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Building Socialism From Below: Luxemburg, Sears, And The Case Of Occupy Wall Street

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Building socialism from below

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By
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Major Research Paper

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Abstract

For as long as capitalism has existed, people have struggled against it. However, despite the fact that anti-capitalist social movements have won important battles and at times created change, the global capitalist system remains largely intact, ever growing and expanding. How might waves of resistance help pave the way for a different economic and political system—one based upon the principles of accountability, equity, justice, and production for human need? This paper examines how anti-capitalist theories and writings, as well as a radically democratic social movement, can inform visions of a sustainable future that is productive, just, and built upon the needs and well-being of people: a future of socialism-from-below. After clarifying the political vision identified as socialism-from-below, I outline the contributions of two influential theorists in this tradition: Rosa Luxemburg and Alan Sears. I then apply their theories on the potential for social movements, and the characteristics of socialism-from-below, to the case of Occupy Wall Street. By applying the lessons learned through Occupy, future movements can meaningfully contribute to the long-term process of developing social movements with the capacity to resist capitalism in a more sustainable way.

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Table of Contents

Abstract....2
Acknowledgements....3
Chapter 1....5
Introduction....5
Literature Review....8
Capitalism....8
Neoliberalism....13
The Reproduction of Neoliberal Capitalism....18
Inspiring Movements Towards Resistance....20
Moving Beyond the Protest....21
Chapter 2....23
Theory and Methodology....23
Socialism-from-below....23
Luxemburg....29
Sears....32
Chapter 3....36
Findings and Results....36
Chapter 4....48
Discussion and conclusion....48
References....53

Chapter 1

Introduction

In 2014, many of us find ourselves in a precarious place. Job security is increasingly uncertain, and for students like myself, the prospect of graduating is not filled with visions of accomplishment, but is rather fraught with uncertain job prospects and piling debt (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2014). We have grown up hearing the story that the world rewards hard work, and that poverty and deprivation are the products of laziness—but with decreasing financial security, stagnating jobs, government cuts in social spending, and environmental degradation around the globe, this story is getting harder and harder to believe. Meanwhile, the private sector continues to grow: CBC News tells us that in 2013, private financial wealth around the Globe grew by 14.3%, despite the fact that millions of North American families have still not recovered from the 2008 recession (CBC News, 2014).

Something is wrong with this story.

For as long as capitalism has existed, people have struggled against it (Linebaugh, 2014). And for virtually as long, social and economic theorists have demonstrated the flaws in its promises of prosperity and equal opportunity, showing instead the ways in which the capitalist system has led to social and environmental devastation. Among the specific ills reproduced in part through the logic of capitalism are mass poverty, wars, human injury and sickness, gender and racial inequality, gentrification and mass incarceration, environmental desolation, and the concentration of wealth and power into fewer and fewer hands (Bannerji, 2000; Federici, 2012; Gilmore, 2006; Harvey, 2005; McNally, 2006; Peet, 1975). Capitalism has deepened streams of poverty and exploitation around the world; yet, while there has been oppression, there has also been resistance. There have been communities across the world who have stood up to the

forces of capital and, by taking to the streets and organizing in their schools, workplaces, and neighbourhoods, have reclaimed their land, protected their resources, held fast to their cultural practices, and defended popular power (Smith, 2001; Spronk & Webber, 2007; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). However, despite the fact that many of these movements have won important battles and at times created change, the global capitalist system remains largely intact, ever growing and expanding. How might these waves of resistance help pave the way for a different economic and political system—one based upon the principles of accountability, equity, justice, and production for human need? How might these moments of resistance inform global movements with the capacity to bring about another world?

In this Major Research Project, I examine how anti-capitalist theories and writings, as well as a radically democratic social movement, can inform visions of a sustainable future that is productive, just, and built upon the needs and well-being of people: a future of socialism-from-below[1]. My research is premised upon the assumption that in order to strive towards another world, we must first begin to imagine that an alternative to capitalism is possible (Lebowitz, 2010). By engaging with the work of two socialist theorists, and analyzing key themes in the academic debates around the Occupy Wall Street movement, my paper addresses the following questions: how can key insights from mass movements for popular power inform new movements for sustainable, democratic socialism-from-below in the 21st century? Specifically, how can movements for transformation build upon and learn from the practices of Occupy Wall Street, and from the traditions of socialist theorists?

I will argue that, in order to meaningfully challenge capitalism, we must employ the theoretical lens of socialism as a guiding tool for building resistance movements. By analyzing Occupy using the core tenets of socialism-from-below, I will draw lessons that are useful for

[1] For my definition of this specific term, see page 21

contributing to the long-term process of building future movements with a greater capacity to resist capitalism.

This MRP will be organized in the following way: the remainder of this chapter will lay the foundation for this paper by explaining the problems of the capitalist system—its premises, its logic, and its consequences both throughout history and within the 21st century. I will then examine how this logic is reproduced, and a number of movements that have tried to resist it. I will then discuss the necessity of envisioning alternatives, and the value of employing an anti-capitalist theoretical framework as a way of making sense of resistance movements.

Following this, the theory and methodology section of this paper will define and discuss socialism, and specifically, my conception of the term socialism-from-below: a democratic social order in which human and environmental needs, rather than profit, are at the centre of economic and social reproduction. I'll illustrate my own concept of its central tenets, drawing on Hal Draper (1966) to distinguish the two dominant understandings of socialism. Following this, I will explore Rosa Luxemburg and Alan Sears' theories on the processes and underpinnings necessary to ushering in an era of socialism. Luxemburg (1937) postulates that in order to bring about an age of socialism, workers and dispossessed people themselves must struggle against the capitalist class, winning concessions not for the sake of redeeming capitalism, but in order to prepare themselves for mass mobilization and genuine social transformation. The Luxemburgian model undergirds Alan Sears' (2014) theorization of the Infrastructure of Dissent, in which he argues that in order for people to achieve and sustain mass mobilization in the 21st century, they must develop interlocking cultural, social, and theoretical spaces through which to exchange ideas and generate a broad left with social weight.

In order to bring these theories to life, I will also look at a case study: the Occupy Wall

Street movement of 2011. I will examine some of the central debates around the movement, as well as its place within the two theories discussed prior. Was Occupy "successful" or did it "fail"? Has it changed the ways in which people engage with capitalism and explore alternatives? Is this movement able to teach us anything about future movements on the left? Upon addressing a number of the themes present in the academic literature, I intend to analyze Occupy through the lens of Luxemburg and Sears' theoretical work.

By engaging with these theories and movements, I make a case for the possibility of developing a future in which the interests of human need are not sacrificed for the interests of profit. My research adds to the body of knowledge on the possibilities of socialism and socialist analysis, and intends to make an understanding of socialism-from-below more accessible. By drawing upon a socialist tradition to examine a contemporary social movement, I create a work that is meaningful to activists and communities interested in developing future movements based upon redistribution, human need, and justice. My aspiration is for this research project to meaningfully contribute to challenging the complacency and sense of helplessness associated with neoliberal capitalism, demonstrating to readers that capitalism is *not inevitable*, that there *is* an alternative, and that by building movements on the left, we *can* aspire and build towards another world.

Literature Review

Below I will describe the central principles upon which the capitalist system is founded, drawing largely upon Marx's theoretical account and other theorists within the Marxist tradition (esp. McNally, 2006; Lebowitz, 2010; Harvey, 2011; Cairns & Sears, 2012).

Capitalism

The fundamental motivation of capitalism is *profit*. As Marx and Engels (1967) explain in

The Communist Manifesto, profit accumulation is the engine, the driving force, the beginning and end of capitalism. The way in which profit (or *surplus value*) is produced is the characteristic that makes capitalism distinct from economic systems of the past, and it is the reason capitalism cannot be transformed without a radical overhaul of the very foundations of society and economy. As Fredric Jameson (2003) said, the mechanics and reach of capitalism have become so widespread, so normalized, that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism" (p. 76).

Under capitalism, productive parties are divided into two groups: the owners of productive property (the capitalists) and the workers. As Marx and Engels (1967) explain, the capitalist owns the means of production: the land, resources, and equipment necessary for producing things. Workers are those who do not own productive property: all they own is their labour power (Marx & Engels, 1967). Capitalism is an agreement, albeit a contested one, between these two classes, in which the capitalist purchases labour power from workers in exchange for wages. Through the purchase of labour power, the capitalist controls the production process, then sells the goods and services workers produced (commodities) on the market for a profit (Marx& Engels, 1967; McNally, 2006).

