality. Notably, human liberty broadens as equal opportunities is extended to women and individuals from destitute impoverished households, ethnic minorities, and rural areas. Essentially, universal welfare programs enhance individual independence, and because beneficiaries also provide, it produces less stigmatization and distrust in relation to these programs. Furthermore, by arranging earnings-affiliated benefits not merely to the impoverished but to high-income earners as well, social insurance institutions can decrease inequality and destitution more effectively in contrast to flat-rate or concentrated benefit practices. Accordingly, the financial contributions paid to the system increase, while at the same time guaranteeing that every group in society contribute to its endurance, which ensures its political approval by the wealthy and the middle class.⁸⁵

Social democrats would first enter government during the interwar period in Europe as provisional “shock-absorbers”⁸⁶, mostly due to the instability that occurred following the end of the First World War. To a certain extent, their role was to constrain and subdue political strife. It was total war (as opposed to political success) that brought social democracy into government in countries such as Germany and Great Britain with a productive economic program of counter-cyclical demand management and welfare state expenditure. Following the end of the Second World War, there was a massive increase of unionization of the European working class. Naturally, this had an important effect on politics. The point had come in which a lengthy period of wide-ranging economic growth that had the potential to sustain profit ratios for capital as well as greater living standards for the working class. A fundamental element in this regard was the

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Joe Guinan, “Returns to Capital: Austerity and the Crisis of European Social Democracy”, *The Good Society*, 22 (2013), p. 48.

political influence of organized labor, as the power of the trade unions gave social democrats a strong position in the context of the economy, as they were able to practice redistributive policies.⁸⁷ The Scandinavian countries that Sanders refers to as inspiration were among the European countries in which social democracy materialized, and from the 1930s to the 1970s were seen as setting the standard for the development of an extensive and effective welfare state. During these years, the Scandinavian nations led European social reform as they increased the rights of laborers, reduced working hours, increased participation of women in the work force, financed family-beneficial policies, and so forth.⁸⁸

3.2. The New Deal and the Progressive Movement

By contrast, the United States does not have a socialist tradition, as Werner Sombart argues in *Why is There no Socialism in the U.S.?*⁸⁹ Nevertheless, in the early twentieth century, Americans developed a so-called “progressive movement” that championed reforms that were similar but nonetheless different from social democratic principles. At the center of this movement is the belief that governmental intervention in the economy could improve the lives of the masses, a contrast to the liberal tradition and its core values of capitalism, competition, and non-intervention.⁹⁰

3.2.1. The Progressive Movement

Progressivism was a political movement that originated at the beginning of the twentieth-century as a response to the excesses of US industrialism and expansionism. The movement derived originally in the cities amongst the middle class, which was shocked by the unabashed greed, governmental apathy, increasing poverty, national imperialism, corporate arrogance, and political corruption generated by the swift industrial development and mechanization of US society in the late nineteenth-century. Accordingly, the movement established the Progressive Party with its 1912 platform that had been principally produced by social workers and people supportive of social work principles. The platform emphasized that the objective of the Party was

⁸⁷ Guinan, “Returns to Capital”, *The Good Society*, 22 (2013).

⁸⁸ Erin S. Einhorn and John Logue, “Can Welfare States Be Sustained in a Global Economy? Lessons from Scandinavia”, *Political Science Quarterly*, 125 (2010).

⁸⁹ Werner Sombart, *Why is There no Socialism in the U.S.?* (New York, 1976).

Hofstadter and Hartz argue the same in their respective works, see chapter 1.

⁹⁰ Allison D. Murdach, “Does American Social Work Have a Progressive Tradition”, *Social Work*, 55 (2010).

to annihilate the invisible government that comprised of special interest created by the contemporary political parties and replace it with a government of the people by enacting a whole range of miscellaneous reforms. Some of these reforms included registration of every lobbyist, equal suffrage, and a limitation on campaign donations. The platform also suggested comprehensive economic and social changes, including expanded federal power to manage business and commerce, the advancement of a national health care program, and federal authority that would guarantee every laborer the right to organize. Allison Murdach writes that the terms “government” and “governmental” invariably were references to the federal government that evolved into the absolute source of positive jurisdiction for the Progressive Party. In contrast to liberalism, with which the movement shares similarities but which was and is a definitive political tradition that advocates first principles such as individual liberty and state beneficence, progressivism could best be classified as social reform impulse or a set of loosely related principles as opposed to a “body of institutionalized beliefs”.⁹¹ Moreover, Murdach argues that American progressivism, although championing ambitious objectives, has invariably missed an explicit ideology, regular leadership, and any established “tradition of beliefs or a set of core values”⁹² that is inherited from one generation to another.⁹³

Moreover, Glen Gendzel writes that the progressives of the early twentieth century followed their inclination toward interventionism, which entailed wielding government power in the name of common good, and not simply for big-business. As time went on, the progressives – comprised of private voluntary factions and philanthropic organizations – realized that charity on its own was incapable of solving the issues of the modern industrial order. They were intrigued by European-style social democracy, even socialism, yet not many were able of contemplating such a significant reorganization of US capitalism. In contrast, progressives believed in political action that entailed a scientifically devised, ethically legitimate, and democratically governed approach to politics but did not champion any specific reform. Progress in the future was dependent on government intervention in market affiliations of every different type as industrial capitalism had produced broad and fresh differences of wealth and power.⁹⁴ Progressives felt that “the time had come for government power to expand in order to catch up with the increased

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 85.

⁹² Ibid, p. 85.

⁹³ Murdach, “Does American Social Work Have a Progressive Tradition”, *Social Work*, 55 (2010).

⁹⁴ Glen Gendzel, “What the Progressives Had in Common”, *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 10 (2011).

power of private aggregations of wealth”.⁹⁵ Describing yourself as “progressive” mainly denoted your belief in “the human ability to build a better world collectively on purpose”.⁹⁶ It is because of this reason that progressives referred to themselves as progressives from the outset – it was precisely because they maintained that progress – a better future – was within reach solely by deliberate shared effort, not by dependence on natural forces, abstruse constitutional beliefs, or the market’s concealed hand.⁹⁷

3.2.2. The New Deal and Professionalism

As recounted in chapter 1 (section 1.1.2), the Democratic Party, from the late 1960s, began to reject the New Deal coalition in favor of what Thomas Frank describes as young educated professionals who did not care for traditional working-class issues. However, there was a period in which professionals and professionalization were regarded as the solution to society’s economic and social issues, namely with the rise of the progressive movement. Frank writes that the progressives in the early twentieth century started to view professionalization as a positive element that could save society from being devastated in the conflict between management and labor.⁹⁸ Frank defines professionals as a “high-status group”,⁹⁹ an affluent faction of society - comprised of professionals such as engineers, lawyers, doctors, and also academics including political scientists and economists – who exert an immense influence on politics. The reason for their exalted status is a result of learning as opposed to income as they are talented and intelligent, which has given them “social authority”:¹⁰⁰ they are individuals who comprehend social problems and who present solutions to those problems. This in itself is a positive feature but as Frank writes, the issue is that professionals are autonomous as they do not answer to the public but rather their peers and clients and thus they are not obliged to listen to the opinions of people below their own status.¹⁰¹

Frank argues that the United States has had negative experiences with professionals dating back to the first decades the Republic. However, the turning point came in the early

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 335.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 337.

⁹⁷ Gendzel, “What the Progressives Had in Common”, *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 10 (2011).

