

The Democratic Road to Socialism (Again): Strategies of Anglo-American Democratic Socialism 2015-2020



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There are two things that the working class urgently needs: democracy and socialism.

— Karl Kautsky in ~~20~~17 (2010)

... optimism about the democratic road to socialism should not lead us to consider it as a royal road, smooth and free of risk. Risks there are, although they are no longer quite where they used to be ...

— Nicos Poulantzas in 1978 (2020)

Abstract

This thesis attempts to assess the strategic questions and possibilities raised by the coming to prominence of ‘democratic socialism’ in the UK and US in 2015-2020, with the rise of Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour left on the one hand, and of the Democratic Socialists of America, spurred on by the campaigns of Bernie Sanders, on the other. In doing so, it also hopes to give readers an account of what, in fact, ‘democratic socialism’ constitutes in the contemporary Anglo-American context, and, crucially, make out what might productively differentiate it from other socialist orientations on the question of strategy. In particular, the thesis argues that contemporary democratic socialism presents a coherent answer to a key strategic challenge: *how, given the dual improbability of either a revolutionary or moderate, gradualist method of socialist transformation, to proceed as a socialist actor seeking transformational change in the context of a capitalist democracy*. However, whether democratic socialism presents a *convincing* answer to this challenge, the thesis argues, is open to debate.

In order to achieve its aims, the thesis combines the academic literature on socialist strategy and rational political choice in capitalist democracies, with the political literature produced by the contemporary Anglo-American democratic socialist movement itself, while also inspecting the real practices of that movement. The thesis focuses on three strategic elements of the democratic socialist movement: non-reformist reforms, in and against the state, and class-struggle elections.

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Introduction

This thesis attempts to assess the strategic questions and possibilities raised by the coming to prominence of ‘democratic socialism’ in the UK and US in 2015-2020, with the rise of Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour left on the one hand, and of the Democratic Socialists of America, spurred on by the campaigns of Bernie Sanders, on the other. In doing so, it also hopes to give readers an account of what, in fact, ‘democratic socialism’ constitutes in the contemporary Anglo-American context, and, crucially, make out what might productively differentiate it from other socialist orientations on the question of *strategy*.

In particular, the thesis will attempt to assess whether democratic socialism can provide, on the one hand, a real and coherent *answer*, and on the other, a *convincing* one to a central strategic challenge for socialist actors in capitalist-democratic societies, broadly of that kind that exists in the UK, US and elsewhere in the Global North. That *strategic challenge* (*SC*) may be put as follows:

How, given the dual improbability of either a revolutionary or moderate, gradualist method of socialist transformation, to proceed as a socialist actor seeking transformational change in the context of a capitalist democracy.

This thesis will make the case that democratic socialism *does* present a set of strategies that constitute a coherent and real answer to *SC*. Having established this, the routes by which it is reasonable to assess whether democratic socialism presents a *convincing* answer will come into view. The thesis will argue that the convincingness of democratic socialism’s answer to *SC* is indeed open to critique in particular ways depending on the element of strategy being considered, and it will point toward further work necessary to properly develop such a critique.

Chapter 1 – Academic Context and Methodological Considerations

– will survey the academic context of the thesis. It will build a picture of the general conclusions of the literature that concerns itself with the choices presented to socialist actors in capitalist democracies, that is, socialist strategy. It will draw out the *SC* from this literature and identify two central motivations for the *SC* – the *rational choice* concern and the *structural constraint* concern. With this achieved, the chapter will proceed to derive the central research questions of the thesis and explain *how* these questions must be addressed, i.e., by what method the thesis will approach them.

Chapter 2 – Historical Context - will consist of a general and historical elucidation of the democratic socialist left in the Anglo-American context from 2015 to 2020. It will attempt to justify democratic socialism as the thesis' focus, and, in particular, justify both the Anglo-American context and the choice of the years 2015-2020. With this initial picture of the contemporary democratic socialist movement made clear, the chapter will then make some comments about the necessary approach to the movement that the thesis will take in order to relate it to *SC*. It will argue that the thesis must take an idealised, clarified, more strictly delineated version of the real democratic socialist left as its principal object. This idealised democratic socialism, Chapter 2 will argue, may be referred to as 'democratic socialism' on the basis that it is characteristic of and theoretically prominent in the broader movement.

The **following three chapters** will then attempt to directly answer the research questions – of coherence and convincingness - in relation to democratic socialism by breaking its strategy down into three central 'strategic elements'. For each chapter, the first task will be to define the strategic element, then second, to establish its actual presence within democratic socialism, which will require a close reading of primary texts and sources. With this achieved, the element at hand will be inspected as a possible coherent answer to the dual improbability of a moderate gradualist or a revolutionary socialist strategy in a capitalist democracy (i.e., *SC*).

Finally, with the discussion of coherence complete, the ways by which to properly critique the convincingness of the particular strategic element will come into view.

Chapter 3 will consider the strategic element of ‘**non-reformist reforms**’. The ‘non-reformist reform’ describes a method of change that, rather than supporting the continued existence of a current state of affairs (capitalism), *destabilises* the system and, therefore, creates both the impetus for further reforms and ripens conditions for explicit class struggle in the workplace and the community. The chapter will argue that this strategy is present within the democratic socialist movement, and that it does indeed constitute a real and coherent answer to *SC*. The chapter will also elucidate some possible barriers to ‘non-reformist reforms’ as a completely *convincing* answer to *SC*, namely, that their success largely depends on the ability of democratic socialist actors to maintain strategic independence and clarity, something they have not done consistently.

Chapter 4 will concern itself with the strategy of ‘**in-and-against the state**’. This describes a strategy whereby, in entering some part of the state via elections, democratic socialists act to counter adversarial elements of it (military, treasury, etc) that cleave towards capitalist dominance. In countering these elements, the state is democratised and put into a productive relationship with the popular masses, and therefore made a more effective instrument for socialist change. Again, the thesis will argue that this strategic element is present in the Anglo-American democratic socialist formation, and that it does indeed constitute an answer to *SC*, attempting to transcend the dual implausibility of moderate gradualist and revolutionary socialisms and their respective strategies in relation to state power. As a *convincing* answer to *SC*, the chapter will argue that the ‘in-and-against the state’ strategy is open to critique on the basis of its dependence on a perhaps incomplete understanding of the nature of the state itself.

Chapter 5 will consider the strategy of ‘**class struggle elections**’ – a manner in which a socialist organisation can engage in seeking electoral victory that aids the intensification of class struggle. It also considers the relationship between class-based movement and socialist organisation that this strategy expresses, sometimes called

the ‘**merger formula**’, whereby movement and organisation are set in a productive relationship with each other and can advance together in a transformational process. In relation to *SC*, the chapter will argue that this democratic socialist strategy is, again, a coherent answer. However, the extent to which it is a *convincing* one depends on how we understand the class nature of movements that spring up around electoral campaigns.

Finally, in its **conclusion**, the central arguments of the thesis will be reemphasised – that democratic socialism has a coherent response to *SC*, but its convincingness remains open to debate. It will then draw together comments regarding the necessary future areas of research that must be conducted into Anglo-American democratic socialist strategy in order to put forth a full and productive critique of its convincingness in relation to *SC*.