In order to make this profit under capitalism, production must be fundamentally based on the exploitation of the labour power of workers. It is important to note that the capitalist does not simply purchase workers' labour, but labour *power*: during a given shift or workday, everything a worker produces belongs to the capitalist, and the capitalist is also seeking to extract more and more productivity from the worker, above and beyond what is being given back in wages (McNally, 2006). This extra productivity generates a surplus, allowing a large portion of the value generated through production to go to the capitalist in the form of profit. Control over this surplus is what allows the capitalist to acquire more value than he

compensates the worker for producing—wages, along with other considerations necessary to maintain production (like equipment purchase and maintenance) are expenses (McNally, 2006). As expenses, wages are a deduction from the value produced, and in order to remain competitive, the capitalist must always be looking for a way to generate more surplus and suppress wages and other expenses (Marx & Engels, 1967). Although wages are an expense for the capitalist, they are the survival and livelihood of the workers; and workers must (with greater and lesser coherence and success) look to have wages raised or at least defended. Because capitalists require profits to reinvest and grow in order to remain competitive with other capitalists, and workers' wages must always be lower than the value workers produce if profits are to be made, workers and capitalists are placed in an antagonistic relationship (Luxemburg, 1937). It is also a relationship that deeply organizes the overall distribution of power in society: in the absence of resistance from below, the classes who own productive property grow wealthier and more powerful, while workers struggle to survive (Lebowitz, 2010).

As a result, capitalism is a system that entrenches economic inequality—through capitalism, workers and capitalists are always at odds with one another. At times this struggle erupts in open conflict; at other times, it is less visible because the organizations of workers' power are weak (Sears 2014). In addition, the inequality necessary to capitalism is solidified through the instability of the market. As Richard Peet (1975) explains, the demands of the market are fluctuating—markets go through periods of boom and bust, and consequently do not always demand the same level of production. These fluctuating demands not only perpetuate, but actually entrench the unequal class divide consequential of the capitalist system. Peet (1975) argues that, to account for an unstable market, capitalism depends upon a strata of people kept in a constant state of economic instability—a demographic of potential

workers who must always be willing to work in any condition when the need arises, and be disposable when no longer needed. This demographic tends to be comprised of women, people of colour, and queer individuals—as a result, this class division deepens racial and sexual hierarchies (Federici, 2012).

As for actual working conditions within capitalism, experiences are uneven. Not every single employee is automatically miserable, and some people enjoy their jobs or at least elements of it. However, I must draw attention to the fact that the way work itself is structured under capitalism factors into that basic antagonism between workers and capitalists. Capitalists owning the labour power of workers contributes to what Marx (1967) calls alienation. Because the labour power of the working class belongs to the capitalist, workers' time, energy, creative capacity, productivity, and ability to flourish become the property of the capitalist, not the worker (Cairns and Sears 2012). As Marx and Engels (1967) explain, workers under capitalism are alienated from their product, from one another, from nature, and from their own creativity —labour is a state of self-denial. Through the increased gender and racial stratification especially brought about by the capitalism of the 20th century, this alienation amongst workers has only increased (Brandt, 2008).

Now before we go any further, I want to address what seems to me like a logical question: if profit is the driving force that places workers and capitalists in a relationship of antagonism, why does capitalism *have* to be driven by profit? Are we assuming that all CEOs are money-hungry and could never choose to give their employees higher wages? Does capitalism really need profit to survive?

Profit is in fact essential to capitalism, but not simply because all capitalists are greedily trying to line their own pockets. Rather, private competition is built into the logic of capitalism. Capitalists must continue to make a profit in order to re-invest it in production—developing the

tools and technologies to produce more commodities with less and less time and fewer technological resources, and consequently be able to sell at a lower and lower price (McNally, 2006). Capitalists that do not continue to reinvest in improving production to drive down prices will be put out of business by competitors. This means constantly having to figure out new ways of generating profit in order to reinvest and drive down prices—even if it means driving employees to inhumane working conditions or completely destroying the natural world. As Rosa Luxemburg (1937) explains, the interests of the capitalist must dominate the processes of production due to competition, exploiting them through whatever means is necessary to suit the needs of the market.

Because of the nature of competition, capitalism's pattern of surplus-extraction, reinvestment, and development is cyclical and unending, and capitalism is a system of relentless expansion, interrupted only by periodic crashes. In order to maintain profit, capitalists must ensure that what is being produced is marketable—there must always be people to buy things. As a result, capitalism depends upon a culture of consumerism and planned obsolescence: for example, products are made to break so that people are continually driven back to the market to buy, introducing consumerism as a form of leisure, as a form of interaction and even as a form of identify—all in the name of maintaining production (Leonard, 2010). This mandate of relentless expansion has also had a devastating toll on the natural environment, rapidly destroying millions of rainforests and ecosystems, homes to many species and indigenous communities. This has caused mass sickness, displacement, and has placed us on a path towards environmental crisis (Leonard, 2010; Petras & Veltmeyer, 2013).

Capitalism is a system that has not only redefined the relations of production, but has shaped the fabric of the social and political world. It has separated economics from governmental responsibility, introducing the norms and mechanisms of capitalist production

(efficiency and productivity) into social institutions such as education and government. Its central driving force—profit—has become the primary indicator through which well-being, health, happiness, and success is measured (Ritzer, 1983; Government of the UK, 2013).

Since capitalism operates through individual capitalists continually developing the means of production in order to remain competitive, it is a system that is not based upon collective decision-making, but by individual capitalists making production choices solely on the grounds of what is efficient, what is profitable, and what can be sold. Therefore, the market is dominated not by products that meet people's needs or ensure their safety, but entirely on the basis of what capitalists assume they can sell (McNally, 2006). As a result, the market is not an instrument oriented toward meeting needs. Even products essential for survival, like food or shelter, are virtually only accessible through the market, ensuring that only those who can pay will have their needs met. Profitability is placed ahead of human well-being, and through the separation of the economy from the sphere of governance, decisions made about profitability have been placed above the interests of the people governments claim to represent. This is anti-democratic (Lebowitz, 2010; Cairns & Sears 2012).

Neoliberalism

To this point I have described the core logic of the dominant socio-economic system that has been expanding across the globe for at least the last 200 years. In this section, I focus on significant changes taking place within capitalism during the past thirty or forty years. Understanding neoliberalism is important to thinking about what resistance to capitalism must look like in the 21st century.

Because of workers' struggles in the first part of the twentieth century, the state in the post-war period was partially devoted to reining in the worst excesses of capitalism, making

sure that business expansion was kept in check, and that people could get at least their basic needs meet through the state (Sears 1999). The actual number of people who were able to get their needs met by the state was not all-inclusive—the same privileges of state care were not afforded to women as they were to men, people of colour as to whites, and LGBT individuals as to straight and cisgender communities. However, the state assumed the function of care-giver: this function was known as the welfare state (Sears, 1999).

However, the late 1970s marked a change in this. As Sears (1999) explains, the conditions for this shift were a combination of economic crisis, the weakening of the labour movement, and the rise of a new generation of right-wing thinkers in the political realms of the Global North—particularly Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in Britain and President Ronald Reagan in the United States. As a result of these conditions, the late 1970s marked the beginning of a new incarnation of market relations known as neoliberal capitalism.

Stuart Hall (2011) describes the core premise of neoliberalism as "the idea of the 'free, possessive individual'" (p. 706). According to Hall (2011), neoliberalism comes from classic ideals of liberalism in the 18th century, associated with rights to private property and accumulation. As an economic and ideological reality, neoliberal capitalism is an exercise of this freedom to expand private property in the market without restraint, and stipulates the right to grow and accumulate on a global scale (Kitschelt, 1999). In response to the economic crises of the 1960s and 1970s, Prime Minister Thatcher argued for the overthrow of the welfare state and the redevelopment of the state as the servant of individual freedom, of corporate freedom, arguing that open and unregulated markets are the only key to development, and are in fact "the British inheritance" (Hall, 2011, p. 706). Her approach to economies saw the welfare state as unnatural, compromising our fundamental rights to freedom, and placing barriers to economic growth (Hall, 2011).

As David Harvey (2005) explains, the logistics of neoliberal capitalism are such that the state must invest its resources primarily into developing the market and bringing in foreign investment, even at the expense of labour interests or the environment. It promotes direct foreign investment under the assumption that such investments will, eventually, improve a nation's overall prosperity: the "declared public aims of neoliberalism [are] the well-being of all" (Harvey, 2005, p. 79). Neoliberal capitalism promises the prosperity of all people through the prosperity of the economy. In other words, this political shift to neoliberalism was no accident. It was an intentional manoeuvre on the part of business and state policymakers as a means of eliminating seemingly needless restrictions on profit accumulation (McNally, 2006).