⁹⁸ Frank, *Listen, Liberal*, pp 25-26.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 22.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 22.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, pp 22-23.

twentieth century, at the time of the Gilded Age, as professionals were now viewed as “an enlightened managerial class”¹⁰² expected to create industrial harmony that was not considered viable based on simply the profit motive. This meant that the progressives of this era believed that capitalism could be pacified by utilizing professional expertise as the industrial world’s numerous issues were (and still are) profound technical issues that demanded care from skilled experts. Frank contends that the progressive ideal was proven by Franklin Roosevelt’s presidency. The president’s cabinet and advisors were dominated by representatives of this professional class, the architects of the New Deal’s numerous government interventions in the market. During the 1930s, the economy was regulated and the middle class were basically guaranteed a variety of consumer goods. Not surprisingly, Frank regards the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt as a “golden age for government-by-professionals”;¹⁰³ clearly, the lives of working people improved as the impulses of the progressive era were more systematically applied.¹⁰⁴

This corresponds with what William Leuchtenburg writes about Roosevelt’s presidency as numerous Americans witnessed the federal government develop into an institution that was directly involved with their own welfare. The state was now the origin of relief payments, taxing people directly in order to provide old age pensions, and overall had transformed from what Leuchtenburg calls an impartial mediator to a mighty advertiser of society’s welfare. The New Deal embraced the duty to guarantee all Americans a minimum standard of living, which meant that the New Deal’s relief programs symbolized progress from the cruel pre-depression practices. For instance, child labor was abrogated in interstate trade and the sweatshop was dealt a massive blow as a result of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 that secured workers the right to a minimum wage as well as overtime pay if they worked for more than 40 hours. Moreover, Leuchtenburg asserts that the government under Roosevelt provided assistance to Americans in the form welfare and relief not as charity but rather as social rights that were secured through the Social Security Act. The President and his advisors devised a government that purposely wanted to make the industrial system more humanitarian and to safeguard laborers as well as their families from exploitation. Thus, the federal government increased its powers substantially during Roosevelt’s presidency as the Great Depression had dispelled the wariness which greeted

¹⁰² Ibid, pp. 25-26.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 26.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 26.

government action under the illiberal regime that originated during the eighteenth century. The administration believed that the depression was the product of political collapse as well as economic disintegration, which in their view necessitated the utilization of new political methods. Accordingly, as the federal government had significantly broadened its influence in the economy, few challenged the authority of the state when it was subsidizing the farmer millions of dollars to leave fields fallow or for protecting workers who were organizing union elections, to name some examples. At the time of the FDR administration, the belief that the state not only could but also should serve to avert future crises became accepted by the public.¹⁰⁵ What the New Deal had produced was an extensive legacy of “antidepression controls – securities regulation, banking reforms, unemployment compensation”¹⁰⁶ – in spite of the fact that it was not able to ensure that a successive administration would actually utilize them.¹⁰⁷

Moreover, by the second year of the Roosevelt administration in 1932, a pattern of the New Deal had begun to develop. The distinctive feature was the effort to rectify the imbalances of the previous order by establishing a fresh equilibrium that would represent an assortment of classes and groups. The goal of the New Dealers was to establish an armistice akin to a period of war in which class and factional antagonisms receded and the allegations of private or partisan economic interest were eschewed in favor of national consensus. Leuchtenburg writes that Roosevelt did not position himself as the champion of liberalism but rather as “father to all the people, not as the representative of a single class but as the conductor of a concert of interests”.¹⁰⁸ As a person above the political conflict, Roosevelt intended to act as the unifier of interests and the harmonizer of disparate ideologies.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, Leuchtenburg contends that the New Dealers were progressive politicians of a different sort from those at the turn of the century. Rather than rationalizing relief as a humanitarian effort, the New Dealers would frequently insist that it was essential in terms of stimulating purchasing power, stabilizing the economy or conserving the workforce as opposed to achieving social justice.¹¹⁰ Nonetheless, Leuchtenburg asserts that the New Dealers realized internally that “what they were doing had a

¹⁰⁵ William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal* (New York, 2009), pp. 331-335.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.84.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

deeply moral significance however much they eschewed ethical pretensions”.¹¹¹ They saw themselves as belonging to a humanitarian impulse that sought to make people’s lives more adequate. Roosevelt, from Leuchtenburg’s perspective, was a moralist who sought to accomplish various humanitarian reforms and guide the country based on the principles of government. Accordingly, the Roosevelt presidency was a period that saw the federal government act as a guarantor for society’s welfare closely to that of social democracy as capital and labor were forced to compromise in the effort to produce not only prosperity but also social equality. Leuchtenburg also writes that Scandinavia functioned as a model abroad for the New Dealers “not only for its experience with labor relations and social insurance and currency reform, but because it represented the ‘middle way’ of happy accommodation of public and private institutions the New Deal sought to achieve”.¹¹² Therefore, the New Deal represented a turn towards social democracy even though Roosevelt himself was more similar to a pragmatist who sought to unify the country across class lines and strengthen the American economy by initiating reforms that he deemed necessary for those purposes. Lastly, the ideals that the original progressives of the twentieth century championed were realized as the state did become an actor that improved the lives of the masses as it was used by the New Dealers to manage the economy to the benefit of working people and not only the wealthy and the powerful. Nevertheless, as the progressive movement lacked a core ideology and was advocating for nebulous reforms, it is more useful to view the New Deal as the result of social democratic principles rather than the progressive movement.

3.2.3. The Democratic Party and Contemporary Progressives

As the Democratic Party rejected the New Deal coalition in favor of neoliberalism in the last decades of the twentieth century, it became what we may call a “social liberal party” with a socially conservative wing. The Party in general adopted liberal positions on issues such as abortion and more recently gay marriage, which in turn alienated Protestant and Catholic groups and the party’s conservative social wing. One must remember that, at the time of the New Deal coalition, the Democratic Party was not a social liberal party as, for instance, Northern trade union representatives were frequently Catholics who had conventional attitudes in regard to sex

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 345.

¹¹² Ibid, pp. 345-346.

and marriage.¹¹³ This has led to the Democrats losing working-class voters to the Republicans for the last fifty years.¹¹⁴ A further complication is that contemporary Democratic politicians use the label “progressive” to describe themselves, but the term is not equivalent to the one used by the progressives of early twentieth century and there is no overall specific definition.

Nonetheless, the aforementioned social liberal positions are an element that contemporary progressives often have in common. They also wish to achieve more economic and social equality and, like the original progressives of the twentieth century, view government as a tool to realize those ambitions. However, although they might agree on the causes that afflict society, contemporary progressives are not considered one cohesive group that has a fixed ideology and a shared solution to society’s problems. For instance, both Senator Sanders and Hillary Clinton call themselves progressives but have different opinions in regard to banking regulation¹¹⁵ and economic issues in general as Clinton adheres to the neoliberal-wing of the Democratic Party while Sanders does not (as demonstrated in chapter 1).

3.3. Elizabeth Warren

Senator Elizabeth Warren, representing the state of Massachusetts, is another Democratic politician who describes herself as a progressive.¹¹⁶ During the 2020 Democratic Presidential Primaries, Senator Sanders was not the only politician who advocated for significant changes in the American economy and political system as Warren was another candidate who presented institutional reforms that, from Judis’ perspective, were identical to the ones suggested by Sanders. Yet, what separated the two was the fact that Warren called herself a capitalist as opposed to a socialist.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Michael Lind, “Progressives are a minority in America. To win, they need to compromise”: (*The Guardian*, website, published 19.12.2020). Accessed 27.04.2021 from: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/commentisfree/2020/dec/19/progressives-us-democrats-power-new-deal>

¹¹⁴ Niskanen Center, “How Democrats Lost the Working Class, with Matt Karp”: (*Niskanen Center*, website, published 28.04.2021). Accessed 30.05.2021 from: <https://www.niskanencenter.org/how-democrats-lost-the-working-class-with-matt-karp/>

¹¹⁵ Tara McKelvey, “What does it mean to be a progressive in the US?”: (*BBC*, website, published 05.02.2016). Accessed 28.04.2021 from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-35467470>

¹¹⁶ Elizabeth Warren, “Elizabeth Warren: The Democratic Party is a Progressive Party”: (*YouTube*, website, published 26.02.2020). Accessed 28.04.2021 from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgdIH5j2xEM&ab_channel=ElizabethWarren

¹¹⁷ Judis, *The Socialist Awakening*, p. 32.