1

Academic Context and Methodological Considerations

In this initial chapter, I will attempt to locate this thesis within a broader political-theoretic literature on socialist strategy and attempt to establish its credentials as a unique contribution to that academic discourse. In locating the thesis as such and discussing its related literature, I: 1) will draw out one fundamental strategic challenge (*SC*) for socialist parties or movements acting within capitalist democracies; 2) will describe the nature of this thesis as an academic and theoretical contribution, restating the research questions and outlining a method by which to answer them; and 3) briefly note certain related literatures that I will not directly engage with, and explain how the thesis will relate to them.

1.1 Academic Literature and the ‘Strategic Challenge’

1.1.1 Moderate, Gradualist Socialism in the Strategy Literature

The most influential text that occupies itself with the choices presented to socialist actors in capitalist democracies¹ is Adam Przeworski’s much-cited *Capitalism*

¹By ‘capitalist democracy’, we simply *refer to* (and about which make no normative claims regarding the extent of ‘actual’ democracy) the system commonly found in much of the Global

and Social Democracy (1993), first published in 1985. In this text, Przeworski employs a certain analytic Marxian methodology and style to consider hypothetical political actors (parties, movements) and classes (worker and capitalist) and inspect, formalising via symbolic language and graphical representation, their rational interests and plausible courses of action. He also considers the real history of the workers' movement and its development into social-democratic parliament-oriented parties, perhaps the most notable moderate, gradualist socialist tradition. From such an analysis, Przeworski ultimately concludes a number of difficulties faced by political actors in capitalist democracies hoping to institute change in a socialistic direction. For the purposes of this thesis, his chief conclusion is as follows: in any attempt to gain power, a socialist party with a social base consisting of workers will fail so long as it fails to find allies, since workers do not constitute a large enough social force to either win power or govern. In finding allies, usually amongst the middle-classes, the socialist party must therefore dilute its socialist end-goal, and in turn, alienate a portion of its worker-base. Therefore, the socialist party, acting rationally (King and Wickham-Jones, 1990), must ultimately fail, losing its anti-capitalist ambitions and becoming satisfied by making some social reforms within capitalism.

Przeworski concludes:

I think that social democrats have done about as well as they could have under historical circumstances not of their choosing [...] I only doubt that they would lead their societies to socialism. I am sure that reforms are possible, but that does not mean that reformism is a viable strategy of transition to socialism. (1993, p. 239)

On a similar basis, but with a focus on the rational individual worker rather than the workers' party, Cohen and Rogers (1983) point out that, in a capitalist democracy, the worker can successfully struggle for short-term gain on the basis of their position as a worker (improved living and/or working conditions). The

North – a political system characterised by multiple independent parties, elected government, the presence of legal political rights such as freedom of assembly and speech etc., coupled with a capitalist economy (i.e., private property, commodity markets including a labour market, wage-labour, etc). Given the probable familiarity of readers with this system, we can go without an analytic definition.

pursuit of long-term gain on such an interest (social transformation) is irrational so long as the costs of the process of transformation are plausibly high, or uncertain. Even under non-revolutionary conditions of transition, the crisis generated by capital flight and/or sabotage from other capitalist countries orients workers' short-term interests against even a transition by parliamentary means. For Cohen and Rogers, as for Przeworski, the formation of social-democratic parties as vehicles for workers' interests appears as the most likely outcome in capitalist democracies, but such a route toward *socialism* by this method is unlikely if not impossible. (Cohen and Roger, 1983, pp.50-60)

Calnitsky (2021) represents one of the most optimistic portions in the literature, asserting that there exists an empirical basis for a continuous growth of welfare spending that can plausibly allow reformist parties to slowly decommodify labour *without* compromising the socialist aspiration or short-term working-class interest. But even this literature fails to give a convincing vision of the transition between a mixed system of partially commodified labour, and a society *without* labour as a commodity, i.e., a socialist society. Though Calnitsky (2021) attempts to draw on Przeworski's works (1993;1997) to make this argument, he is ultimately left with Przeworski's conclusion: though social-democratic reforms are possible, how in fact they could lead to socialism in the final instance is unclear.

1.1.2 Revolutionary Socialism in the Strategy Literature

Underlying most, if not all, of these authors' arguments regarding the difficulties of a social-democratic, reform-based route to socialism in the capitalist-democratic context, is the equally unlikely possibility of a moment of socialist rupture, revolution or insurrection.

Przeworski's *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (1993) begins with the assumption that "if insurrection by a minority is rejected - either because it is unfeasible or because it does not lead to socialism - then social democracy is the only historical laboratory where lessons can be sought" (p.1). In a later work, Przeworski and Limongi (1997), surveying data from across a millennium, note that "no democracy

ever fell, regardless of everything else, in a country with a per capita income higher than that of Argentina in 1975” (p.165).

Drawing on Przeworski and others (Banks and Wilson, 2020; Erikson and Tedin, 2015; Sassoon, 1996), Calnitsky (2021) also concludes that, “at least inside the rich capitalist democracies”, “I do not [...] think that the revolutionary road is implausible. Rather, it is impossible” (2021, p.14).

Even the more radical Erik Olin Wright, attempting to conceptualise a revolutionary break with capitalism in his well-known *Envisioning Real Utopias* (2010), rejects out-of-hand the intuitive understanding of revolution as a direct confrontation with the state by revolutionary social forces. This understanding is so implausible for Wright that it does not feature in even his *definition* of revolution or ‘rupture’. Instead, ‘rupture’ is defined as a distinctly un-revolutionary process - made by socialist forces working within the existing state and elected through liberal-democratic means. But even this he rejects on Przeworskian grounds - that the necessary broadening of the social base needed to achieve rupture would leave the ‘revolution’ unstable and, ultimately, not sufficiently materially advantageous for a majority of citizens to continue to support. (Wright, 2010, pp.308-320)

Cohen and Rogers’ (1983) rational choice approach also bears out this conclusion on the same basis that it leads to pessimism on the moderate, gradualist route to socialism. If a worker in a democratic context can effectively achieve short-term gain with little risk via the political process, then the struggle for high-risk revolutionary change appears deeply unlikely.

Indeed, as both Cohen and Rogers’ individual-oriented and Przeworski’s party-oriented rational choice arguments seem to suggest, the scale of inclusion of labour into a society does seem to shape the political expression of the labour movement of that country. Those democracies with ‘high inclusion’ of labour into the political process yield social-democratic parties. Only without workers’ input into the political process do revolutionary socialist workers’ groups exist to a notable extent (Vössing, 2008).

1.1.3 The Strategy Literature Overall

Reviewing the literature, we find the following picture. In capitalist democracies, though social-democratic parties may develop and enact reforms favouring the working class, the route to socialism by this method is unlikely or impossible. We therefore turn to the possibility of *rupture* with the capitalist system – insurrection or revolution – but this too appears either deeply implausible or impossible. In response to the classical Marxist debate of reform or revolution, then, the answer comes – ‘neither’.