Despite the rhetoric of prosperity and sustainable development, the practices of neoliberal capitalism—deregulation of labour markets and trade, greater direct foreign investment and corporate land enclosure across the world—have been detrimental to many communities in both the Global North and South. One example of this devastation can be seen in Mexico. As Brandt (2008) explains, the reinstatement of the government as the servant of economic expansion and foreign investment has largely meant the elimination of state support for workers. This has placed Mexican workers in an increasingly precarious position, as it has resulted in the elimination of protection from the consequences of lay-offs, decreased work, and companies pulling out. Brandt (2008) explains that this re-investment of government resources into corporations has also meant the removal of food subsidies and credit programmes for local farmers in favour of market expansion, forcing farmers to enter an ever-growing, increasingly precarious workforce. This has often meant that farmers, formerly able to sustain themselves, must get seasonal or part-time jobs to patch together enough money to feed their families. Formerly a self-sustaining nation, Mexico must now import a third of its food (Brandt, 2008). Since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed in

1994, this strategy of retrenching state support and investing it into corporate growth has forced many communities across the nation to leave traditional farming practices behind and enter an unstable workforce with little security or autonomy (McNally, 2006; Brandt, 2008).

McNally (2006) explains that this pattern of freer corporate trade forcing farmers and rural communities to leave their traditional lifestyles is not unique to Mexico. Because of increased privatization and state-retrenchment of social services, rural and poor citizens all across the globe have experienced limited access to healthcare and agricultural supplies, increased gentrification, and the retrenchment of credit programmes for farmers and small business—dismantling local farmers' and small business owners' ability to compete in small- and large-scale markets (McNally, 2006; Sadasivam, B. 1997). Although neoliberalism uses the language of promoting competition, this is an increase in competition almost exclusively between giant corporate conglomerates—not between small businesses or other direct competitors such as farmers or tradespeople.

As mentioned in the previous section, capitalism separates the economy from the state. By giving owners of private property protection from democratic control, the logic of neoliberalism allows and codifies corporations' ability to supersede governments' protection of people and the environment. According to McNally (2006), chapter 11 of NAFTA gives corporations the right to sue national governments for blocking their ability to invest, and infringing upon their right to trade. This has led to corporations suing governments for denying them access to property, even after citizens have lobbied the government to block investment on the grounds that proposed mining projects or manufacturing plants were detrimental to the health and water supply of the local community (McNally, 2006). Under chapter 11, the well-being of the environment, as well as individual citizens, is subordinated to the rights of corporations.

This expansion of corporate rights at the expense of human and environmental well-being has not been exclusive to North American nations. As Petras and Veltmeyer (2013) report, a number of mining corporations in the Amazon have been found and charged with using manipulative and coercive methods, from posing as humanitarian organizations to employing direct violence, in order to secure the consent of local peoples and politicians to mine their land. This has produced devastating ecological consequences. In Petras and Veltmeyer's (2013) words, “over a million people in the Amazonian basin suffer from diseases derived from exposure to and ingestion of toxic and carcinogenic substances, such as mercury” (p. 168). While embracing their freedom to expand into untapped resources, the tactics of these foreign-owned companies have effectively overruled the voices of local communities in the fate of their own land. This has also happened in Costa Rica, where corporate enclosure has prevented indigenous people from tending to the land in traditional ways—ways that have preserved the land for centuries (Isla, 2005). Even in cases where World Bank-sponsored land enclosure has happened in the name of preservation, the imposition of corporate practices has been to the detriment of both people and the environment (Isla, 2005).

Neoliberal capitalism has also exacerbated unequal gender relations. Brandt (2008) describes the ways in which agribusiness work in Mexico is divided along assumptions about inherent gendered qualities—women are given monotonous jobs with longer hours because they are expected to be able to handle them better. Brandt (2008) explains that these divisions have only increased with the expansion of agribusiness—more women are being employed for seasonal work, while more men are being employed year-round under the assumption that they are the primary supporters of the family (Brandt, 2008). Despite the fact that agribusiness provides opportunities for both men and women to work, sexual divisions of labour are distinct and hierarchical. This reality is even worse for indigenous women, who are often relegated to

jobs picking in the fields, where they are given the lowest wages and greatest exposure to pesticides. With incredibly low wages and no childcare, many of these women must bring their children onto the fields to work so their family can afford to eat (Brandt, 2008). Within the context of Costa Rican land privatization, Isla (2005) explains that although multilateral institutions have hired many women for their botanical knowledge of tropical resources, claiming that this is a step towards equal status, the consequent reality for many women has been one of social devaluing through the commodification of knowledge. Coupled with additional time constraints and an inability to adequately continue cultivating their own land and tending to their families, this commodification of knowledge has ultimately lead to poorer education among women, as daughters are taken out of school to help with responsibilities at home (Isla, 2005). Despite promises of greater freedom and equality, the practices of neoliberal capitalism ultimately amount to further degradation of women.

The Reproduction of Neoliberal Capitalism

In light of capitalism's devastating consequences, it makes sense to ask: why is this system continuing? Why has it not been overthrown?

The effects of neoliberal capitalism do not simply touch the economic sphere. They have reshaped the cultural terrain, touching the private and social spheres, the material and the ideological—daily reproducing themselves through the type of workers they create. As Sears (1999) explains, the shift from the welfare state of the mid-twentieth century to the neoliberal state, or the "lean" state, has had a number of implications pertinent to explaining the reproduction of capitalism (p. 91). Neoliberalism has changed the way in which workers are regulated by introducing "management by stress"—hiring workers to be flexible, temporary, and able to be disposed of at any time (Sears, 1999, p. 98). By seeking to eliminate alternatives

to bad jobs, the neoliberal economy seeks to break down senses of entitlement amongst workers, such that workers are willing to accept injustices (such as inconsistent hours, poor pay, or poor working conditions), because they have no other option (Sears, 1999). By being in a state of perpetual economic instability, workers are less willing to challenge the system that they are in, because they cannot afford the potential consequences. And in light of the defeats suffered by progressive movements in the neoliberal period, there are relatively few opportunities for people frustrated with capitalism to feel as though they can act in tandem with others in order to challenge unfair social structures (McNally, 2006).

In addition to this state of uncertainty, the neoliberal economy places additional pressures on the private lives of its workers. As Sears (1999) explains, the welfare state of the post-war period in North America and Europe made itself responsible for the care and well-being of its citizens—people could depend on the state to meet their needs. However, with the shifting of the role of the state after the 1980s, the state no longer provides the same means to fulfil certain needs (such as health, care for the elderly, or childcare), placing additional pressures on families or individuals to depend on the market, or shoulder these needs through the unpaid sphere of the home (Sadasivam, 1997; Sears, 1999). As the reproductive sphere is typically headed by women, this has meant an increased burden on women both in the North and the South, deepening gender disparities and further inhibiting citizens' ability to challenge the realities of neoliberal capitalism.

The advent of the neoliberal era has produced an ideological shift as well. Increased pressure is placed upon individuals to depend on themselves rather than neighbours or communities, being expected to meet their needs through the market or the reproductive sphere. Neoliberalism has a strong ethic of individualism and competition—people must rely on themselves, and are morally regulated through this lens (Harvey, 2005). The neoliberal

capitalist system has bred a culture of isolationism and atomization—in a society built around the values of the economy, people are kept separate from one another and taught to think of themselves as individual units (Barry, 2002; Kennedy, 2005). It is in this context that Margaret Thatcher's famous claim towards the inevitability of the expansion of global capitalism, that "there is no alternative," seems to have so much strength (Helliwell & Osberg, 2004, p. 1002). Amidst a growing class divide, a weak labour movement, and more pressures on individuals than ever, neoliberal capitalism seems all but unstoppable.

Inspiring Movements Towards Resistance

Despite the continued growth of global capitalism, there have been inspiring instances of resistance around the globe. Communities across the world have stood up to global capital investment, resisting its supposed inevitability. In Bolivia, citizens have rallied together to protest the privatization of their water and gas; in Argentina, displaced workers have occupied factories and reclaimed the means of production (Spronk & Webber, 2007; Ranis, 2005). In Egypt, thousands of citizens gathered in Tahrir Square in 2011 to demand the removal of the nation's corrupt leader (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). In 1999, thousands of people in Seattle gathered together to disrupt a party for World Trade Organization delegates in order to confront the debt crisis in the Global South (Smith, 2001). Student strikes in France, riots in Indonesia, working class solidarity in South Korea, and occupations in North America have demonstrated examples of ordinary citizens actively resisting the threat of neoliberal capitalism over their freedom and their lives (McNally, 2006). In addition, there have been other groups across the world, such as the Landless Worker's Movement in Brazil and the Zapatista movement in Mexico, who have organized collectively to create sustained anti-capitalist movements, developing social orders around production practices and trade agreements that have not been

exploitative, but have worked for the good of all (Brandt, 2008; Starr & Adams, 2003). Not only have these groups endeavoured to resist capitalist encroachment, but they have actively worked to create a better world—through solidarity networks, autonomous collectives, and localized trade and governance.