3.3.1. Ideology

On an ideological basis, Senator Warren says she is not a democratic socialist¹¹⁸ and expresses a divergent perspective from Sanders on capitalism. During an interview with *CNBC* in 2018, Warren was asked whether she deemed capitalists to be “bad people”.¹¹⁹ The Senator’s response was:

I’m a capitalist. [...] I believe in markets. What I don’t believe in is theft. What I don’t believe in is cheating. That’s where the difference is. I love what markets can do, I love what functioning economies can do. They are what make us rich, they are what create opportunity. But only fair markets, markets with rules. Markets without rules is about the rich take it all. It’s about the powerful get all of it.¹²⁰

Here, Senator Warren separates herself from Sanders in terms of supporting capitalism as an idea, as a potential system that could work for people on a general basis. However, Warren also says that there must be clear boundaries in which the rich and powerful are kept check, so that the average American does not suffer economically at the hands of capitalism. This is similar to what Roosevelt expressed on the same topic as he viewed power in the hands of a few as a threat to the prosperity of the many and free enterprise. Nonetheless, it is somewhat difficult to describe Warren’s ideas as part and parcel of the liberal tradition. On the one hand, the Senator explicitly says that she fully supports capitalism and markets as they create opportunity and generate wealth, which corresponds with the core belief of the liberal tradition. On the other hand, Warren also makes it clear that capitalism and markets are not categorically positive as a small number of people have gained a decisive advantage in terms of money and power, and thus she wants to curb capitalism in the form of establishing “rules” and enforcing them. This is not entirely in line with the liberal tradition, Hofstadter points out that for liberals the task of politics is protect the capitalistic system and “not to cripple it with a plan for common collective action”.¹²¹ Warren’s plans to level the playing field by making the markets fairer would contradict the liberal tradition’s principles of non-intervention in the markets and would hinder

¹¹⁸ CNN, “Warren: I am not a Democratic Socialist”: (*CNN*, website, published 09.03.2019). Accessed 26.03.2021 from: <https://edition.cnn.com/videos/politics/2019/03/09/elizabeth-warren-socialism-south-by-southwest-bts-nr-vpx.cnn>

¹¹⁹ CNBC, “Sen. Elizabeth Warren on Trump, Making Capitalism Work For All”: (*YouTube*, website, published 24.07.2018). Accessed 15.03.2021 from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=om43AMROOnw&ab_channel=CNBC (n.p.)

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It*, p. xxxvii.

the very wealthy from accumulating greater profits. Thus, even though Senator Warren fits the liberal tradition in theory as she strongly believes in the concept of economic opportunity and success within the capitalist framework, she does not adhere to it in absolute terms as she advocates for intervention and regulation of the markets.

Moreover, Warren does share certain similarities with the original progressives of the twentieth century. During her presidential campaign announcement in 2019, Warren asserted that millions of American families are suffering as a result of an economic system that is rigged in favor of “the wealthy and the well-connected”¹²² who possess too much power, not only over the American economy, but over American democracy as well. This resembles what the progressives of twentieth century expressed as it reflects what Murdach writes regarding a corrupt federal government that is influenced by special interests. Furthermore, the Senator contends that the wealthy and the powerful are allowed to abuse the law regardless of what they do and yet accumulate more wealth – such as bankers who receive bailouts despite cheating, companies that scam and receive tax cuts, and corporations who are subsidized even though they pollute. Warren describes this system as rigged as there is “too little accountability for the rich, too little opportunity for everyone else”.¹²³ Thus, Senator Warren is a politician who, ideologically, clearly believes that capitalism can produce opportunity and economic success for the average American but who also contends that it needs fundamental structural reform to eliminate corruption and unfair advantages on behalf of the wealthy and powerful, which is similar to what the progressive movement argued a century earlier.

3.3.2. Political Approach and Policy

On the topic of political approach, Warren, like Sanders, refused to accept campaign donations from super PACs, as well as federal lobbyists¹²⁴, and instead received small individual donations of \$200 or less (53%) and more than \$200 capped at \$2,800 (57%) during March 2020.¹²⁵ She also expressed her goal of building a grass roots movement and wants the Democratic Party to

¹²² C-SPAN, “Senator Elizabeth Warren Presidential Campaign Announcement (C-SPAN)”: (*YouTube*, website, published 11.02.2019). Accessed 23.03.2019 from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1PcV28K4eA&ab_channel=C-SPAN (n.p.)

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Sean McMinn and Alyson Hurt, “Tracking The Money Race Behind The Presidential Campaign”: (*NPR*, website, published 21.04.2020). Accessed 14.03.2021 from: <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/16/711812314/tracking-the-money-race-behind-the-presidential-campaign>

embrace the same political approach as opposed to accepting campaign donations from wealthy individuals.¹²⁶ In terms of specific policy issues, Warren wishes to close “the revolving door between Wall Street and Washington”¹²⁷ through an anti-corruption bill that she has proposed, in order to end government corruption. Furthermore, the Senator wants to “change the rules”¹²⁸ and provide Americans – laborers and small businesses - with economic power, as corporations possess disproportionate power. This entails enabling laborers to join unions and increase wages by letting laborers join corporate boardrooms, dissolve monopolies that impair competition, oppose Wall Street banks to safeguard the US economy, and prosecute corporations in the event that they defraud their customers and mistreat their laborers. Moreover, Warren wants to achieve tax reform that ends loopholes for the wealthy as well as an “ultra-millionaires tax”¹²⁹ so that the richest individuals contribute a fair share to the country that has enabled them to prosper.¹³⁰ Finally, Warren wants to increase the minimum wage as she believes that “no one should work full time and still live in poverty”¹³¹, and, like Sanders, wants to fulfill Roosevelt’s Second Bill of Rights.¹³² Accordingly, Warren is a politician who shares many of the same concrete policy proposals as Sanders but who has a different perspective on what these reforms are meant to achieve as she contends they are supposed to make capitalism more equitable as opposed to transform it into socialism.

3.4. Sanders in contrast to Warren

Senator Sanders speaks warmly of Warren as he says she has been a friend to him for decades and believes that she has been a very good senator. On the other hand, Sanders states

¹²⁶ MSNBC, “Elizabeth Warren on 2020, Socialism and Breaking Up Big Tech | The Last Word | MSNBC”: (*YouTube*, website, published 22.05.2019). Accessed 26.03.2021 from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCw3o-Em_80&ab_channel=MSNBC

¹²⁷ C-SPAN, “Senator Elizabeth Warren Presidential Campaign Announcement (C-SPAN)”: (*YouTube*, website, published 11.02.2019). Accessed 23.03.2019 from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1PcV28K4eA&ab_channel=C-SPAN (n.p.)

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ C-SPAN, “Senator Elizabeth Warren Presidential Campaign Announcement (C-SPAN)”: (*YouTube*, website, published 11.02.2019). Accessed 23.03.2019 from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1PcV28K4eA&ab_channel=C-SPAN (n.p.)

¹³¹ Elizabeth Warren, “Opinion: 17 Million Reasons to Raise the Minimum Wage”: (*ABC News*, website, published 25.03.2014). Accessed 11.04.2021 from: <https://abcnews.go.com/Business/17-million-reasons-raise-minimum-wage/story?id=23054905> (n.p.)

¹³² Elizabeth Warren, “Elizabeth Warren on FDR’s Second Bill of Rights”: (*YouTube*, website, published 03.02.2019). Accessed 15.03.2021 from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xb7XMGuC2bk&ab_channel=ElizabethWarren

there are “differences”¹³³ between him and Senator Warren as she identifies herself as a capitalist, something Sanders says he is not: “The reason I am not [a capitalist] is because I will not tolerate for one second the kind of greed and corruption and income and wealth inequality and so much suffering that is going on in this country today, which is unnecessary”.¹³⁴

Accordingly, there is a formal barrier between Sanders and Warren on an ideological level as the former does not view capitalism, in theory nor in practice, as an optimal economic system because of all its negative elements.