The motivations for this ‘neither’ answer in the literature are, as we have seen, wide-ranging. We might, however, classify them as adopting two broad categories of concern.

First, is what we might call the ‘*rational choice*’ concern. This may take a more individual-oriented view, as in Cohen and Rogers (1983), where the rational choices presented to the individual worker leads them away from revolutionary politics and toward a reformist politics that is ultimately non-socialist and non-transformational in relation to capitalist society. It may also take a more institutional or group-oriented view, as in Przeworski (1993), who reaches the problem stated above by inspecting the rational choices presented to worker’s *parties* and the necessary broadening of their social base and diluting of their socialist aspirations. In either case, the rational choice concern largely focuses on the insufficiencies of those actors who may pursue change, and the restrictions they face to those choices they can *rationally* make in certain modelled scenarios (though often with reference to real histories).²

Second, is what we might call the ‘*structural constraint*’ concern. This, it seems, is much of the sentiment underlying the rejection, often out-of-hand, of revolutionary socialist change in capitalist democracies (Wright, 2010; Calnitsky 2021). Rather than a focus on the actors who might hypothetically pursue socialist change,

²Beyond Cohen and Rogers and Przeworski, there are of course other arguments which can be called ‘rational choice’, or indeed variants of the arguments these authors present. However, we take these authors and their arguments as broadly representative, and we will touch on some adjacent arguments in our discussion.

this concern focuses on the problems more directly originating with the object of change – the capitalist-democratic society itself. For Wright, “the robustness of the institutions of the state in developed capitalist democracies make ruptural strategies implausible” (2010, p.309), making *all-out* revolution the stuff of “wishful thinking or romantic illusions” (p.308). While he refrains from spelling out the particular nature of the ‘robustness’ of the state, we might make three reasonable assumptions that line up with other portions of the literature. 1) The capitalist-democratic state is robust in that most capitalist-democratic states possess overwhelmingly large means of state defence – i.e., police, armed forces and intelligence services. This is clearly a factor in the otherwise rational choice-oriented concerns of Przeworski (1993) and Calnitsky (2021) regarding the tumultuous (and ultimately not rationally pursued) period of breakdown after an attempted revolution, but it might also reasonably be applied to more ambitious moderate, gradualist socialist actors. Being, itself, rational, the state “will devote all of its resources to break the revolution” (Calnitsky, 2021, p.17). 2) The limits placed on the state by ‘business confidence’, as referenced invariably by Przeworski (1993) and Block (1987). Since the capitalist class has control over the investment function, any reform *or* revolutionary socialist advance will likely be faced with a crisis of disinvestment and related crises of currency and capital flight. The state is ‘robust’ here in the sense that its institutions are forced into a kind of necessary stability of function. 3) The state is robust in its ability to include and pacify otherwise plausibility *revolutionary* social forces and personnel, and to make *moderate, gradualist* ones ultimately un-socialist. This is the worry implicit in Vössing’s findings (2008) on the inclusion of the labour movement into democratic institutions, and a worry explicitly laid out, drawing on Vössing, by democratic socialist Eric Blanc (2021a).

These two concerns are clearly interlinked. The robustness of the state originating in its ability to include and pacify otherwise transformational agents (*structural constraint*) shapes the choices that appear as rational to those agents (*rational choice*), which in turn alters the response of the state – its level of repression and acceptance of reform (*structural constraint*). In any case, the two concerns, taken

either together or separately as different authors have, seem to imply grim prospects for socialist transformation in capitalist-democratic contexts.

Yet, despite both the *rational choice* and *structural constraint* concerns laid out in the literature, socialist actors in capitalist democracies remain. Indeed, it is intuitively implausible that critics of capitalism who seek the socialist transformation of that system will disappear, so long as capitalism still exists. For these actors, we can therefore draw out a basic *strategic challenge (SC)* from the literature, that is:

How, given the dual improbability of either a revolutionary or moderate, gradualist method of social transformation, to proceed as a socialist actor seeking transformational change in the context of a capitalist democracy.

Socialist actors in capitalist democracies, it seems, must provide an answer to this strategic challenge.

1.2 Thesis as a Contribution – Its Location and Tasks

The location of the thesis within the literature above, and its task in relation to it, is therefore as follows. It takes *SC*, as drawn out from the literature above, as its foundation. However, rather than maintaining a focus on the *hypothetical rational* agent – be it the individual worker or workers’ party etc – it considers a *real* socialist political formation, that is, the Anglo-American democratic socialist left in the period 2015-2020.

Readers may hope here for an immediate definition of ‘democratic socialism’, or else a conceptual distinction between it and revolutionary and gradualist socialisms. However, as an analysis of a real political movement, the thesis must build up such a definition by analysis of real political activity and, as we will see, this is one central task of the thesis as a whole.

Of this movement, the thesis asks two related questions:

- 1) As a primary concern, does the thought and practice of Anglo-American

democratic socialism constitute a real and *coherent* answer to SC?

2) Does the thought and practice of the movement constitute a *convincing* answer to SC?

In answering (1), we will establish whether democratic socialism of the contemporary Anglo-American type is a distinct strategic formation in comparison to moderate, gradualist socialism on the one hand, and a ruptural or revolutionary socialism on the other, and whether it therefore makes a coherent attempt to overcome the strategic impasses of both within the context of a capitalist democracy. Democratic socialism must, if it is to constitute a real answer to *SC*, make some attempt to address the *structural constraint* and the *rational choice* concerns. This thesis will make the case that such an attempt is made, and democratic socialism does constitute a coherent and real answer to *SC*. In doing so, as outlined in the introduction, we must elucidate key strategic elements of contemporary democratic socialism, and these shall be the strategies of non-reformist reforms, in and against the state, and class-struggle elections.

As a key part of this task of answering (1), we must clearly grapple with some definitional problems which the thesis has not done thus far. Namely, beyond an intuitive definition based on connotation, what in fact constitutes a revolutionary strategy (confrontational, intense, rapid) or a moderate, gradualist strategy (compromising, measured, deferential). This will be made clear as we delineate democratic socialism as a strategy in contrast to them in Chapters 3-5.

The thesis makes (1), the question of coherence, its primary concern. It does for broadly the same reasons as the focus on coherence notably taken up by the analytical Marxist school, particularly G. A. Cohen in his writings on Marx's theory of history (2000). Cohen adopts the aim of combining Marx's theory as written, with an analytical framing that values coherence, clear statement, and logical rigour in argument (p.xxiv). He does so largely in order to defend Marx's (reconstructed) theory, but he also maintains this aim in order to better critique the theory where necessary, and to open the theory up to more effective critique by others (p.ix). This is also behind Cohen's attacks on what he calls 'bullshit' Marxism

(p.xxvi), which fails to effectively hear critique due to its ever-shifting positions (i.e., incoherence and lack of clarity), and, when responding to a competing Marxism, must resort to the reading off of simple signifiers in order to make non-arguments against it: the text is written by an academic, and therefore the theory asserted by analytical Marxism is ‘individualist’; or it adopts a different style to canonical Marxist thinkers, and is therefore ‘undialectical’. Ultimately, Cohen’s position makes it clear that establishing coherence and clarity are absolute necessities for either a defence or a critique of any given theory or position. Like Cohen, we too are faced with the enemy of unclarity.