Moving Beyond the Protest

Despite their impact, these examples have all been limited in their capacity to bring about fundamental, sustainable global change. They have not succeeded in fundamentally weakening the capitalist system—we still live in a profit-driven world. As Alan Sears (2008) explains in his article, "Notes Towards a Socialism for our Times," we live in a generation in which any truly lasting alternatives to capitalism seem increasingly unachievable—it is tempting to wonder if alternative political perspectives, such as those of socialism, still have a meaningful place in conceptualizing a fairer world. Is socialism even a worthwhile perspective to take?

Sears (2008) explains that the theoretical lens through which we envision the world can shape our approach to its social realities. It can be easy to look at the forces of capitalism as distant entities, untouchable and inevitable as the weather—I have heard countless people attribute capitalism to "human nature," resigning themselves to it as a necessary evil. However, as Sears (2008) explains, by employing socialism as a map beyond the relations of capitalism, a lens through which to envision a new world, we are given a different perspective on our current economy. Through a socialist lens, we do not need to see global economic forces as intangible entities, as the products of human nature, but as the product of human *decisions and relations*—able to be altered through mobilization and the making of new decisions and relations (Sears, 2008). The lens through which we view economic conditions changes the way we approach then. If we see capitalism as abstract and intangible, we might view social

movements such as the Zapatista movement, the Battle of Seattle, or Tahrir Square as foolish attempts to stand up to something that cannot be stopped. But if we view economic conditions as products of human activity, and the ground-level movements that challenge them as valuable laboratories of potential, we can look to them for lessons in shifting the political sands upon which the economy and its relations stand, challenging those of capitalism and developing new relations. By applying the theoretical lens of socialism, we can develop the ideals of a society centred around peace, justice, and equity, and develop strategies for mobilization with these values in our purview. Given the economic and political climate in which we find ourselves today, it is now more important than ever to reclaim the values of socialism—of redistribution, of mass ownership of the means of production, of participatory democracy, of accountability, of equity, and of justice—in order to use them as tools for envisioning a new world. Using these theories, we can examine the movements for popular power both of our present and our past in order to engage in the long-term process of building more equitable, more sustainable movements for the future. We can explore the key insights of previous mass movements for popular power in order to inform new movements for sustainable, democratic socialism-from-below in the 21st century, and consequently, work towards a better world.

Chapter 2

Theory and Methodology

The first section of this paper focused on the devastation of capitalism. This section develops my argument that an anti-capitalist vision is essential to building social movements with transformative power. Drawing on a number of theorists and activists in the anti-capitalist tradition, the alternative model I describe in this section is a political vision called Socialism-from-below.

Socialism-from-below

Socialism is a model of anti-capitalist organizing based upon redistribution and the development equal access to basic needs (Lebowitz, 2010). Below, the form of socialism I am presenting (socialism-from-below) is divided into a set of core principles to be developed towards the governance of our economy and overall society. I do not, however, present it as a recipe for revolution, with a list of ingredients meant to directly replace those governing our society at this time in history. I am presenting socialism-from-below as a theoretical model meant to outline the guiding principles for a society centred around social justice, designed to rectify and prevent against the inequalities structured into capitalism. Labour historian Rob Kristofferson (2014) states that "economics" are simply an agreement between people about how to arrange their society. My vision of socialism proposes that a different agreement can and should be forged—an agreement that nourishes the natural environment, and allows all people to thrive and develop.

Before continuing, I want to clarify why I am using the term socialism "from below." For those who are not daily immersed in Marxist rhetoric, the word "socialism" often tends to

conjure a bleak image of mass deprivation and totalitarian control. However, as Hal Draper (1966) explains, the word "socialism" encompasses many varieties and flavours, though generally still pointing to mass, equitable redistribution. However, within these varieties and flavours, the numerous types of socialism can be divided into two main forms: socialism-from-above and socialism-from-below (Draper, 1966). The former is a top-down model in which production, redistribution, and power are concentrated in the hands of the state and bestowed upon the "grateful masses"; the latter is a vision of self-emancipation, in which production, redistribution, and power have been taken hold of by active citizens through the processes of mass mobilization (Draper, 1966, p. 2).

As Draper (1966) explains, the history of socialism has been largely dominated by socialism-from-above: top-down models in which the state has centralized resources and attempted to lavish them upon the masses. One does not need to look far into history to see that top-down models of socialism (The Soviet Union, China) have *not* placed human beings in the centre, nor have they cultivated human potential, social justice, or true democracy. In fact, the largest and longest-enduring experiments in socialism have been deeply bureaucratic and authoritarian in character, hardly looking very different from neoliberal capitalism (Bockman, 2011). No top-down model has had any real success in bringing about a truly just society. To embody the interests of all people, we need a vision that is created and sustained by the people themselves. This is why I have chosen to borrow Draper's (1966) term for my concept of socialism: "socialism-from-below" embodies the emphasis on people as the actors in bringing about and maintaining a truly just socialism.

Below, I present the core principles that constitute my understanding of socialism-from-below. However, before proceeding, I want to place myself in this vision of socialism. The model of socialism-from-below that I present draws upon a number of anti-capitalist theorists:

Marx (1967), Luxemburg (1937), McNally (2006), Lebowitz (2010), as well as a number of other theorists, such as Vandana Shiva (1988), Ana Isla (2005), A. Breeze Harper (2010), and bell hooks (2000). I have struggled with reconciling my own actions (complicity within capitalism) and my social position (benefiting from capitalism) with my desire to shape a better world, and so far this journey has lead me to believe that resistance cannot happen through top-down politics, it cannot happen through the efforts of isolated individuals, and it cannot happen simply through small political concessions or corporate reforms. It must come from a basis of community, and it must come from a set of ideals that recognize the value of human life and the natural world as central to meaningful development. These ideals, which I have come to identify as socialism-from-below, are divided into five principles:

1. **Socialism-from-below is a vision of society and an approach to organizing driven by human and environmental need, not profit**

The drive to enrich the lives of humans and protect the natural environment is the fundamental basis of socialism-from-below. Socialism-from-below aims for economic, political, and social systems organized in order to satisfy and cultivate people's needs and the health of the natural world (Lebowitz, 2010). The constituents of human need—food, shelter, health, companionship, entertainment, the opportunity to work, the opportunity to be creative—are the core organizing principles of production and consumption. In contrast to capitalism—with its driving force of profit—a system with a focus on human need and environmental protection at the centre drastically alters the focus of production. As Lebowitz (2010) says, “a good society is one that permits the full development of human potential. This is really the starting point” (p. 13). It is a system “with human beings at the centre”—every other principle of socialism comes from that (Lebowitz, 2010, p. 31).

2. **Socialism-from-below aims to achieve equity in all economic and social relations for all people, working towards a society in which all people can thrive**

Capitalism operates through a mandate of relentless excess, creating extraordinary wealth and power for a few and deprivation and harm for the masses (Marx, 1967). It is a system that has been structured to advantage some at the expense of many, and as McNally (2006) explains, this has produced a sordid history of poverty and deprivation along the lines of sex, race, orientation, and ability across the globe. Socialism-from-below is not only rooted in principles of equality and inclusion, but engages in the active process of cultivating inclusion through anti-oppressive engagement. As Potts and Brown (2005) explain, anti-oppressive engagement is the process of intentionally challenging and breaking down social hierarchies through feminist and anti-racist politics, striving to develop a society that is equitable to all. As Miller (1997) explains, there can be no true justice without this foundation of equal rights.

3. **Socialism-from-below is founded upon participatory democracy**

In addition to production being collectively owned, socialism-from-below operates through democracy—people themselves are in direct, active control of their productive resources.

Despite using the rhetoric of choice, capitalism is a system in which social and political control is acquired by those who dominate the market: business and state policymakers; owners and shareholders (McNally, 2006). The owners of the means of production make decisions on the basis of what is profitable for them—the only real choice offered to individuals is through what they buy on the market. By contrast, socialism-from-below envisions a system in which people themselves have decision-making power over the decisions that matter most in their lives, including decisions that are currently outside of democratic control (McNally, 2006).

Socialism envisions a world in which individuals and communities are deeply informed of the political happenings of their society, and are able to come together to discuss ideas, share interests and talents, and directly use their resources to better their society through political engagement (Sears, 2014). Socialism-from-below is built upon all people, regardless of sex, gender, race, or ability, having frequent opportunities to exercise their democratic rights in order to increase the wealth of their community.

4. **Socialism-from-below is based upon collective ownership of key productive resources**

Socialism-from-below is a system in which society's key productive resources are collectively owned and managed by people—by workers and their communities (Cairns and Sears 2012). Factories, land, natural resources, transportation and communication infrastructure, for example, are not owned and dictated privately by corporations or capitalists, gaining profit at the expense of the masses: they are owned by people, and they operate for people. Capitalism functions through the separation of workers from their product, from one another, and from the freedom to pursue their own creative essence. By contrast, socialism-from-below is a system in which people are able to embrace their own creativity, work together, and innovate together to produce for themselves, their families, their own communities, and society at large, as opposed to the demands of profitability (McNally, 2006). With the time, energy, and productive capacity of individuals belonging to one another rather than the capitalist, people are able to democratically decide what to produce and how to produce it. Once participatory democracy is further developed (as truly equitable collective ownership can only come from participatory democracy), labour can be a place of self-fulfilment and ownership, rather than self-denial and alienation (Lebowitz, 2010).