3.4.1. The Case for Social democracy

What makes Sanders a distinct politician when compared to Warren is his ambition to create a system based on achieving social equality, rather than a competitive system predicated on only achieving greater opportunity to compete. Equality does not entail abolishing private corporations and private enterprise, but empowering workers by enabling them to join corporate boardrooms (as Warren also suggests), with the intent to create equilibrium between capital and labor. Sanders connects this idea to the overarching belief that economic growth on behalf of corporations (capital) cannot be the correct nor the only instrument to measure the economic conditions of society overall and the economic conditions of labor in particular, as the economic security of the latter group is inadequate. This correlates with the social democratic principle that capital, labor, and the state collaborate and establish institutions and policies that in turn advance both equality and economic growth. Likewise, Sanders’ point about not wanting to abolish private corporations or state ownership corporations corresponds with social democracy’s principle about managing rather than owning the means of production. The essential aspect for Sanders is that workers are allowed to unionize, and that they are represented on corporate boardrooms and thus can influence their own working conditions and the direction of the enterprise, which is in line with social democrats accepting private enterprise as long as it is beneficial to the workers. Furthermore, Sanders views his mission as to “pick up where Franklin Delano Roosevelt left off”¹³⁵ and realize Roosevelt’s economic bill of rights in order to provide

¹³³ ABC News, “Warren said ‘she is a capitalist through her bones. I’m not.’: Bernie Sanders”: (*YouTube*, website, published 13.10.2019). Accessed 29.03.2021 from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBfFr3kegJI&ab_channel=ABCNews (n.p.)

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ CNBC, “Bernie Sanders on Socialism, Taxes And Criminal CEOs”: (*YouTube*, website, published 02.11.2019). Accessed 29.04.2021 from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Kho7JpSz_g&ab_channel=CNBC (n.p.)

every American with economic rights. In this context, the aspect of freedom is also very important to Sanders as he deems political rights – the right to vote and the right to free speech etc. – to be insufficient in terms of individual freedom without economic rights that provide Americans with economic security in the form of healthcare, affordable housing, an affordable higher education and the like.¹³⁶ This is in line with social democracy’s core belief that human liberty is only realized when every individual of society has adequate material resources and social rights. Lastly, Sanders wants a progressive tax system that is “based on the ability to pay”¹³⁷ in order to provide revenue for government programs that guarantee the aforementioned healthcare, affordable housing etc. for everyone.¹³⁸ These are welfare proposals that correlate with social democracy’s fundamental tenets in which the state accumulates great amount of revenue through progressive taxation that finances universal welfare programs. Accordingly, what all of these factors denote is that Sanders proposes to develop social democracy in the United States, which would entail not replacing capitalism with socialism altogether but to combine the two of them together in order to create more social equality for every American.

3.4.2. The Sanders-Warren Divergence

As Warren’s policy proposals and political approach are very similar to those of Sanders it is somewhat challenging to distinguish the two of them as politicians. Where the two of them differ is on an ideological level. Even though they advocate many of the same ideas in the effort to improve the economic condition for Americans at large, they argue from different ideological perspectives as Sanders is attempting to do so under the banner of socialism (which is really social democracy) while Warren is trying to accomplish it by defending capitalism. Sanders’s beliefs are based on social democratic principles that he believes are superior to those of capitalism and regards Roosevelt’s New Deal and the unrealized economic bill of rights as socialist policies. Warren’s various statements is that of a reformer of capitalism in which the term “progressive” is used to underline that she wants to utilize government to regulate the economy in order to hinder those with the most power from dominating the economic system at the cost of everyone else in order to provide a more fair and competitive economic system. Thus, Warren positions herself as a capitalist who believes in the potential that this system offers, the

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Bernie Sanders, *Our Revolution: A Future to Believe In* (London, 2017), p. 263

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 273.

opportunity for the individual to make a profit and prosper further. What Warren is attempting is to reform capitalism so that everyone has a more realistic opportunity to achieve success and thus save capitalism, which resembles what Hillary Clinton expressed about capitalism as well (see section 1.1.5.). Accordingly, Warren is ideologically positioned between Sanders on the far left and Mrs. Clinton and Joe Biden in the center of the political spectrum. Zaid Jilani provides a useful perspective in this regard and contends that Sanders favors concentrating on “post-distribution”¹³⁹ reliefs, which entail using government’s ability to tax and spend to precisely satisfy Americans’ requirements. By contrast, Warren aims to enable regulators and reorganize markets to mold “pre-distribution”¹⁴⁰ income, before taxes. Jilani further contends that Warren is less inclined to promote expensive government programs and instead favors regulating Wall-Street and protect consumers. Furthermore, Jilani also asserts that Warren’s various statements on capitalism are not merely rhetoric: “Her life’s work has been to make markets more competitive and equitable, not to redistribute money from the rich to the poor and remove big chunks of economic life from the private sector”.¹⁴¹ Therefore, it is a significant ideological difference between the two senators as Sanders is a socialist championing social democratic ideals while Warren is a capitalist reformer favoring tighter regulation and structural change of the markets.

3.5. Chapter 3: Conclusion

Overall, despite the fact that he shares similarities with her on policy, Sanders is a singular politician, particularly when compared to most Democrats, including Warren. His worldview is based on social democratic principles as opposed to capitalistic ideals, which is unique in an American context. Warren is not as distinctive as she believes in the potential that markets can offer – opportunity and competition – something that is not too different from what Hillary Clinton has also expressed. Conversely, Sanders does not deem markets positively as he views them as part of a system that is fundamentally flawed as it produces inequality as opposed to equality and economic security. By taking inspiration from European social democracy in general and Scandinavia in particular, Sanders is looking beyond his country’s borders at

¹³⁹ Zaid Jilani, “Why the Differences Between Sanders and Warren Matter”: (*Jacobin*, website, published 08.01.2019). Accessed 01.05.2021 from: <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/01/elizabeth-warren-bernie-sanders-socialism-progressives> (n.p.)

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

“foreign” ideas to solve America’s problems, while Warren’s approach is more centered around “domestic” and traditional solutions by appealing to capitalism and the potentials of the markets. This makes Sanders an anomaly as his approach is a quite unusual one as he attempts to devalue America’s traditional relationship to capitalism while Warren is trying to honor it. His endorsement of Roosevelt and the New Deal is an attempt to position himself as the legitimate successor to that political project and to merge it with his European social democratic ideals, thus melding American and European political practices. Thus, Sanders’s ideology and policy proposals are based on what has been historically European political philosophies that materialized to a certain extent during the Roosevelt presidency, and that he now attempts to realize in contemporary America.

4. Findings: Sanders and the American Left

Senator Sanders has had an impact on American politics since he first rose to national prominence in 2015. In particular, Sanders has had a substantial influence on the direction of the American Left toward democratic socialism, we have seen in this thesis. The prospects for socialism in America rest on achieving a socialist majority within the American electorate, which is necessary to realize Senator Sanders's aims of social equality and economic security. These goals are by no means assured. On the one hand, the Democratic establishment constitutes the dominant neoliberal wing of the party and it poses a considerable challenge to achieving a socialist direction for the party. On the other hand, a generational change in leadership of the Party's leftwing raises other questions about the direction of the left. Ultimately, its future rests on future leaders such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who stand in-between Sanders' socialist vision and the rise of identity politics. The outcome of that struggle will probably determine Sanders's legacy