First, this enemy is partially present, completely understandably, across contemporary democratic socialist writing itself; that is to say, it is often ambiguous, or even contradictory, in its presentation of its positions. ‘Understandably’, because the collected theory of a whole movement cannot be expected to be completely coherent and, indeed, were it so, this would rightly be considered uncanny. Nevertheless, like Cohen’s treatment of Marx, if we are even to point in the direction of the ways in which the question of convincingness in relation to *SC* may be answered, we must find the coherences and present the democratic socialist position in as clear a way as possible. *How* precisely to go about this will be discussed in Chapter 2 when we discuss ‘idealisation’.

Second, and most significantly, the enemy of unclarity is present in the limited writing, up until now, on Anglo-American democratic socialism that is itself not from the democratic socialist perspective. Like Cohen’s self-established opponents, existing critiques of democratic socialism have invariably identified the most basic signifiers of the democratic socialist strategy – engagement with elections, the demand for reforms, a sometimes-expressed rhetoric of ‘political revolution’ – and unproblematically read off of them a whole strategy which they then apply standard but ambiguous arguments against: democratic socialism is a secretly undemocratic insurrectionary project (Edward, 2020), or else an idealistic but doomed ‘reformism’ (Angry Workers of the World, 2020; Black Rose Anarchist Federation, 2019b; McGregor, 2019).

Like Cohen, this thesis insists, by example, that we ~~take~~ must take a theory on its own terms, and that we must be adamant about understanding and expressing it in the most clear and coherent way possible without altering its substance. Then and only then can we see the ways in which a critique may be developed. The thesis is therefore written partially as an argument against the kind of writing, and indeed the kind of politics, that argues against its rivals by doing the opposite, by debating with spectres that it itself has conjured.

Given this, in addressing our secondary concern (2), we can make some tentative steps toward exploring, not simply whether democratic socialism *makes a real attempt* to answer SC, but whether its answer is a convincing one. That is to say, while presenting an answer to the puzzle of SC, does the democratic socialist strategy nevertheless fall into the problems presented by the moderate, gradualist route on the one hand or the revolutionary one on the other? The thesis will argue that it is much less clear that democratic socialism is successful in this regard, and that its ‘convincingness’ in relation to SC is still open to debate, though arguments will differ depending on the element of the strategy under inspection. Given the size of the task presented by our primary concern, this secondary concern will be provisional. However, with the coherence of democratic socialism in relation to SC established, the critiques that the thesis will point to will be ripe for development and further work.

1.3 Other Literatures

Upon considering the task of this thesis – of clarifying and analysing a certain strategic orientation – the work of Michael Freeden and his morphological analysis of ideology (Freeden, 1998; Freeden, 2013) may seem appropriate; after all, what is a strategic orientation, we may reasonably think, other than a certain aspect of an ideology, one that contains those concepts relating to the objects and methods of change? Equally, Freeden’s approach has had a significant academic influence. If we are to set aside his approach for the purposes of this thesis, we should have

good reasons. Yet, if we carefully consider the task of the thesis, it seems we do have such reasons.

The morphological analysis understands ideologies as functioning to decontest certain contestable concepts (Freeden, 1998, pp.76-77). For example, liberalism advocates ‘freedom’ and has it refer to a certain thing with certain properties, whereas socialism advocates ‘freedom’ but uses the word to refer to a differing thing with other properties, yet ‘freedom’ in general usage is ambiguous. “Ideologies serve as the bridging mechanism between contestability and determinacy, converting the inevitable variety of options into the monolithic certainty” (Freeden, 1998, p.76). For us, we might consider the concepts of state, of reform, of party, and we might see how these are differently decontested by sections of the socialist left and how this bears on the democratic socialist strategy in particular.

However, in order to most productively relate democratic socialism to *SC*, the strategic elements of democratic socialism must be made up of more complex and technical elements than the more foundational concepts that the morphological approach implies. We might, plausibly, build up such more complex elements (‘in and against the state’, ‘non-reformist reforms’, etc.) by inspection of democratic socialism’s decontested concepts (state, reform, party), but the question of scope of this thesis limits that route.

A second literature with which we might engage concerns itself with historical socialist formations that are broadly similar to contemporary democratic socialism in strategy. We might, perhaps, take Second International Marxism – what has been called ‘revolutionary social democracy’ (Blanc, 2021a) – and Left Eurocommunism (Rooksby and Doherty, 2021) as similar to democratic socialism in crucial respects, and explore the ways in which these formations answered *SC*. Drawing parallels to democratic socialism’s answer to *SC*, we might then evaluate democratic socialism on this basis. This would require significant exploration of these real historical movements, their associated literatures, and the historical interpretations of both. Once again, the issue of scope limits this route.

We shall limit our consideration of these historical socialist movements and their related literatures, then, to *only* where the democratic socialist literature itself makes use of them in considering its strategy. This way, the thesis will not find itself involved in the debate over what the real historical Kautsky or Lenin etc *in fact* argued and their *actual* relation to certain movements and strategic orientations. We shall limit ourselves to the (contemporary Anglo-American) democratic socialist arguments, and the democratic socialist versions of historical figures, movements and strategic orientations. This way, we keep to our central aim of considering democratic socialism in relation to *SC*.

1.4 Conclusion

In this initial chapter, I located this thesis within a broader political-theoretic literature on socialist strategy and attempted to establish its credentials as a unique contribution to that academic discourse. In locating the thesis as such and discussing its related literature, I: 1) drew out one fundamental strategic challenge (*SC*) for socialist parties or movements acting within capitalist democracies; 2) described the nature of this thesis as an academic and theoretical contribution, restating the research questions and outlining a method by which to answer them; and 3) briefly noted certain related literatures that I will not directly engage with, and explained how the thesis will relate to them.

<u>Academic theoretic literature on moderate gradualist and revolutionary socialist strategy in capitalist democracies.</u>	
Unlikelihood of reform <i>or</i> revolutionary road to socialism in capitalist democracies.	
Structural constraint concern.	Rational choice concern.
Strategic Challenge (SC): <i>How, given the dual improbability of either a revolutionary or moderate, gradualist method of social transformation, to proceed as a socialist actor in the context of a capitalist democracy.</i>	
<u>Anglo-American democratic socialism (2015-2020).</u>	
Coherent <i>answer</i> to SC (1)?	<i>Convincing</i> answer SC (2)?
Makes an attempt to distinguish itself from moderate, gradualist socialism on the one hand and revolutionary socialism on the other? If yes, how?	Nevertheless falls into the problems presented by the gradualist route on the one hand or the revolutionary route on the other?
Is an attempt to address both structural constraint and rational choice concerns?	

Table 1 – Methodology and structure of the thesis.