5. **Socialism-from-below is based upon the constant process of striving towards social and environmental justice**

Capitalism, as an economic system, is insatiable: there is no cap on profit, and productivity must grow and grow in order for the system to survive (Marx & Engels, 1967). Being based on the production of surplus value, it is always striving to improve the means of production in order to increase that surplus: it is a constantly expanding process (marked, of course, by periodic crises). Similarly, socialism-from-below also operates through a constant process—however, this is the process of people themselves innovating and striving to improve the elements of society in order to better serve the interests of one another and the environment. It is an ongoing project in democratic, pro-equity social justice, always working to struggle against oppression and towards the well-being of all people and the planet (McNally, 2006). Again, it is not a perfect model or a recipe to be imposed upon a government or a society—it is a process to discover and pursue production, consumption, and governing practices that best serve the interests of all people. These are guiding principles for understanding what a good society should look like.

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Of course, the question remains: how do we the people begin to make change? How do we strive to bring about this socialist model? We cannot fail to acknowledge our current entrenchment in capitalist society—how are we to engage it? Is there a role for each citizen to struggle towards a vision of socialism-from-below? Where do we begin?

To answer these questions, I turn to one of the most important theorists in the socialist tradition: Rosa Luxemburg.

Luxemburg

Luxemburg (1937), born in Poland in 1871, had a long career in politics and activism. At the turn of the 20th century, she worked to establish the German Party of Social Democracy (SDP), understood throughout Europe to be the largest and most successful socialist party at that time. This was a period in history in which socialism had a strong political presence in Europe, and a movement towards world socialism seemed like a real possibility (Luxemburg, 1937). By 1912, the SDP had gotten quite large, with dozens of seats in parliament, and publications with millions of subscribers. However, the growth of the party also saw the growth of conservative tendencies within it, which eventually grew large enough to dominate the party and push revolutionaries like Luxemburg to the margins. She wrote the pamphlet *Reform or Revolution* in response to one of these conservative leaders, Eduard Bernstein, who argued that capitalism might be adapted into a less exploitative system, and consequently did not need to be overthrown. Luxemburg (1937) wrote *Reform or Revolution* in order to clarify the relationship between the struggle towards capitalist reformation and socialist revolution.

In this text, Luxemburg (1937) challenges the increasingly-popular idea that through the struggle for reforms, capitalism might be adapted into a less exploitative system. Instead, Luxemburg (1937) argues that so long as there is a capitalist class, the interests of this class will dominate society—the interests of the people will never truly prevail within capitalism. She argues that a truly just society can only come about through the death of capitalism and transition into an era of socialism. However, regarding the question of how to get there, Luxemburg (1937) illustrates that both the reform and revolution perspectives share similar tactics. Both work towards the same immediate tasks: the strengthening of trade unions, labour victories, and the struggle to improve the position of working and dispossessed people. The difference lies in the overall objectives of each approach: while reform strives to subdue

capitalism, the revolutionary aim sees reformist victories as *preparing the working masses for the eventual seizure of political power*. Luxemburg (1937) sees these victories as demonstrative to the working class that they *can never* truly lessen the exploitative nature of capitalist production without the direct seizure of political power by the working class, thus creating a class consciousness and awareness leading to a revolution beyond. In Luxemburg's (1937) own words:

> "*It is not true that socialism will arise automatically from the daily struggle of the working class. Socialism will be the consequence of (1) the growing contradictions of capitalist economy and (2) the comprehension by the working class of the unavailability of the suppression of these contradictions through a social transformation*" (p. 68, italics in original).

Through constant striving and tireless organizing by increasing numbers of activists, the working class will learn how to come together as a unified front, a cohesive force, collectively seizing political power. Mass action itself has the function of education, showing and teaching individuals to come together as communities of resistance. As socialism-from-below depends upon active democratic participation, so too must these struggles: through them, communities learn to exercise true democracy, and engage in the process of centring political practices around the needs of people rather than profit. Through struggle against the inequalities of capitalism, workers can practice cultivating a prefigurative society, living out or at least experimenting with the economic and social principles they wish to see. If sustained, this practice of struggle and self-education will eventually bring about a "maturity of economic and political relations," finally preparing the masses to collectively seize power (Luxemburg, 1937, p. 95). Revolution is legitimized by mass collectivity and maturity, and will be the product of multiple struggles, with both victories and failures. With every attempt to create a new world, the mobilized working class creates the possibility of maturing in its capacity to take and sustain that power amongst the masses, becoming more aware of *how* to sustain that power and

use it to meet the needs of people, eventually towards the end of "a definite victory of the revolution" (Luxemburg, 1937, p. 96). Every attempt to challenge capitalism, whether through large reforms or small, can better prepare the masses for the ultimate seizure of power, transitioning society from one age to another.

In sum, whenever the working masses work towards reforms, there is the potential that newly active working people become more aware of their collective capability to take political control and raise democracy to new heights. Socialist revolution will not happen all at once—there will need to be multiple attempts, as democratic forces extend and flourish through society, creating new opportunities for further democratization—but every attempt has the potential to bring us closer, because within those attempts, a greater understanding of how to sustain revolution will organically grow and make itself apparent within the struggle, and new anti-capitalist institutions will appear to support democratic power (Luxemburg, 1937).

Rosa Luxemburg's (1937) theories were written during a time in which the possibility of socialist revolution was much greater than it is today—at the turn of the century, Germany's Social Democratic Party numbered in the thousands, and the working class movement in Europe had deep and growing roots (Eley, 2002). As valuable as Luxemburg's ideas are, they were written in a political climate very different from ours—since then, we have seen bureaucratic authoritarianism develop in the name of socialism, two world wars, and capitalist expansion stretching to the farthest ends of the globe. Now, in the neoliberal era, the notion of the masses seizing political power is much harder to imagine than it was in Luxemburg's time.

Therefore, in order to make her theories applicable to our own time and situation, it is necessary to examine more deeply the conditions through which the masses might seize control, especially in light of the decline of the left in the neoliberal period. In what capacity might people come together to mobilize and mature in their capacity to seize political power?

I want to augment Luxemburg's theory on the necessity of popular struggle by discussing the value of spaces, both cultural and intellectual, through which ordinary citizens might have the opportunity to come together to bring about change. In order to do so, I will turn to the work of Alan Sears.

Sears

In his recent book, *The Next New Left,* Alan Sears (2014) addresses the need for instances of direct action to be placed in the context of the larger body of leftist struggle. He explains that throughout the twentieth century, there has always been a space for leftist struggle, which he calls the Infrastructure of Dissent. He argues that this space is the necessary germinating grounds for revolution—that without the space in which to imagine and work toward anti-capitalist possibilities, there is no ability to sustain them. The Infrastructure of Dissent is the space for exchanging and generating ideas before, after, and during direct action, in order to sustain resistance movements beyond the protest. It is a place—places, of course—for citizens to come together and make sense of the world through an alternative logic—a logic that is not founded upon profit and the interests of the ruling class. It is an infrastructure, a sprawling network of concrete and mental spaces for people to share and build their own knowledge and experiences into the process of imagining and making a new left.

As Sears (2014) explains, there are a number of key capacities achieved through the Infrastructure of Dissent: collective memory (connecting the happenings of our current society to leftist struggles of the past, particularly when capitalist logic has taught us to forget them); collective dreams (the ability to imagine another world); collective learning (educating one another and cultivating independent thought) and capacity for solidarity (a chance for people to come together as a community). In his words, it is “the amalgam of spaces, networks, and

institutions in which activists develop their capacities to push back" (Sears, 2014, p. 100).

The Infrastructure of Dissent is not built once and for all, but it must be renewed, and innovated to suit the times in which we live. The Infrastructure of Dissent that grew and thrived from the early 20th century up until the 1970s has drastically weakened since the advent of neoliberalism. In order to rebuild it, we need to humbly learn from one another, and take into account a variety of perspectives (Sears, 2014). The Infrastructure of Dissent of this age must strive to be an inclusive space, particularly acknowledging how it has excluded others in the past along lines of gender, race, sexuality, and status. It must not only be a resource to aid the struggle, but a place for providing and solidifying a vision that workers and activists can aim towards in demanding more just policies (Sears, 2014).

Sears (2014) argues that in the 1930s-1940s, local communities were essential to the infrastructure of dissent. The culture of shop stewards (workers' representatives from the shop floor) allowed workers to exchange ideas, organize, and mobilize; in addition, having cultural centres and public gathering spaces, as well as close living conditions, allowed workers to come together to exchange and perpetuate ideas, educating and taking care of one another.