4.1. The Tools for Success

For Judis, the key to socialism's potential future success lies with capitalism's increasing unpopularity with young Americans. From his perspective, there are three essential developments as well as one underlying trend that explain this disenchantment with capitalism. The most significant development was the Great Recession of 2008 that augmented misgivings concerning capitalism and economic security that had risen since the turn of the millennium. Although the recession produced the Tea Party movement amongst older Americans on the Right, it also generated a number of movements critical of capitalism amongst the young on the Left, starting with Occupy Wall Street during 2011 and leading to the Sanders and Warren presidential campaigns in later years. The second development is that of climate change as many young Americans attribute the excesses of the fossil fuel industry as well as unregulated capitalism to the changing of the climate. Judis's third development is the election of Trump in 2016 and the succeeding Trump presidency that underlined the recklessness of the America's most wealthy groups generated by present-day capitalism. Finally, there has been a longer-term transformation in the economy as the standard of living of the college-educated young has ceased to increase because of rising costs to obtain a college degree. These conditions have generated

immense amounts of student debt and a loss of a guaranteed lifetime employment, the latter aspect also stoking fears concerning the costs of healthcare and insurance. As a result, young college graduates would increasingly blame capitalism, and with the outbreak of the COVID pandemic and the resultant economic depression these apprehensions and anxieties have been buttressed.¹⁴² Judis contends that this disenchantment of capitalism could be mobilized into a socialist movement that will have an effect on American politics to the same extent that the conservative movement of the 1970s did.¹⁴³ This would entail creating a socialist mass movement. Karp believes that “a social democratic majority does not yet exist within the Democratic electorate”¹⁴⁴ nor in the country at large. What Senator Sanders has done is give “the Left new relevance in national politics”.¹⁴⁵ Yet, in order to acquire political power, the Left needs to assemble the majority it requires, something that cannot be done over the course of two election cycles but might be possible within the next decade or so, as Karp sees it. In this context, he believes that Sanders’s five-year period of national attention has laid the foundations for a social democratic reform that could have a national majority within this timeline. The basis for this hypothesis is the fact that Sanders won amongst younger voters by historic margins, something that he achieved not through his charisma or style but with possibly “the most brusquely ideological platform in Democratic primary history”.¹⁴⁶ Since his first presidential campaign, Sanders has energized and molded the perspectives of a whole generation of voters, and has thus established a fresh and important connection between his brand of “class-struggle social democracy”¹⁴⁷ and the material conditions of Americans below the age of 45.¹⁴⁸

In a larger context, working-class parties worldwide are less concerned about transformational economic redistribution and more absorbed by issues such as environmentalism and questions regarding cultural representation. Sanders on his own was not capable of reviving twentieth-century class politics in the United States. Nonetheless, Karp believes that the hope of achieving the electoral alignment needed to attain social-democratic reforms is based on the

¹⁴² Judis, *The Socialist Awakening*, pp. 69-72.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁴⁴ Matt Karp, “Bernie Sanders’s Five-Year War”: (*Jacobin*, website, published 28.08.2020). Accessed 07.05.2021 from: <https://jacobinmag.com/2020/08/bernie-sanders-five-year-war> (n.p.)

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Sanders voters below the age of forty-five. Karp considers this to be fundamental for the future of socialism in America:

Not only do two-thirds or more of these younger, poorer Americans support Medicare for All, wealth taxes, and other significant reforms – they have shown, in two different primary campaigns, that those fundamental redistributive commitments are strong enough to guide their voting choices. This is not yet a socialist majority, but it is, perhaps, a socialist majority in embryo.¹⁴⁹

Despite the aging American populace, this embryonic majority increases each year and within each demographic as the concord among academics points to ideological preferences remaining relatively stable with time.¹⁵⁰

4.2. The Obstacles within the Democratic Party

The challenge for Sanders and his potential future successors is that the dominant neoliberal-wing of the Democratic Party wields substantial power over its politicians and the Democratic electorate. Subsequently, these obstacles mean that achieving a socialist majority is very challenging for Sanders and other politicians within the Democratic Party who attempt to accomplish it. The Senator's 2020 presidential campaign demonstrated these obstacles.

4.2.1. The Power of the Democratic Establishment

What is apparent to Karp is that Sanders's failure to win the Democratic presidential nomination shows that there is a considerable disparity between winning exit poles and attaining power: "If the Sanders campaigns illuminated American social democracy's unknown political resources, they also revealed, in a dramatic fashion, the determination of their opponents".¹⁵¹ Karp considers this a basic lesson of Sanders's campaigns: the unity and fierceness of the Democratic opposition to Sanders's agenda as Democratic Party officials, political commentators, and TV pundits comprehensively derided it ever since the start of Sanders's first campaign in 2015. What was not apparent was how swift and efficient the Democratic opposition to Sanders could be as the other 2020 presidential candidates – Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar – suspended their campaigns and – along with other prominent Democratic officials such as Harry Reid - endorsed

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

Biden shortly before Super Tuesday in the effort to deter Sanders and help Biden win the nomination.¹⁵² This development also provided Biden with an exceptional amount of media as he received approximately \$70 million in positive television coverage on all of the leading news networks in America.¹⁵³ Moreover, in the 2020 primaries, Sanders received the endorsements of merely nine Democratic U.S. representatives (3.8 percent) and one senator.¹⁵⁴

This type of ideological resistance and organized vigor demonstrated by the Democratic Party against Sanders's agenda proved critical in the 2020 primaries as it had a profound effect on the Democratic electorate. One group that Sanders struggled with in both the 2016 and 2020 primaries was black voters, which was a crucial element in both Hillary Clinton's and Joe Biden's successful campaigns for the party nomination. Both comprehensively outperformed Sanders among this segment of the electorate. Despite black voters supporting Medicare for All at levels higher than nearly any other part of the American population, leading black Democratic politicians are part of the neoliberal-wing of the Party. This becomes challenging for Sanders and other politicians on the Left as these prominent black leaders have an impact on black voters, especially as President Obama is still the most predominant leader.¹⁵⁵ Congressman Jim Clyburn of South Carolina's 6th district, the majority whip in the House of Representatives and the highest-ranking African American Democrat in the House, is another figure who has significant clout within the Party. Clyburn endorsed Biden three days before the 2020 South Carolina primary and provided the latter with much needed legitimacy amongst the electorate, as he had not won any states prior to the primary in South Carolina. Subsequently, as he has considerable influence, Clyburn mobilized the state's black voters to Biden's benefit and the latter won by approximately 30 points over Sanders.¹⁵⁶ A crucial part of this result was that Biden received 61 percent of the black vote in a state where African-Americans comprise nearly 60 percent of the

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Dustin Guastella, "Where Do We Go After Last Knight's Defeat": (*Jacobin*, website, 11.03.2020). Accessed 23.05.2021 from: <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/03/bernie-sanders-democratic-primary-results-joe-biden>

¹⁵⁴ FiveThirtyEight, "The 2020 Endorsement Primary": (*FiveThirtyEight*, website, published 08.04.2020). Accessed 21.05.2021 from: <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/2020-endorsements/democratic-primary/>

¹⁵⁵ Karp, "Bernie Sanders's Five-Year War": (*Jacobin*, website, published 28.08.2020). Accessed 07.05.2021 from: <https://jacobinmag.com/2020/08/bernie-sanders-five-year-war> (n.p.)

¹⁵⁶ Daniel Strauss, "'A chain reaction': how one endorsement set Joe Biden's surge in motion": (*The Guardian*, website, published 04.03.2020). Accessed 22.05.2021 from: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/04/joe-biden-jim-clyburn-endorsement-super-tuesday>

Democratic electorate.¹⁵⁷ However, this also generated further momentum for Biden as he won all the southern states on Super Tuesday a few days later, in large part because of solid support amongst minority voters such as blacks.¹⁵⁸ Thus, Karp asserts that black primary electorate might be persuaded by “institutional continuity”¹⁵⁹ rather than political ideology given that Biden is part of the Democratic establishment and was Obama’s vice president. Accordingly, it will be challenging for future Left-wing candidates to gain a majority of the black votes needed to perform in the primaries as long the leading black politicians remain part of the Democratic establishment and continue to oppose the challenge from the Left.¹⁶⁰

4.2.2. The Electability Factor and Identity Politics

A strategy that weakened Sanders’s 2020 presidential campaign was one that incorporated identity politics. The 2016 campaign followed a strategy that was based on class politics, which aimed to combat income and wealth inequality in a manner that could alleviate cultural tensions that separate society along racial and ethnic lines. From Shant Mesrobian’s perspective, the fact that the principal form of attack against the Senator and his adherents in 2016 was to continuously denounce them as racist, misogynistic, and indifferent to bigotry proves that Sanders’s candidacy was a threat to this culture war concord within the Democratic Party. Mesrobian thus deems the change of strategy in 2020 as a political variant of Stockholm syndrome as the 2020 Sanders campaign embraced the actual identity politics it had previously opposed due to pressure from the Democratic establishment to conform.¹⁶¹ This resulted in Sanders, among others things, denouncing Trump as a racist, sexist, and a homophobe¹⁶², which distracted from his original focus on economic and materialistic issues. An additional factor that

¹⁵⁷ Jane C. Timm and Patrick J. Egan, “South Carolina exit polls: Black and moderate voters fuel Biden to victory”: (*NBC News*, website, published 29.02.2020). Accessed 22.05.2021 from: <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/south-carolina-exit-polls-more-black-moderate-voters-turn-out-n1146046>

¹⁵⁸ Strauss, “‘A chain reaction’: how one endorsement set Joe Biden’s surge in motion”: (*The Guardian*, website, published 04.03.2020). Accessed 22.05.2021 from: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/04/joe-biden-jim-clyburn-endorsement-super-tuesday>

¹⁵⁹ Karp, “Bernie Sanders’s Five-Year War”: (*Jacobin*, website, published 28.08.2020). Accessed 07.05.2021 from: <https://jacobinmag.com/2020/08/bernie-sanders-five-year-war> (n.p.)