2

Historical Context

In this chapter, I will give a general and historical elucidation of democratic socialism in the Anglo-American context from 2015 to 2020. I will also attempt to justify democratic socialism as the thesis' focus, and, in particular, justify both the Anglo-American context and the choice of the years 2015-2020. With this initial picture of the contemporary democratic socialist formation made clear, the chapter will then make some comments about the necessary approach to the formation that the thesis will take in order to relate it to SC, that is, the thesis must take an idealised, clarified, more strictly delineated version of the real formation as its principal object. This idealised democratic socialism, this chapter will argue, may be referred to as 'democratic socialism' on the basis that it is distinctive of and theoretically prominent in the broader formation.

2.1 Historical Sketch - From Protest to Politics, and 'Democratic Socialism'

Inspecting the left political formations that followed the Great Recession of 2008 in the UK and the US, we can reasonably say that they both took largely similar forms. Both were characterised by a lack of official leaders and, occasionally, demands (Keshtiban, 2017); by a commitment to horizontalism and an absence of definite

membership (Aitchison and Peters, 2011); by a conscious street presence; and by spontaneous as well as conscious growth via social media (Blanche, Calleja-Lopez et al., 2017). These common features predominated in the UK in the anti-austerity movement (2011-2015) (BBC, 2015), the student movement (2010/2011) and Occupy (2011), and in the US with its more significant Occupy movement, Occupy Wall Street and its local variants (2011). These movements, as well as concurrent movements in other parts of the world with similar characteristics, have together been called ‘networked’ social movements (Blanche, Calleja-Lopez et al., 2017; Castells, 2015; Nunes, 2021). At a general level, as Worth (2019) puts it, this ‘new’ left acted primarily (and consciously) at the civil level, not at the level of state politics. Indeed, often these movements, particularly Occupy (both in the UK and US), took an explicitly ‘anti-political’ line, i.e., a hostility to, and dismissal of the legitimacy of, any existing political institution (Bates, et al., 2016, pp.347-348).

But in 2015, both the UK and US lefts experienced a dramatic reversal – a turn toward institutions, formal organisation and the state (Burtenshaw and Panitch, 2020; Nunes, 2021; Panitch et al., 2020, p.10).¹

In the UK, following the defeat of Labour in the 2015 general election, the ‘networked social movement’ for anti-austerity experienced a notable resurgence, with a significant nationwide protest against the effects of government cuts bringing, organisers estimated, 250,000 onto the streets in London, Bristol, Glasgow and Liverpool (BBC, 2015). The only candidate for the concurrent leadership election of the Labour Party to attend and speak at the protest was Jeremy Corbyn who, as a backbench MP since 1983, had been a consistent supporter of and participant in the post-2008 social movements, and indeed social movements prior (Seymour, 2017, pp.16-21). In the months following, Corbyn’s campaign experienced a huge transference of energy, enthusiasm and individuals from the various single-issue campaigns and movements (though the anti-cuts movement most prominently)

¹While the democratic socialist Labour left was not the only manifestation of a ‘turn toward the state’ in the UK – the rise of the SNP in Scotland with the rise of the independence movement, the Green ‘surge’ in England in 2015 – neither aimed at producing real possibilities for *socialist* politics nor did they represent an ‘entering of the movements’ into state-oriented politics at such a scale as the democratic socialist Labour left (see 2.31.).

to the campaign for Corbyn's Labour Party leadership (Seymour, 2017, p.19; Prentoulis, 2017, p.196; Wainwright, 2017, p.117). Corbyn's tour of the country as part of his leadership campaign was characterised by over-packed rooms and mass meetings (Panitch and Leys, 2020, p.198; Nunns, 2016, p.241). With the combination of, on the one hand, the focusing of the various networked, single-issue campaigns that had sprung up since the implementation of austerity cuts in 2010, and, on the other hand, the influx of unaffiliated, disaffected progressives, the Corbyn campaign, and subsequent pro-Corbyn wing of the Labour Party, became the 'Corbyn movement' (Nunns, 2016, p.162).

Corbyn and the Party left's platform was consistently 'class-focussed' (Murray, 2016), and across the period of the left leadership in the party consisted of proposals for sweeping changes of British society 'for the many, not the few', which became Labour's slogan in the 2017 election and after: nationalisation and democratisation of key industries; a revitalisation and funding of the NHS; worker-ownership funds; a substantial improvement to union and worker rights; a regional rebalancing and progressive taxation. More radically, Labour's reports on land ownership (Monbiot, 2019) and firm ownership (Anon, 2017) considered further ways in which the basic ownership-structures of society might be recomposed.

The British Labour Party faced two general elections with Corbyn as its leader, in 2017 and 2019. Both were characterised by the participation of the newly formed Labour left, in the efforts to mobilise particularly young voters and non-voters, in the creation of a mass of low budget viral video content, and in the strategic targeting of particular parliamentary constituencies (Panitch and Leys, 2020, p.208).

The organisational core of the 'movement' after Corbyn's leadership election was the then-newly formed organisation Momentum, co-founded by Jon Lansman MP and James Schneider amongst others, out of Corbyn's initial campaign (Nunns, 2016, p.333). Since its creation, Momentum consisted of Labour members (membership of the party is a requisite for membership of Momentum) making up local groups. While the majority of its membership remained broadly non-active throughout Corbyn's leadership (Blakeley, 2020, pp.86-88) beyond becoming mobilised during election

campaigns, a minority of members became involved in community and workplace organising, as well as local cultural projects (Momentum, 2021a; Redmond and Rose, 2019). Members also became activated around internal Labour elections, such as those for the National Executive Committee (NEC), where Momentum campaigned for socialist slates and for representatives with commitments to the democratisation of the Labour Party, another of Momentum's central aims (Momentum, 2021b).

As part of this commitment to Party transformation, Momentum set up, in 2016, an event parallel to the annual Labour Party conference – The World Transformed festival (TWT) – which would function as a place for the Labour left and those socialists sympathetic to the movement to gather, and practice political self-education. Though TWT panels and events took a wide variety of topics, and various cultural and sporting events also took place, a general focus was maintained on the nature and strategic possibilities of the Labour Party, and the festival usually finished with a rally with MPs from the Socialist Campaign Group (SCG) and other key figures (The World Transformed, 2018; The World Transformed; 2019). By its second year, TWT had become its own organisation, though maintaining support and close affiliation to Momentum (Burnell, 2020).

The period of Corbyn's leadership and left growth within and adjacent to the Labour Party also saw the rise of a network of left media organisations. At TWT 2018, *Tribune*, historically a popular magazine associated with the soft left of the Party, saw a relaunch under new management and with a specifically democratic socialist position (Blakeley, 2019). Novara Media, a radio, video and written news outlet founded in 2011 by those involved in the student movement, also experienced success: an interview with Corbyn before his election in 2015 receiving tens of thousands of views, and their YouTube subscriber count increasing by over 760% during the period of left leadership of the party (HypeAuditor, 2021). Their editors and regular contributors have become known figures in the movement through their appearances on national television (Sarkar, 2018), and presence at TWT and other Momentum events (Bastani et al., 2017).

After Corbyn's defeat in the 2019 general election and his subsequent resignation as leader, left Labour leadership candidate Rebecca Long-Bailey was defeated by a majority in 2020. On reflection, prominent democratic socialist theorist Leo Panitch notes how, despite its meteoritic rise and the surprise success of its very existence, the left ultimately did not do enough to transform the party: Momentum members remained divorced from Constituency Labour Party (CLP) meetings and proceedings, and from the meetings of local Labour-affiliated unions. The form which presented itself initially, as the social movements entered the Party - the potential, of the Party and its organs becoming class organising and class movement-building ones - was not fully realised (Panitch in Blakeley, 2020,p.88).