In the decades following, the infrastructure of dissent took a different form. After the end of the second world war, Canadian society saw the rise of the welfare state, and a shift in culture away from public gatherings and towards privatization, consumerism, and entertainment in the home. Although direct action during the 1950s was limited, this period of time allowed for the re-examination of ideas, which was necessary for the next wave of mobilization/activism in the decades to follow. As a result, the infrastructure of dissent of the 1960s and 70s was the space through which formerly excluded voices, such as racial and sexual minorities, were integrated into the larger body of leftist struggle, and both activists and theorists could learn from the movements of their past. Consequently, the instances of

mobilization in the 1960s encompassed a richer focus on the environment, Global South activism, and integrating voices formerly found on the margins (Sears, 2014).

Since the 1980s, the Infrastructure of Dissent is particularly weak (Sears, 2014). If the masses themselves must come together to seize political power, and the Infrastructure of Dissent is the place through which citizens come together to generate ideas, educate one another, and essentially prepare themselves for transformation and the seizure of political power, we must explore the potential presence (and absence) of such an infrastructure in this present day and age. Doing so requires turning to instances in which people have exercised political power, and investigating whether such instances have been conducive to the generation of ideas, alternative visions, and self-education, and demonstrated the potential for cultivating sustained resistance. My hope is that careful reflection on experiments in rebuilding Infrastructures of Dissent can make a contribution to further strengthening the nascent new left of our time.

I will examine the Occupy Wall Street movement as a case study in the following section. Using a special issue of an academic journal as my jumping off point, I will analyze the ways in which the themes in my conception of socialism-from-below appear (or are ignored) in analyses of the Occupy movement. By examining its key discussions, I intend to situate Occupy within the Infrastructure of Dissent and Luxemburg's theories on social transformation through mass mobilization. By situating Occupy within these theories, I will offer a refreshed look at the opportunities and obstacles facing leftist struggle in our time, in order to gain a better grasp upon how mass movements might bring us closer to realizing a society of socialism-from-below. Of course, there are other cases that could have been looked at, and different ways of approaching Occupy. My reason for choosing this case, and my reasons for starting with academic journals are the following: the Occupy movement offers valuable

insights not only because of its recentness and relative locality, but because it directly addresses the issues I am concerned with in this MRP—the desolation of capitalism, and the need for socialist alternatives. As I will explain in the section to follow, Occupy Wall Street has directly struggled with a number of the characteristics of Socialism-from-below that I have listed above, such as democracy, inclusion, and the need for a social order with people at the centre. When analyzed in the context of Sears' and Luxemburg's ideas, the specific features of Occupy offer valuable insights into creating social change. I am choosing academic journals because I want to analyze the key debates around Occupy from a holistic perspective, taking into account not only the perspectives of individuals who were directly involved, but also those of seasoned activists and authors who offer insight from a theoretical vantage point. Since the objective of this MRP is to examine the lessons offered by social movements as a whole, examining Occupy through the theoretical debates of scholarly journals will allow me to gather and situate these debates from a broader perspective, allowing me to integrate them in a more nuanced way.

Chapter 3

Findings and Results

I want to open my analysis of the Occupy movement by first talking about my place within it. As I have been planning this MRP, it has made more and more sense for me to examine Occupy as a social movement potentially embodying the characteristics of socialism-from-below—but I confess, I felt like I was hiding a shameful secret; namely, that I wasn't actively involved in the Occupy protests.

It's one thing to examine a movement that happened decades ago or somewhere far away, one that I couldn't possibly have been involved in—but Occupy happened three years ago, and I wasn't there. I was in the third year of my undergraduate degree, and I did little more than catch glimpses from the margins—news clips here and there, and some complaints about how the Occupation in Toronto was said to be harming small businesses. A year later, I took a course on social movements, and was required to write a paper on Occupy. I chose to do mine on the movement's democratic practices, and this was when my fascination with Occupy truly began. As I learned more I became more interested than ever—but at the same time, I felt like a hypocrite. What good was my interest now? How valuable can my perspective be when a movement happens around me, and I only recognize its merits a year later from within the classroom?

I wrestled with the same question while writing and planning this MRP. My response is that, despite the fact that I am approaching Occupy Wall Street from the perspective of an outsider, I have realized that the ability to analyze the work of those actually present at the movement gives me a unique opportunity to explore the movement through theoretical perspectives that insiders might not have. Moreover, movements to change the world require

transformation at both the social and political level. Despite my lack of involvement in 2011, this thesis has the potential to build upon the accomplishments of the Occupy movement at the political level, offering key insights that may in fact strengthen future movements. My readings on resistance to capitalism have taught me that the key to working towards a new world is in learning to include and integrate the unique contributions every individual and community is able to make. Despite my lack of experience in direct action, the opportunity to offer a theoretical perspective on the insights of others puts to use my own skill set in a meaningful way. This is my contribution.

Below, I use the five characteristics of socialism-from-below described above as a framework for examining the Occupy movement. By drawing primarily upon academic journals, as well as activist blogs and first-hand accounts from Occupy Wall Street, I seek to explore some of the key debates around how the practices and principles of Occupy align with and fulfil the characteristics of a truly socialist society. By drawing largely upon academic journals, I am utilizing and building upon the expertise of previous analysts and social theorists.

Socialism-from-below is a vision of society and an approach to organizing driven by human and environmental need, not profit

What were the core values of Occupy? To what extent were they centred upon human need?

The principles of Occupy Wall Street were expressly based on human need. The movement sought to identify and express the common interests of the people who do not own the means of production (Gessen & Taylor, 2011). It was based upon the recognition of an imbalance of power: production, consumption, and governance all skewed towards the generation of profit for the very rich, identified as the 1%. Not only did Occupiers identify capitalism (and the 1%)

as the root cause of economic injustice, but identified themselves as a unified group *seeking* justice: the 99% (Gessen & Taylor, 2011). The rallying cry for Occupy was "We Are The 99%," and in addition to marching against banks and wall street corporations, the movement was about cultivating and sustaining an alternative view of the world: a view in which people could support one another, converse freely, exchange material, and together dream about how to bring about a world in which people, not profit, are the central concern of the economy (Flacks, 2013). Not only did it protest economic injustice, it sought to act out the type of world that Occupiers were advocating for. As Leach (2013) explains, it was a "prefigurative strategy for social change—in other words, those attempting to create social change by structuring their own practice according to the principles they want to see govern the whole society."

Occupy was comprised of General Assemblies and Working Groups. General Assemblies (GAs) were mass meetings held daily, in which everyone had the opportunity to make speeches, pass motions, or make decisions (I more fully discuss General Assemblies below.) Working Groups were committees in charge of carrying out the decisions of the GAs, as well as maintaining the movement by taking care of basic needs like food and sanitation (Gessen & Taylor, 2011).

In addition to daily meetings and marches, Occupy instigated a number of actions that demonstrate the prioritization of people's needs, such as moving money out of big banks, and campaigns against student debt and mortgage debt (Flacks, 2013). Since the disbandment of the camps, Occupy initiated a number of actions, such as mobilizing against home foreclosure, providing relief after Hurricane Sandy, and standing with Wal-Mart employees as they went on their first national strike (Manilov, 2013). By embodying participatory democracy, providing a place for people to live, and speaking a language of justice and solidarity, Occupy places the value of people over profit.

The strength and prolificacy of this vision tells us that people are hungry for change. The fact that the movement was able to sustain itself for as long as it did, and the fact that it inspired similar encampments all around the world, suggests that a sense of discontentment with capitalism has been present across many communities, waiting for an opportunity to act. For many, Occupy represented the vision of another world, a world with people at the centre, that so many desperately need (Gessen & Taylor, 2011). The force of the movement indicates that many people are no longer content to believe that a profit-centric system can work for the good of all, and are daring to believe that a new social order with people in the centre is achievable. The message of Occupy drew so many to itself because it dared to believe that another way is possible.

Socialism-from-below aims to achieve equity in all economic and social relations for all people, working towards a society in which all people can thrive

As a prefigurative society with people at the centre, did Occupy practice radical equity and inclusivity?

Occupy was structured around inclusion and equity for all in several ways: the slogan "we are the 99%," the General Assemblies, and the Working Groups were meant to be open to everyone, providing the opportunity for anyone to voice concerns, and get involved in the movement in whatever ways particularly suited them (McCabe, 2011). However, there are conflicting views about the extent to which the movement, despite the openness and "leaderlessness" of its structure, was truly inclusive (Leach, 2013).

Hirsha Walia (2011) critiques Occupy for not being more purposeful in challenging the generalism within the slogan of the 99%, arguing that to ignore the racial and gender inequalities within the 99% only reinforces them. She argues instead that true inclusion means

critical engagement with every social position, recognizing that "the 99 per cent is not a homogenous group but a web of inter-connected and inter-related communities of struggle" (Walia, 2011, para. 10).