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Shant Mesrobian, “The Left’s Culture War Rebranding”: (*American Affairs*, website, published 22.12.2020). Accessed 11.05.2021 from: <https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2020/12/the-lefts-culture-war-rebranding/>

¹⁶² MLive, “Bernie Sanders calls Trump a racist, sexist, homophobe, xenophobe, and religious bigot”: (*YouTube*, website, published 08.03.2020). Accessed 14.05.2021 from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rgka6-fQ9FI&ab_channel=MLive

proved detrimental to Sanders's 2020 campaign was the Senator's decision to use the "socialist" brand more frequently after his 2016 campaign had produced "a cottage industry of socialist political identity among a young, educated, energized class of Left activists and intellectuals throughout the country's urban centers".¹⁶³ This led to the socialist label appealing to and associated with the young, urban, and highly educated social cohort. Consequently, Sanders appeared elitist and exclusive to the older generation that had valued broad and inclusive politics.¹⁶⁴ This is linked to another factor within the Democratic Party that hurt Sanders in 2020, namely electability and "the incumbent effect"¹⁶⁵ – political parties electing a nominee that is considered "moderate and safely electable"¹⁶⁶ when the rivaling political party occupies the presidency. This was a fundamental contrast when comparing the 2016 and 2020 election cycles as Donald Trump was the incumbent president¹⁶⁷ and a profound majority of Democratic voters maintained that electing a candidate who was most likely to defeat Trump was more crucial than any other issue.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, Mesrobian asserts that the socialist brand hurt Sanders in the 2020 primaries due to the fact that the electability factor in the general election was such an important issue for the electorate. There was fear that Trump's threat to make Sanders's socialism a central issue might cost the Democrats the election. Accordingly, a crucial part of the working-class voters that had boosted Sanders's first campaign abandoned the Senator in favor of Biden in 2020, and Sanders's constant weakness amongst older voters proved vital in his defeat.¹⁶⁹

4.2.3. The Democratic Electorate

The 2020 Democratic primary campaign reflects issues that have divided and hampered the Party since the late 1960s when the party reforms began to reach out to professionals and neglected the traditional working-class voters. Sanders attempted to reverse this trend by appealing to the latter group. He did well against Clinton in 2016 amongst the white working class (white voters

¹⁶³ Mesrobian, "The Left's Culture War Rebranding": (*American Affairs*, website, published 22.12.2020). Accessed 11.05.2021 from: <https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2020/12/the-lefts-culture-war-rebranding/> (n.p.)

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Karp, "Bernie Sanders's Five-Year War": (*Jacobin*, website, published 28.08.2020). Accessed 07.05.2021 from: <https://jacobinmag.com/2020/08/bernie-sanders-five-year-war> (n.p.)

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Matthew Sheffield, "Dem voters care more about beating Trump than any one policy issue": (*The Hill*, website, 17.05.2019). Accessed 21.05.2021 from: <https://thehill.com/hilltv/what-americas-thinking/444295-poll-democratic-voters-prioritize-defeating-trump-over-their>

¹⁶⁹ Mesrobian, "The Left's Culture War Rebranding": (*American Affairs*, website, published 22.12.2020). Accessed 11.05.2021 from: <https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2020/12/the-lefts-culture-war-rebranding/>

without college degrees), as he won states such as West Virginia and Indiana. However, in 2020, Biden defeated Sanders across the South and Midwest in mainly white working-class counties. Karp believes that in 2016, Clinton's unpopularity helped Sanders to perform better overall among voters in 2016, especially in conservative regions such as the Ozarks. Biden proved to be a stronger candidate in 2020 as he managed to create an efficient image of "a vanished breed of New Deal Democrat"¹⁷⁰ that was able to appeal to both white and black working class voters. Still, even though Sanders struggled with the white electorate, he performed better than Biden among white working class voters without college degrees as he led or tied Biden among this group in eight different states.¹⁷¹

Furthermore, Sanders made crucial progress among Latino voters in 2020, a group he struggled with in 2016 after losing to Clinton in ten of eleven states where Latinos constituted a significant part of the eligible voters. In California, Sanders won the state by 8 points over Biden and received 49 percent of the Latino vote to Biden's 22, and was a close second in Texas (less than 5 points behind Biden), receiving 39 percent of the Latino vote to Biden's 26.¹⁷² Yet, even though Sanders won Latino-majority localities decisively in 2020, Latino voter turnout did not generally increase. This indicates that Sanders was successful in terms of swaying Latino voters who supported Clinton in 2016, but also fairly unsuccessful in regards to mobilizing new Latino voters to take part in the political process. Karp concludes that the Latino voter turnout is simply one aspect of an overall deeper and more fundamental issue that left-wing candidates encounter within the Democratic Party: "the relative decline of working-class political participation – black, brown, and white alike".¹⁷³

Lastly, due to the Democratic Party largely adhering to neoliberalism, affluent professionals are some of the Democrats' most devoted supporters.¹⁷⁴ In the places where Democratic turnout increased from 2016, the largest increases were among the white and most affluent suburbs that voted for Biden. For instance, in the affluent Fairfax county in Virginia, the

¹⁷⁰ Karp, "Bernie Sanders's Five-Year War": (*Jacobin*, website, published 28.08.2020). Accessed 07.05.2021 from: <https://jacobinmag.com/2020/08/bernie-sanders-five-year-war> (n.p.)

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Nicole Narea, "Latino voters might have saved Bernie Sanders's campaign": (*Vox*, website, published 04.03.2020). Accessed 23.05.2021: <https://www.vox.com/2020/3/4/21164235/latino-vote-texas-california-bernie-sanders-super-tuesday>

¹⁷³ Karp, "Bernie Sanders's Five-Year War": (*Jacobin*, website, published 28.08.2020). Accessed 07.05.2021 from: <https://jacobinmag.com/2020/08/bernie-sanders-five-year-war>

¹⁷⁴ Thomas Frank, *Listen, Liberal: Or, What Ever Happened to the Party of the People* (New York, 2017), p. 41.

primary vote increased with seventy percent as approximately hundred thousand new voters joined the party. In several places, the effect of the suburban increase was so enormous that very small affluent areas would have a bigger effect on the election than significantly bigger working-class localities. This turned out to be a critical factor in the 2020 Democratic primaries as conservative affluent suburbanites supported Biden. Across the Sun Belt, from energy enterprises in California and Texas to defense contractors in Virginia, professionals voted for Biden. Following Trump's election 2016, anti-Trump Republican pundits helped mobilize these wealthy suburbanite professionals as these two groups had a cultural detestation for Trump and a material hostility to Sanders in common. Karp underlines that these affluent suburbanites could have been a decisive factor in Sanders's ultimate defeat in the primaries and that they will most likely remain an obstacle to Left contenders in the future as the neoliberal-wing of the Democrats continue to court them.¹⁷⁵

4.3. Prospects for Future Success

Sanders's defeat in the 2020 Democratic presidential primaries due to the aforementioned obstacles within the Democratic Party, makes it doubtful that he will run for president a third time. He will be 83 on Election Day 2024,¹⁷⁶ which leads to the question: who could provide the leadership of the socialist movement and continue Sanders's role on the national political level? The Senator's goal of generating a political revolution by mobilizing millions of Americans to take part in the political process becomes essential in this context. Directly connected to this objective is Our Revolution, a non-profit political action organization that was launched in August 2016 following the suspensions of Sanders's presidential campaign of that year. An important task of this organization is to elect political candidates at the federal, state, and local levels that share Sanders's ideology. As an elected official, Sanders is not legally permitted to take part in the daily activities of the organization. Instead, it is run by Larry Cohen and Nina Turner, both of whom had major roles in Sanders's presidential campaign.¹⁷⁷ The Senator credits the organization for providing the younger generation of potential politicians the confidence needed in their effort to successfully run for political office. Furthermore, he believes that an

¹⁷⁵ Karp, "Bernie Sanders's Five-Year War": (*Jacobin*, website, published 28.08.2020). Accessed 07.05.2021 from: <https://jacobinmag.com/2020/08/bernie-sanders-five-year-war>

¹⁷⁶ Judis, *The Socialist Awakening*, p. 62.