In the US, something quite similar took place. A political outsider and veteran of social movements of a previous era – Bernie Sanders – took to an electoral platform, bringing with him the most recent ‘networked’ social movements, and creating the conditions for a resurgent socialist left. What, as with Corbyn, appeared at first as a protest candidacy, soon attracted crowds at mass meetings and rallies (Sunkara, 2020, p.202). This was Sanders’ first of two presidential campaigns. In both his initial attempt in 2016 and his second in 2020 he maintained a ‘*class-focused*’ (Murray, 2016) rhetoric - mirroring the Occupy movement in his attacks on the ‘one percent’ (MSNBC, 2015) - and *class-based* means of campaigning –raising money for and joining picket lines and using his campaign’s data infrastructure as a means to get campaign supporters to assist strike action in their area (Day and Uetricht, 2021, p.49).

Sanders’ policy platform was also, in many ways, similar to that of Labour’s under Corbyn. Sanders presented a vision of American society which attempted to distribute power away from ‘Wall Street’ and toward ordinary people, through national healthcare (‘Medicare for All’), free education, an end to homelessness and progressive taxation.

What Sanders and the movement around him lacked was a political party, at least in the form presented to Corbyn and the British democratic socialists. The Democratic Party is unlike the British Labour Party in that it is *not* a membership

party, i.e., it has no democratic membership decision-making structures or a political position or line of its own that it can use to discipline its members (Sunkara, 2020, p.233; Alcázar et al., 2019, p.126). Sanders, and his socialist supporters, had no organisation to attempt to democratise. It was therefore an unlikely candidate, for thirty years a marginal caucus within the Democratic Party with just enough influence to perpetuate itself (Alcázar et al., 2019, p.118), the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), that took the position of destination for the USA's emerging new socialist left. While the 2016 campaign functioned somewhat as an “ad hoc proto-party” (Day and Panitch, 2020), allowing those participants of Occupy and other social movements to gather in one political space, its failure meant those now organised individuals needed somewhere to continue their political action, and that for many was the DSA (Day and Panitch, 2020). In the year following Sanders' defeat and Trump's election, DSA membership more than tripled (Pearce, 2017), and has gone from 6,500 members in 2014 (Schwartz, 2017) to 92,000 in 2021 (Democratic Socialists of America, 2021).

Having truly reconstituted itself by 2017 with its huge influx of new, young members – building new committees, structures, bylaws, political education programmes and the like (Day and Uetrict, 2021, p.65) – DSA began on a larger scale to combine electoral campaigning (though for DSA candidates running as Democrats rather than under a third-party line) with workplace and community organising, taking part in the 2018 teachers strike wave across the South (Blanc, 2019b), campaigning for municipalised energy in Providence, Rhode Island, and for sick pay laws in Austin. Unlike Momentum, DSA's church appears broader and its factions more distinguishable, organised into caucuses – Communist Caucus, Libertarian Socialist Caucus, Bread and Roses Caucus etc. – each with their own strategic and political arguments.

Alongside the more formal organisations of the new democratic socialist left in the US, as in the UK, came a similarly successful network of media. At the forefront is *Jacobin* magazine, a socialist print magazine set up in 2010 by DSA member Bhaskar Sunkara, which experienced a meteoric rise along with the Sanders

campaign and the DSA. In the summer of 2015, Jacobin had 10,000 subscribers; it gained 16,000 in just the two months after Trump was elected (Baird, 2019). Alongside *Jacobin*, there has been a proliferation of podcasts and video broadcasts – *Chapo Trap House*, *The Michael Brooks Show*, *The Antifada* amongst many others – which have served to create a further cultural basis for the continuation of democratic socialism as a force in the USA, particularly amongst a Millennial base (Jelfs, 2021).

Although Bernie Sanders was unsuccessful *electorally*, failing to become the Democratic presidential candidate in 2016 or 2020, after Sanders’ second defeat, Bhaskar Sunkara remarked: “five years ago, the US left did not exist, in any visible form at least. The two Sanders campaigns changed that” (2020, p.245). Unlike the democratic socialists in and around the left of the British Labour Party, the DSA and its allies could not be disrupted so easily by a party establishment – the Democratic Party’s undemocratic *non-party* structure removes that possibility. At time of writing (Spring 2022), the DSA approaches 100,000 members.

2.2 Relating Democratic Socialism to the Strategic Challenge – Idealisation

We have arrived at a picture of democratic socialism as a broad movement that, while it may justifiably be discussed (as we will see in section 2.3) as a relatively united Anglo-American movement, and having its central activities 2015-2020, nevertheless appears as nebulous, with vague boundaries. In order to relate the democratic socialist formation as described in sections 2.1 and 2.3 to the strategy challenge (*SC*) that we discussed in Chapter 1, we must come to an understanding of democratic socialism that gives us a definite strategic orientation. We must therefore perform an act of idealisation on the broad movement of democratic socialism.

By idealisation, we simply mean the treatment of some object as having features it does not have (Godfrey-Smith, 2009, p. 47) – i.e., the deliberate fictionalisation of reality – which is done in service of more effectively describing some nevertheless true aspect of that reality. In this case, we must treat the messy democratic socialist movement of the US and UK as more uniform, and with a more or less delineable

strategic orientation, which we may then call ‘democratic socialism’. With such an understanding, whether (now properly idealised) democratic socialism presents a real and coherent answer to the impasse of *SC*, and whether that answer is a convincing one, can have a concrete answer.

The question remains, however, *how* we determine this idealised form of democratic socialism as a strategic orientation. The obvious starting point is to turn to those publications, discussed elsewhere in this chapter, that are closely associated with the democratic socialists in and around the Labour left on the one hand and the DSA on the other – *Tribune* magazine and *Jacobin* magazine. On this basis, we can inspect a particular strategy that is explicitly argued for in print, rather than make a difficult attempt to empirically draw out, for example, the views on strategy of the average DSA member. Indeed, these pseudo-official organs of their respective country’s democratic socialist movements (Henwood, 2019; McIntosh, 2021; Syal, 2019) will not simply provide material for a clearer understanding of a democratic socialist strategy, but also give an insight into the more theoretically defined and intellectually dominant strand of the diverse, vaguely defined (non-idealised) movement.

To perform the same function, we can also look to specific, notable individuals involved in the democratic socialist movements and their theoretic output. Consider Bhaskar Sunkara, for example – founding editor, publisher, and a regular contributor to *Jacobin*, publisher of *Tribune* since its relaunch in 2018, author of *The Socialist Manifesto* (2020), previous vice-chair of the DSA (a nominal position), and regular speaker at the British democratic socialist left’s annual The World Transformed (TWT) festival. Writers like Sunkara occupy a particularly useful position for creating an idealised democratic socialism, on the basis that they not only produce theory but also take part in the movement to a notable extent.