Maharawal (2013) also observed this broad, universal sense of inclusion within the slogan of "the 99%," complete with its erasure of identities, but she also observed a tendency within the movement towards a very intentional, anti-oppressive process, which she calls the "radical politics of inclusion" (p. 178). Maharawal (2013) observed the latter through the creation of intentionally inclusive, anti-oppressive spaces for groups who have been historically marginalized. This political process was less about representing everyone, and more about pursuing a vision of social justice intending to purposefully address and break down oppressive social hierarchies based on race and sex. One example of this intention was seen in the "progressive stack." The "stack" was the term used for the list of individuals who wanted to speak next during General Assemblies; the "progressive stack" was the list in which preference was given to those belonging to traditionally marginalized groups (Maharawal, 2013). This process of practising radical inclusion was indeed a process, and was not readily accepted by everyone (Maharawal, 2013). However, it challenged the idea that by being the 99%, those within the Occupy movement were all already equal, and instead demanded that Occupiers be attentive to and responsible for breaking down social hierarchies.

Thomas Frank (2012) critiques the movement for failing to be inclusive due to inaccessibility. He claims that because the movement was largely comprised of young, highly educated individuals, many of whom went on academic panels and even created scholarly journals within the movement, Occupy did not connect to those outside of the academy. In addition, there were a number of theorists and activists who critiqued the movement for its problematic language around occupation, and its lack of outreach to Indigenous communities

(Kilibarda, 2012; Walia, 2011). For the First Nations, North American land is already occupied, and to use the language of occupation fails to recognize the place of colonialism in the discussion of economic injustice, and the ways in which capitalism has shaped the experiences of these communities (Kilibarda, 2012; Walia, 2011).

These debates teach us that inclusivity is a process, requiring intentional effort at every step. Although the "progressive stack," as explained by Maharawal (2013), indicates a recognition of the need to keep marginalised perspectives central, there is still a much greater need for the integration of multiple perspectives in the development of the movement itself. For example, considering the fact that the concept of "occupation" makes the movement exclusionary for displaced Indigenous communities, perhaps the movement might have integrated the concerns of these communities into the central values of Occupy itself. Better yet, perhaps the movement might have focused around integrating both the perspectives and methods of Indigenous communities in all parts of the movement, such as the values, the actions, and the decision-making processes. Learning to serve the needs of all communities is integral to developing a movement with the potential to truly stand up to capitalism—developing this capacity is a long-term process, through which every social movement must learn from its predecessors.

Socialism-from-below is founded upon participatory democracy

Was Occupy truly democratic? What were the uses of the movement's radically democratic practices?

A number of theorists have commented on the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of the General Assemblies (GAs) as decision-making platforms, as a means of bringing people together, and as acts of resistance to representative democracy. Several authors have celebrated

the GAs for their ability to create a sense of solidarity and togetherness amongst Occupy participants (Gessen & Taylor, 2011; McCabe, 2011; Gitlin, 2013a; Smucker, 2013). As Smucker (2013) says, "collective ritual fosters strong group identity, cohesion, and solidarity." He further argues that the GAs were valuable as a public performance of the message of the movement, and as a symbol for a better world. This performance was valuable for keeping attendance high, for creating solidarity, and for publicly defying the dominant decades-old narrative that there is only one way to do democracy (Gitlin, 2013a). The General Assemblies were also a space for anyone to voice concerns, and to feel a sense of personal ownership and meaningful involvement in the movement (McCabe, 2011).

However, despite the value of Assemblies when it comes to creating a sense of solidarity, a number of the authors also agree that the GAs were not effective platforms for making decisions (Gessen & Taylor, 2011; McCabe, 2011; Gitlin, 2013a; Leach, 2013 Roesch, 2013; Smucker, 2013; Wengronowitz, 2013). Leach (2013) explains that despite the fact that all were welcome to attend GAs, the complexity of handsignals and the GA procedures excluded many newcomers, privileging those who were more familiar with the logistics of the meetings. As the movement progressed, GAs became tedious and inefficient, particularly when attendance was larger (Gessen & Taylor, 2011; Leach, 2013; Manilov, 2013). In fact, a number of authors have admitted that the GAs were so ineffective that many of the most influential organizers stopped attending them altogether, and made many key decisions about the direction of the movement outside of the General Assemblies (Roesch, 2013; Smucker, 2013; Wengronowitz, 2013).

In an attempt to embody true democracy, the movement was considered "leaderless"—however, this description concealed the clear presence of leadership within Occupy Wall Street. As Walia (2011) explains, the illusion of leaderlessness was problematic because it deflected accountability, and failed to address the unspoken hierarchies within the movement. She, along

with Wongronowitz (2013), argues that Occupy should instead have considered itself "leaderful," acknowledging the unique roles of particular individuals in facilitating the movement.

Occupy's experiment in practising radically horizontal, direct democracy has a number of valuable lessons to teach us. Despite their capacity to bolster solidarity, Occupy has shown that its General Assemblies, with their concensus-based decision-making platforms, were not only impractical and inefficient (failing to translate to large scales, and failing to make decisions in a timely manner), but masking underlying social inequalities. One important lesson to take away from the Occupy movement might be the need to acknowledge the value of different individuals' roles in the movement—an acknowledgement also masked by the guise of "leaderlessness." Another lesson might be the need to develop multiple forms of decision-making for multiple situations, acknowledging that consensus is not always practical on large scales, and that disagreement and debate can be healthy and help the movement to grow. One way to develop these forms of decision-making might be, as stated earlier, to integrate the decision-making models of other cultural practices, like Indigenous traditions, into the movement. Incorporating a number of influences into the movement's governance has the potential to ensure that Occupy's decision-making processes are equitable, accessible, and practical.

Socialism-from-below is based upon collective ownership of key productive resources

How did Occupy Wall Street practice collective ownership?

The main focus of Occupy did not include calls for collective ownership of key productive resources. The movement's emphasis was on the problem of inequality in terms of wealth and political power, not private property relations under capitalism. My speculation is that the

context in which OWS organized—that is, making camp in front of Wall Street, demanding justice from banks and the government, and practising direct democracy—made it difficult to move towards collective ownership of production. Of course, dominant social forces, the law, property relations and so on make such a move extremely difficult at the moment. But even setting this point aside, if collective ownership can only be a product of true democracy, and the above authors conclude that the democratic process observed within the GAs was not an effective platform for decision-making, the Occupy movement was not in a position to develop and sustain collective ownership of productive resources.

However, the theme of collective ownership has had a presence in the Occupy encampment. A number of authors discuss the importance of reclaiming public space as a shared good for all people, and the value of public space as a site of solidarity (Gitlin, 2013; Milkman, Lewis & Luce, 2013; Perdue & Sbicca, 2014). In addition, food and laundry services were collectively facilitated by the movement (Gessen & Taylor, 2011). Therefore, although OWS was perhaps not mature enough to move towards enacting collective ownership of productive property, this value was central to the Occupy movement.

There are a number of ways in which Occupy Wall Street might have facilitated a greater emphasis on collective ownership, such as promoting side-projects with a focus on small-scale food production or communal living, initiating co-operatives, or running educational seminars on subsistence production. Occupy also might have endeavoured to put pressure on the local government to improve public services, such as transit and healthcare, making demands for concessions. However, as illustrated in the following, the extent to which Occupy should or should not have made specific demands on governing authorities raises a number of complicated questions.

Socialism-from-below is based upon the constant process of striving towards social and environmental justice

How is Occupy engaging in a long-term process of resistance?

As Luxemburg (1937) argues, bringing about social change can only be achieved through engagement in the process of sustained, long-term struggle, through the constant development of resistance practices. How did Occupy develop and sustain the long-term struggle against capitalism?

One key debate around Occupy's overall resistance strategy and political impact is its approach to making demands: more specifically, the fact that the Occupy movement openly and proudly refused to make demands (Gessen & Taylor, 2011). A number of theorists felt that this was a strength: in centring itself around a critique of capitalism, OWS was addressing a larger and more systemic problem than anything demands could adequately address (Walia, 2011). Milkman, Lewis, and Luce (2013) claims that the lack of demands opened the movement to a variety of concerns, allowing all participants to bring their own needs and grievances to it (Milkman, Lewis & Luce, 2013). As Smucker (2013) states, "in the wake of OWS's essential articulation, windows are now opening in fights for particular demands" (p. 221).

By contrast, there were also authors and activists who opposed the lack of demands. In his critique, Frank (2012) argues that by failing to make demands, Occupy inhibited itself from moving forward and achieving true political influence. He claims that Occupy's failure to make demands was Occupy's failure to take the obvious next step, moving beyond alternative values and operationalizing its cause into meaningful change (Frank, 2012). Hirshman (2012) agrees, claiming that by failing to outline and follow a simple set of demands, Occupy was entirely unable to sustain itself.