¹⁷⁷ Bernie Sanders, *Where We Go from Here: Two Years in the Resistance* (London, 2018), pp. 34-35.

important factor of the political revolution is overcoming obstacles, financial but also psychological, that dishearten potential candidates and inhibit them from taking part in politics.¹⁷⁸

4.3.1. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

One of the candidates that Our Revolution endorsed during the 2018 midterm elections was Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez¹⁷⁹ who defeated incumbent Democratic Congressman Joseph Crowley in New York's 14th congressional district Democratic primary that year. Ocasio-Cortez had previously worked as a campaign organizer for Sanders's presidential campaign but did not have any prior political experience in terms of being an elected official.¹⁸⁰ This aspect is something that Ocasio-Cortez underlined in a campaign ad as she acknowledged that she had not planned for a career in politics and did not have a wealthy background. She decided to enter the congressional election in order to create a New York City that "working families can afford"¹⁸¹, which entailed advocating for issues such as Medicare for All, tuition-free public college, and a federal jobs guarantee.¹⁸² Ocasio-Cortez went on to win the general election in November 2018 and thus became the youngest woman ever elected to Congress at 29 years old.¹⁸³ Following in the footsteps of Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez ran a grassroots campaign that did not accept any campaign contributions from business-related PACs and instead raised about \$2 million that consisted of small donations, of which 62 percent were contributions of less than \$200.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 37.

¹⁷⁹ Our Revolution, "Our Revolution is proud to endorse Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to represent the people of New York's 14th District": (*Facebook*, website, published 06.06.2018). Accessed 05.05.2021 from:

<https://www.facebook.com/PoliticalRevolution/posts/our-revolution-is-proud-to-endorse-alexandria-ocasio-cortez-to-represent-the-peo/1908900179162189/>

¹⁸⁰ Shane Goldmacher and Jonathan Martin, "Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Defeats Joseph Crowley in Major Democratic House Upset": (*The New York Times*, website, published 26.06.2018). Accessed 06.05.2021 from:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/26/nyregion/joseph-crowley-ocasio-cortez-democratic-primary.html>

¹⁸¹ Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, "The Courage to Change | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez": (*YouTube*, website, published 30.05.2018). Accessed 06.05.2021 from:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rq3QXIVR0bs&ab_channel=AlexandriaOcasio-Cortez (n.p.)

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Abigail Johnson Hess, "29-year-old Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez makes history as the youngest woman ever elected to Congress": (*CNBC*, website, published 29.11.2018). Accessed 06.05.2021 from:

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/06/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-is-now-the-youngest-woman-elected-to-congress.html>

¹⁸⁴ Karl Evers-Hillstrom, "Ocasio-Cortez enters the House with highest portion of small contributions":

(*OpenSecrets*, website, published 17.12.2018). Accessed 06.05.2021 from:

<https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2018/12/ocasio-cortez-enters-the-house-as-most-popular-member-with-small-donors/>

4.3.2. Ocasio-Cortez and Sanders

During the 2020 Democratic presidential primaries, Ocasio-Cortez not only endorsed Senator Sanders but also linked the Senator directly to her own political career, citing Sanders as an example and an inspiration that convinced her to run for political office. What was significant for Ocasio-Cortez was the fact that Sanders proved that it was possible to run a political campaign based on a grass-roots movement as opposed to accepting big money contributions. An element that is of profound importance for the Congresswoman in this regard is Sanders's political revolution as she says that the cause that she and Sanders are fighting for is the basis of her politics. Furthermore, Ocasio-Cortez emphasizes Sanders's ideals, stating that their cause entails "unconditional, universal, guaranteed advanced standard of living in the United States of America"¹⁸⁵ regardless of one's background as Americans "should have a society that guarantees 21st century economic human rights, that introduces democracy to the workplace"¹⁸⁶ so that every American possesses "actual power".¹⁸⁷

These statements signify that Ocasio-Cortez is almost identical to Sanders on an ideological level as she expresses very similar beliefs concerning how the economy should be managed and the economic rights that all American should be entitled to have. Accordingly, what the election of Ocasio-Cortez indicates is that Sanders's ideology and ambitions for the United States is very much present and active in the younger generation of American politicians. This is due to the fact that Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez embodies the ideals that Sanders champions and is part of the political movement that the Senator has tried to mobilize since 2015. It is proof that Sanders has had a direct influence on the Congresswoman as she chose to get involved in politics, to a large extent, because of him and what he represents. Thus, it displays the fact that Sanders has become an essential symbol for a younger generation of American politicians that has an actual, concrete effect in the political realm. Accordingly,

¹⁸⁵ Bernie Sanders, "Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Endorses Bernie Sanders for President": (*YouTube*, website, published 19.10.2019). Accessed 16.04.2021 from:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDGf39NkZe0&ab_channel=BernieSanders (n.p.)

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Ocasio-Cortez could be a potential heir to Sanders who can lead the Left given that she not only endorses his socialist policies but is also one of the most prominent politicians in America.¹⁸⁸

4.3.3. Future Socialist Possibilities

In regards to a future socialist mass movement that the Left can mobilize, Karp asserts that Sanders's effort to shape American politics has provided the American Left with valuable information. It illustrated that social democratic policies are able to achieve a "mass base"¹⁸⁹ in contemporary America. Karp argues that the Senator established the most influential left-wing challenge in modern history as Sanders began at three percent in the polls and conducted two presidential campaigns based almost completely on the solidity of his platform. Even though Democratic candidates in the past such as Jesse Jackson also advocated for single-payer healthcare, Sanders, in contrast, ended his second campaign at a time when polls showed a fresh majority of Americans supporting Medicare for All. Furthermore, Karp contends that the partial success of Sanders's presidential campaigns is not solely a futile "discursive"¹⁹⁰ triumph. It displayed that Sanders's democratic socialism is capable of winning the support of millions of Americans and not just thousands. Karp believes that the significant accomplishment of Sanders's "five-year war"¹⁹¹ against America's wealthy and powerful and the Democratic Party leadership is a strengthened and clarified movement for American democratic socialism. This movement is encouraged by the appeal of its platform but also well aware of the capabilities of its adversaries. Senator Sanders has strengthened the Left as it is now bigger as well as more self-aware, and considerably less tempted to conduct futile third-party campaigns.¹⁹²

Subsequently, Karp believes that this potential majority will face two significant difficulties during the next ten years. The most acute is the main adversary within the primary electorate – the older, affluent, group of professionals that the Democratic leadership continues to pursue with assurances of tax cuts. The challenge in the longer term will be the intense focus on the urban districts on both the East and West coasts of the country where the Left attempts to

¹⁸⁸ Charlotte Alter, "'Change Is Closer Than We Think.' Inside Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Unlikely Rise": (*Time*, website, published 19.03.2019). Accessed 26.05.2021 from: <https://time.com/longform/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-profile/>

¹⁸⁹ Karp, "Bernie Sanders's Five-Year War": (*Jacobin*, website, published 28.08.2020). Accessed 07.05.2021 from: <https://jacobinmag.com/2020/08/bernie-sanders-five-year-war> (n.p.)