Two brief cautionary notes. First, as both writers in the fields of socialist history (Blanc, 2021a, p.16) and the theory of ideology (Freedon, 2013, pp. 116) have pointed out, to focus purely on one section of a group, whether that is elites, or publications, is to avoid the various contradictions and ambiguities of the intellectual

makeup of that group. Though, as we have established, an act of idealisation is necessary, we must nevertheless therefore, given the dangers stated, pay careful attention to the possibility of, rather than making a productive fictionalisation (i.e., an idealisation) of the democratic socialist movements, one-dimensionalising them, and therefore drawing conclusions which have little bearing on reality. The thesis must therefore keep a constant eye on actual historical events, organisational/party documents, and in general an expanded base of sources that ground us and our idealisations in the broader (non-idealised) democratic socialist movements.

Second, when we idealise the democratic socialist strategy into three separate elements, while this helps significantly when developing clear analyses of each element, it also obscures the way they concretely work - often simultaneously and together. Again, this project lacks the scope necessary to analyse each element's concrete relation with its two cousins, but it will touch on certain relations when possible.

We have, then, a general picture of the necessarily idealising approach that the thesis must adopt in relation to democratic socialism. The idealised democratic socialism will, as much as possible, reflect a dominant and more theoretically defined strain within the broader movement - a kind of orthodoxy. Thus, it seems very much justifiable to call this idealised object - 'democratic socialism'. What can be said about the idealised democratic socialism in relation to *SC*, then, might also be reasonably said about the more broad, nebulous movement.

2.3 Justification of Context

2.3.1 Justification of Context - Historical Notability

First, the historical notability of the rise, 2015-2020, of democratic socialism might be defended on a simple numerical basis.

As we have noted, the Democratic Socialists of America grew from 6,500 members in 2014 (Schwartz, 2017) to 92,000 in 2021 (Democratic Socialists of America, 2021), making it the largest socialist organisation in the USA since the Communist Party before its final implosion circa 1956 (Schwartz, 2017). Under the leadership of

Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour Party became the largest political party in Western Europe (MacAskill, 2016), countering a historic trend of falling membership in all British political parties (Whiteley, 2019). Formed in 2016, the left faction of Labour – Momentum – had 42,000 fee-paying members by 2018 (Brooks, 2018), while the annual British democratic socialist festival of ideas and culture The World Transformed (TWT) attracted 3000-10,000 attendees in its various years beginning in 2016 (Allegretti, 2018, The World Transformed, 2021).

Turning to the circulation of the major democratic socialist publications, we can see a similar trend. In the US, *Jacobin* grew from 7,000 subscriptions in 2014 (Sunkara, 2014) to 75,000 at the beginning of 2021, and saw around three-million views of its online articles per month at that time (Jacobin, 2021). In the UK, *Tribune*, relaunched with founding editor of *Jacobin* as its new publisher in 2017, reached 1,000 subscriptions within the first 72 hours of its relaunch at TWT festival, and in 2020 reached 15,000. Also in the UK, *Novara Media*, a news media outlet with close ties to the British democratic socialist movement, went from approximately 8,900 YouTube subscribers on the day of the announcement of Corbyn’s first general election as Labour leader in 2017 (18th April), to 67,800 on the day of the left’s defeat in the 2020 Labour leadership election (4th April) (HypeAuditor, 2021).

Beyond this ‘numerical’ justification, however, is, as we mentioned earlier, a notable and substantive shift in the form of left politics. While the left social movements of the early 21st century and post-2008 crash constituted, largely, an explicit rejection or suspicion of electoral engagement, state-oriented politics and hierarchical organisation (Bates, et al., 2016; Nunes, 2021), the democratic socialist movements that sprang into life in 2015 did so partially due to the *electoral* campaigns of Corbyn and Sanders, and took shape as or within hierarchical, membership organisations that aimed at state power. This substantive change was one of form, but also of *theory* and practice. A political-theoretic interest in contemporary democratic socialism again seems justified.

2.3.2 Justification of Context – Britain and USA

In the thesis thus far, we have assumed that treating the US and the UK democratic socialist movements together is a legitimate move. However, we must justify this treatment if we are to relate *Anglo-American* democratic socialism to the impasse presented by *SC*.

The primary justification for our treatment of contemporary democratic socialism as an Anglo-American phenomenon, is its treatment by both British and American democratic socialists as such. Contemporary democratic socialist theoretic and historical literature consistently links the two contexts, and often treats the political tasks of the two national movements as broadly the same.

Let us take, for example, Leo Panitch² and Sam Gindin’s *The Socialist Challenge Today*, first published in 2018 and republished in 2020 in the wake of the defeat of Corbyn’s Labour in the 2019 British general election. The book begins, in its first chapter ‘The Revival of Democratic Socialism’, with the two contexts – Anglo and American – considered together: “one of the most unexpected aspects of the current political conjuncture has been the coming to the fore of socialists at the leaderships levels of the British Labour Party and the US Democratic Party” (Panitch et al., 2020, p.1). Considering the revival of a class-focus and state orientation to the politics of this new conjuncture, the authors continue: “[i]t is significant that this new politics has galvanized tens of thousands of young people into groups like Momentum and the Democratic Socialists of America” (Panitch et al., 2020, p.1).

Prominent democratic socialist and *Jacobin* founding editor Bhaskara Sunkara intimately links the two contexts in his 2018 book *The Socialist Manifesto* (2020) when he, in describing the post-2008 crash potentialities for socialism, follows his description of the Occupy movement with a brief description of the campaigns of Sanders (pp.199-206) and Corbyn (pp.206-213). He ends the chapter with the claim: “in both the United States and Britain there is a surprising opportunity for

²Panitch, who passed away in 2020, was a notable democratic socialist theoretician within both British and American context, acting as mentor to (amongst others) the editors of both *Tribune* and *Jacobin* (Burtenshaw et al., 2020; Burtenshaw, 2020), was a regular contributor to both publications, and regular speaker at both DSA events and the annual festival of ideas of the British democratic socialist left – The World Transformed (TWT).

socialism today” (p.213). In the afterword to the 2020 edition, Sunkara reflects again on “Corbyn and Sanders” and the position of the democratic socialist movement after their electoral defeats (p.246).

From the British perspective, in the essay collection *Futures of Socialism: The Pandemic and the Post-Corbyn Era* (2020) edited by British democratic socialist economist Grace Blakeley³, essays straightforwardly refer to the “Corbyn/Sanders moment” (p.90) and, in a similar vein to the authors above, again reference “the increasingly unified socialist movement that has emerged around the prime ministerial and presidential campaigns of Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders respectively” (p.xxi).

Beyond this Anglo-American framing at the level of democratic socialist discourse, we might also identify, what might be called, an Anglo-American institutional crossover. We have already considered (see 2.2) the most popular and, indeed, pseudo-official (Henwood, 2019; McIntosh, 2021; Syal, 2019) publications of both the British and American democratic socialist lefts – *Tribune* and *Jacobin* respectively. These publications share a publisher – Bhaskar Sunkara – and often share contributors – Grace Blakeley, Ronan Burtenshaw and Meagan Day to name a few. Equally, both magazines consistently cover the national context of the other (Burtenshaw, 2021; Doherty, 2019; Murray, 2016). Verso Books is a large, *Anglo-American* left-wing publisher, which has published most of the notable democratic socialist theoretic contributions including Sunkara’s *Socialist Manifesto* (2020), Day and Uetrict’s *Bigger Than Bernie* (2021), Panitch and Ley’s *Searching for Socialism* (2020) and Seymour’s *Corbyn* (2017) amongst many others.