Although I agree with Smucker (2013) and Milkman, Lewis, and Luce's (2013) arguments that the lack of demands allowed Occupy to remain open enough to always focus on the problems of capitalism, and that listing demands might have narrowed the focus of the movement to the exclusion of certain grievances, I think that the movement might have benefited from providing the infrastructure for specific demands. If the movement would have designated the opportunity for certain communities to petition the local government on specific issues, while allowing the movement as a whole to maintain its broader focus, this might have allowed Occupy to venture down those next steps that, according to Frank (2012), the movement so sorely lacked.

Another debate around Occupy's engagement in long-term resistance deals with its partnership with other leftist organizations, such as NGOs, non-profits, and homeless shelters. A number of authors have argued that this partnership is essential to the survival of the Occupy vision, and have celebrated the ways in which Occupy has pursued this partnership with the labour movement and other associations with a focus on social justice (Gitlin, 2013a; Roesch, 2013; Walia, 2011; Wengronowitz, 2013). Several authors have argued that Occupy has had a responsibility to pursue its links to leftist causes and institutions in greater depth, recognizing the mutually beneficial relationship that struggles on the left must have in order to be truly inclusive and bring about sustained change (Roesch, 2013; Walia, 2011). As Gitlin (2013a) explains,

> If a movement is to grow and develop, it must be polymorphic—full service or full spectrum, inviting participation at many levels. It needs structures that flex and learn, train organizers, generate actions, and recruit supporters. For overmortgaged and underwater homeowners, it needs to push back the banks. For those inclined to be civilly disobedient, it needs to invent direct actions. For those disinclined to do anything but sign petitions, it needs petitions (p. 227).

In order to truly work towards social transformation, movements in the wake of Occupy must

have the infrastructure to truly accommodate the needs and capabilities of the entire 99%, and be willing to see themselves not as a spontaneous explosion of dissent, but as steps in the long process of confronting, challenging, and ultimately weakening the strength of the capitalist system.

The openness of Occupy's vision, and its ability to recognize the injustices of neoliberal capitalism as the root cause of multiple grievances such as debt, homelessness, and job insecurity, allowed the movement to reach a multitude of people while at its height. In order to learn from the Occupy experiment, future movements might build upon Occupy's success in linking this anti-capitalist vision to specific grievances, issues, and communities, and direct their resources to further developing their capacities to sustain these links without losing their broad focus.

Chapter 4

Discussion and conclusion

The concluding section of this thesis returns to the purpose laid out at its beginning. I began by wanting to explore how the lessons learned from the Occupy movement can inform struggles for a sustainable future that is productive, just, and built upon the needs and well-being of people—a future of socialism-from-below. My central research question has been: how can key insights from mass movements for popular power inform new movements for a sustainable, democratic socialism-from-below in the 21st century? Specifically, I asked, how can present-day movements for transformation build upon and learn from the practices of Occupy Wall Street, and from the theoretical traditions of socialist thinkers whose writings speak to the Occupy moment?

In order to understand what Occupy can teach us about building a future of socialism-from-below, we need to reflect on the ways in which Occupy has contributed to the Infrastructure of Dissent. As explained in Section 2, Alan Sears (2014) describes the Infrastructure of Dissent as the social space necessary for building sustainable leftist movements. He explains that this is a space of collective memory, dreaming, learning and solidarity – a space of thinking and acting – in which people come together to exchange ideas and share theoretical and practical resources in order to develop the means of sustained resistance (Sears, 2014). Yet, as Sears (2014) notes, this is also a space that, since the advent of neoliberalism, has been weakened and fragmented. Sears (2014) also explains that mass movements, like Occupy, have the potential to add to infrastructures of dissent by providing powerful theoretical resources and organizational bases, inspiring people, and potentially shifting the political landscape to create change and strengthen struggles towards true

democratic revolution.

This thesis argues that Occupy Wall Street has contributed to the Infrastructure of Dissent in a number of ways. Firstly, by developing and promoting the concept of "the 99%" and "the 1%", the movement offered a valuable theoretical resource for resistance. Not only did the slogan of "the 99%" identify capitalism as the root of social inequality, it developed the language for unity—it gave people a banner under which to gather and identify their common interest, allowing them to understand personal grievances in the context of capitalist development. The language of Occupy emphasized the class character of inequality, and this is essential for future mass movements on the left.

In addition, the Occupy movement itself also created a number of spaces through which to communicate and exercise dissent—physical spaces through encampments (for their duration), a virtual space of discussion through social media, and an intellectual space through, again, the language of popular occupation and "the 99%." All of these spaces have provided a place for people to gather and partake in a sustained dialogue through which to share stories, generate knowledge, and develop resources for dissent against the forces of neoliberal capitalism. These experiments were important not only to those participating in them, but in demonstrating the possibility of more democratic ways of doing politics. Occupy Wall Street, however briefly, extended the horizon of what is politically possible. Scholars such as Frances Fox Piven (2013) have noted how crucial this is to the development of a new radical left.

Occupy Wall Street also introduced a number of lessons for future movements. For example, Occupy taught activists on the left about the importance and challenges of practising radical inclusivity and the necessity of integrating multiple perspectives, such as the perspective of Indigenous and traditionally marginalized communities, into the values and methods of the movement. Of course, these lessons were not totally new; the left has struggled

with the question of equity throughout the 20th century (Sears, 2014). But by bringing these concerns to the forefront, Occupy has offered a major contribution to the development of more inclusive movements in the future.

The movement also demonstrated the value of radical democracy as a platform for creating solidarity, even while raising questions about whether consensus-based democracy is the best method of making decisions amongst masses of people. It raised important debates about the potential value of specific demands, and, through Occupy's success in partnering with other leftist organizations, demonstrated the fact that partnership is necessary to solidifying the Infrastructure of Dissent. Most of all, it demonstrated the value of accommodating and allowing for the contribution of many different groups of people, developing opportunities for them to exercise resistance through a myriad of capacities.

With regards to the question of *how* future leftist movements might learn from Occupy's key debates and build upon Occupy's contribution to the Infrastructure of Dissent, I return to the theories of Rosa Luxemburg (1937), also introduced in Section 2. Luxemburg (1937) argues that all struggle against capitalism is valuable in preparing the working masses for the eventual seizure of political power, and that through the process of coming together to resist, mass movements allow people to educate one another about the process of sustaining anti-capitalist struggle. She argues that each struggle has the potential to bring us closer to social transformation, because they prepare the masses for exercising ever-greater collective self-governance.

For movements like Occupy, this means that learning about the value of resistance spaces, the challenges of inclusivity and true democracy, and the necessity of partnership with other leftist organisations are lessons that need to inform the long-term process of resistance. This means that we cannot simply look at Occupy in isolation, but as a moment in an ongoing effort

to engage in and struggle with the difficult questions the movement has raised: how can we make democracy more and more inclusive, more and more effective? How can we integrate multiple perspectives into the values of the movement while still using language and articulating a vision that unifies people who suffer under capitalism in different ways? How do we engage with formal politics and make steps towards immediate change without losing the broader vision of anti-capitalist struggle?

I don't have simple answers to these questions. However, drawing on Sears (2014) and Luxemburg (1937), and writing this thesis has taught me that questions like these cannot be answered through scholarly writings and academic debate alone—*the answers must emerge within the context of continued struggle*. This is not to say that academic writings do not have value. Academic writings are valuable in their ability to contextualize and reframe the lessons learned within leftist struggle in order to inform future movements. Deep reflection is a key part of the Infrastructure of Dissent, and radical scholars can contribute to the broad left. However, finding the answers to these questions must be a collective process, emergent from a *long-term commitment* to engage with these questions, to share insights, and develop the answers through collective action. And theoretical work must be viewed as the job not only of academics, but of activists too.

By striving to address these questions through the context of struggle, we keep leftist movements grounded in their primary motivating interest—the well-being of people. To recognize the diversity within "human need" means that a truly inclusive, democratic system must be developed within and throughout that diversity, making a space for all people to contribute to building a world founded on the wide, complex, and dynamic spectrum of human development. As Luxemburg (1937) indicates, it is only through collective ownership of our political struggle that we can hope to transform society into one that is collectively owned.

Anti-capitalist struggle has not been linear. Despite democratic gains in the middle of the twentieth century, wealth and power has been steadily gathered in the hands of the 1% since the 1970s. Many people like me living in North America have never directly witnessed or participated in social movements creating a genuine political impact. As a result, it's very difficult to imagine struggling against capitalism with any success. This difficulty is why it is more important than ever to look at movements like Occupy not as individual instances of success or failure, but as steps within the long-term process of struggle, as uneven contributors to the Infrastructure of Dissent. By learning from partial successes and defeats through this lens, those who would resist capitalism have an opportunity to better develop the tools for building future movements that are more sustainable, more centred upon meeting human need, and more capable of ultimately transforming our society into one of socialism-from-below.

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