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

attract white-collar suburbanites with identity politics as opposed to class politics. In contrast, Sanders based his campaigns on a disparate theory as he brought together a disparate coalition of younger and lower-income voters from Duluth, Minnesota to Brownsville, Texas. In the 2020 Democratic primaries, this working-class coalition was insufficient in terms of winning the nomination for president. Nonetheless, Karp believes that by 2032, contemporary Sanders voters below the age of fifty will probably “represent a majority within the [Democratic] Party electorate”.¹⁹³ The question he poses is whether or not the Left, in the effort to win these voters, will advance the work that Sanders has developed or if it will pursue identity politics and a cordial affiliation with the neoliberal-wing of the Democratic Party.¹⁹⁴

4.3.4. The Threat of Identity Politics

Conversely, Mesrobian contends that the Left has already embraced the realm of identity politics that Karp names as a future threat. He writes that “the Squad” – a group of celebrity politicians that includes Ocasio-Cortez - originated from Sanders’s first presidential campaign but has now become part of the Democratic Party’s culture war as the Sanders affiliated-left at large has embraced identity politics. The Squad is also part of this realignment as the group has embraced a more common, appeasing relationship with the neoliberal-wing of the Democratic Party. For instance, in the fall of 2020, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi rejected President Trump’s \$2 trillion COVID relief package in the effort to deny the President a political accomplishment during the pivotal weeks leading to the election. Few people were willing to challenge Pelosi on this issue in order to distribute vital aid to Americans at large, and the Squad were among those who chose to remain silent and instead focused on their social media celebrity status.

Accordingly, it has become simpler for the Democratic establishment to exert power over the Squad as it is now part of the “cultural Left”.¹⁹⁵ Ocasio-Cortez’s own preferences were highlighted when she separated from Sanders’s 2020 campaign when the Senator chose to promote his endorsement by popular podcaster Joe Rogan. Ocasio-Cortez and others on the Left have long deemed Rogan a problematic individual as he has hosted people with opinions on cultural and societal topics that do not correlate with their own. Accordingly, the

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Mesrobian, “The Left’s Culture War Rebranding”: (*American Affairs*, website, published 22.12.2020). Accessed 11.05.2021 from: <https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2020/12/the-lefts-culture-war-rebranding/> (n.p.)

Congresswoman chose to abandon Sanders’s bid for the presidency – which meant that she did not campaign for the Senator at a crucial period of the primaries - in favor of her “status and celebrity among social justice activists”.¹⁹⁶

Subsequently, Mesrobian deems a “Squad-style Left”¹⁹⁷ as acceptable for everyone – the Democratic Party, the Squad, and the Republican Party as well. The Democratic Party accepts it as its goal is to discard its entire working-class background and completely transform itself as an organization of affluent, urban professionals – a venture that is aided by the Squad’s social media activity. The Squad finds it acceptable as they can maintain their celebrity and influence by presenting a rebellious way of life to young, educated voters who are otherwise not attracted to the Party. Finally, the Republican Party also benefits it welcomes a constant stream of working-class and non-college educated electors who have been rejected by the Democrats. Although Sanders was offering this section of the electorate a program of economic relief, class solidarity, and a rebellion against elite apathy, those succeeding him offer “privilege-checking”¹⁹⁸ and anti-racism guidelines rooted in identity politics. Thus, Mesrobian concludes that the political system is satisfied with the Squad as it contributes to preservation of the status quo.¹⁹⁹

4.4. Chapter 4: Conclusion

In conclusion, there could be a socialist majority, comprised of Americans below the age of forty-five, on the national level within the next decade. However, in order to appeal to these younger voters, the American Left needs to follow a strategy of class politics that focuses on economic issues and disregard the culture war and the aspect of identity politics. The problem is that identity politics has already seeped into the Left and its potential leader of the future, Ocasio-Cortez. Thus, Sanders’s fight for social equality and economic security is in danger of being muddled with identity politics to the extent that his legacy would be one that has become overtaken and subdued by the very interests he has been fighting all along – the Democratic establishment. Although she is, at the outset, ideologically aligned with Sanders and wants to achieve the same social democratic policies that he advocates, Ocasio-Cortez – along with her fellow Squad members – represent a new generation of politicians who are vulnerable to the

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

influence of social media to the extent that it lessens the appeal of those social democratic policies. What Sanders has done is present the Left with an alternative strategy, one of class politics based on social democratic principles that attempts to mobilize across various racial, ethnic, and gender lines. He has displayed its potential but also illuminated how powerful the opposition is as the mainstream Democratic Party managed to curtail his impact in the 2020 primaries and has absorbed Ocasio-Cortez and the Squad into their orbit as well. Whatever the future might hold, Sanders has thrust a spotlight on socialism and contributed to the rising popularity of socialist policies, and thus created an opportunity for his potential successors to build on that opportunity and achieve legislative success. Therefore, the definitive story of Sanders and his legacy depends on whether or not the Left will ultimately embrace or reject the opportunity he has brought them.

5. Conclusion

Senator Sanders is not a traditional American politician for several reasons. His explicit rejection of capitalism and outspoken support for socialism is one factor that distinguishes him from the average politician in the United States. He is an advocate of an ideology in a country that historically does not have a place for it as it conflicts with the capitalistic ideals of competition, self-interest, and economic individuality. Whereas Sanders believes in an economic system that emphasizes the need to guarantee economic rights for every American regardless of one's background and produce more social equality, the liberal tradition endorses a system that allows Americans to achieve economic success by way of competition. This positions Sanders sharply against much of the Democratic Party as he is advocating for economic rights with the objective of generating more social equality and economic security for the masses, while the Democratic establishment adheres to a neoliberal mindset that favors a deregulated economy that benefits America's affluent groups. Moreover, the Senator's approach to campaign finance, rejecting campaign contributions from wealthy and powerful business interests and instead conducting a grass-roots campaign based on small individual donations from the average American, is a reflection of his belief that profound structural change in the American economy cannot be achieved through a traditional, friendly relationship with the country's powerful elite.

Furthermore, by endorsing Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and the unrealized Second Bill of Rights, Sanders attempts to position himself as a successor to Roosevelt who is trying to finish the work of the former president. An important aspect in this context is that Sanders is attempting to accomplish this under the banner socialism as he not only deems it a superior economic system to capitalism, but he argues that the programs of the New Deal were socialist programs and that Roosevelt's presidency represented a shift towards socialism, despite Roosevelt viewing himself as a savior of capitalism. Thus, by endorsing Roosevelt and the New Deal and merging it with social democratic ideals, Sanders is effectively melding American and European political practices. This is what separates Sanders from a Democrat such as Elizabeth Warren as he is advocating for large structural changes in the American economy from a "foreign" socialist perspective while Warren endorses very similar policies but from a "domestic" capitalist perspective.

Moreover, the Senator views the Democratic Party's abandonment of the New Deal

coalition and its embrace of neoliberalism as a mistaken and misguided ideological realignment as it, to him, represents an acknowledgement of capitalism and an endorsement of greed and economic inequality. Sanders's two presidential campaigns have been an effort to redirect the Democratic Party back to its "correct" position on the left in the American political spectrum and to establish a new consensus within the party around social democratic principles. Although he was not successful in accomplishing these objectives, Sanders has proven that his social democratic agenda is popular among young people, meaning Americans below the age of forty-five. Thus, the Senator has provided his potential successors on the Left with an opportunity to continue the work that he started and mobilize a socialist mass movement based on social democratic principles that can achieve electoral success and legislative power. However, with the Left becoming deeply involved in the culture war, the future of socialism in America is uncertain as Sanders himself compromised his last presidential campaign by mixing class politics with identity politics, which damaged his appeal to the Democratic electorate. If Sanders's future successors are to succeed in mobilizing a socialist mass movement, they need to learn from Sanders's mistakes and not make identity politics a part of their strategy. The key to success is dependent on a strategy of class politics that focuses on economic and materialistic issues that appeals to people across racial, ethnic, and gender lines. Whether or not Sanders's vision for the United States will ever be realized is beyond the scope of this thesis. Sanders has laid the groundwork, and others will to finish what he started.

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