In the democratic socialist literature itself, we also find several implicit arguments for the Anglo-American framing:

1) Both democratic socialist movements found themselves attached to an electoral bid of an individual (Corbyn/Sanders) working within a mainstream party (Transnational Institute, 2021, p.13). As we mentioned in 2.1, this lent both

³Staff writer at *Tribune* and contributor to *Novara* and *Jacobin*.

movements a similar orientation – toward the state and the capturing of state power, centrally through elections (Panitch et al., 2020, p.10).

2) Both democratic socialist movements found themselves presented with the definite opportunity of accessing the state *without* the already-existing presence of mass working-class power at the level of the workplace (unions) or community (collective community associations, renters unions, unemployed peoples’ unions) or society (mass socialist parties with cultural and educational institutions), as socialists in general had during the 20th century (Guinan and McKinley, 2020 p.190, Day and Panitch, 2020; Sunkara, 2020, p.215).

3) Though they lacked a class-rooted movement, they quickly acquired a kind of enthused ‘class-focussed’ (Murray, 2016) social movement (via tapping into the concerns of the ‘networked’ social movements that preceded them). Thus, for both US and UK democratic socialists, the social movement faced the party, and the party (or its socialist-sympathising elements) faced the state (Transnational Institute, 2021, p.12).

It seems, then, that contemporary democratic socialism can justifiably be considered as Anglo-American as a formation that can be related to *SC*: there is a level of institutional crossover; there is a shared self-conception; and there are plausible arguments throughout democratic socialist literature in favour of this conception⁴.

2.3.3 Justification of Context – 2015-2020

Having made an attempt to justify the *Anglo-American* nature of contemporary democratic socialism as we will relate it to *SC*, we must also make some remarks in order to justify the particular timeframe which we will consider when we talk about democratic socialism, that is, 2015-2020.

As discussed in 2.3.2, the democratic socialist literature consistently draws the British and American contexts together, and does so partially on the basis

⁴There are some arguments to include Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece into our conception. Some of the literature (Panitch et al., 2020; Transnational Institute, 2021) makes direct comparisons. However, it is clear that both Podemos and Syriza did not have the same shared conception and institutional crossover as the UK and USA lefts.

that the timeframe (2015-2020) is shared between contexts. Even if the 2015-2020 timeframe is not sufficiently justified simply based on the existence of the democratic socialist self-conception, we might argue, drawing on our initial historical sketch (2.1) that this self-conception is reasonable.

Centrally, the pivot on the radical left in the US and UK from horizontalist, ‘anti-political’, networked social movements, to more formalised political formations oriented toward elections and the state, occurred, strikingly clearly, in 2015. As outlined in our historical sketch (2.1), the concerns and enthusiasm of the networked social movements - Occupy, the anti-austerity movement, elements of the 2010 student movement – flowed into the campaigns of Corbyn and Sanders. Both these campaigns began in 2015. If we can historically pick out contemporary democratic socialism as beginning with this turn toward state power, then 2015 is a justifiable starting point for the timeframe. Similarly, while democratic socialist literature may still consider the state and elections after the defeats of Corbyn and Sanders in 2020 (Blakeley, 2020; Transnational Institute, 2021), the imminent possibility of capturing state power that produced the turn toward elections and the state faded past this point. This creates, for us, a timeframe – 2015-2020 – marked by certain conditions that arguably produced contemporary democratic socialism and, as we will see in Chapters 3-5, created a certain *strategic orientation* marked by its particular relation to reform, elections, and party, all of which have as their final object the state.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have given a general and historical elucidation of democratic socialism in the Anglo-American context from 2015 to 2020. I have also attempted to justify democratic socialism as the thesis’ focus, and, in particular, justify both the Anglo-American context and the choice of the years 2015-2020. The chapter also presented an argument regarding the necessary approach to the democratic socialist movement that the thesis must adopt in order to relate it to SC, that is, it must take an idealised, clarified, more strictly delineated version of the real formation of democratic socialism as its principal object. This idealised democratic

socialism, this chapter argued, may be referred to as ‘democratic socialism’ on the basis that it is distinctive of and theoretically prominent in the broader formation.

3

Non-Reformist Reforms

In this chapter, I will begin to answer the research questions set out in Chapter 1, namely, on the one hand, whether democratic socialism can provide a real and coherent *answer*, and on the other a *convincing* one to the impasse presented by *SC*. This chapter will consider those questions in relation to one central strategic element of contemporary Anglo-American democratic socialism: ‘non-reformist reforms’.

The first task of this chapter will be to define in theoretical terms, what constitutes ‘non-reformist reforms’ as an element of strategy. Having done this, the chapter will attempt to establish the actual presence of the strategic element within the democratic socialist formation, which will require a close reading of primary texts and sources. With this achieved, this element will be inspected as a possible coherent answer to *SC*, and an argument will be made that it is, both in regards to rational choice and structural constraint concerns. Having established this, I hope to have provided the groundwork and a possible direction for an evaluation of the democratic socialist strategy of ‘non-reformist reforms’ that avoids misinterpretation of democratic socialism’s answer to *SC*. The chapter will therefore conclude by presenting a preliminary argument: that whether non-reformist reforms are a *convincing* answer to *SC* depends on the ability of democratic socialist actors to maintain strategic independence and clarity.

3.1 Defining ‘Non-Reformist Reforms’

A non-reformist reform is, evidently, framed in contradistinction to a ‘reformist’ reform. At the most general level, a “reformist reform is one which subordinates its objectives to the criteria of rationality and practicability of a given system” (Gorz, 1968b, p.7). For example, we might wish to reform the police force such that fewer killings of Black individuals take place. Assuming that a part of the rationality of the system of policing is that police should have the maximum possible resources to prevent and punish the criminality of citizens, then a reformist reform might increase funding to the police, for training against bias, for research into more effective police body cameras etc (Jeffries and Ridgley, 2020). Such a reform clearly aligns with the basic rationality of the system.

A *non-reformist* reform is therefore the opposite, in that it seeks to cut *against* the rationality of the system, causing destabilisation of that system and therefore opening up the possibility for further reforms. They are ‘non-reformist’ in the sense they are designed to “advance toward a radical transformation” (Gorz, 1968b, p.6), a revolutionary aim, rather than only to reform and take the given reform as an end in itself. Non-reformist reforms are also consciously conceived by actors as “*means* and not an end, as dynamic phases in a progressive struggle, not as resting stages.” (Gorz, 1968a, p.118, emphasis mine). Returning to our example of the system of policing, assuming the rationality of the system is that police should have the maximum possible resources to prevent and punish the criminality of citizens, then a *non-reformist* reform might defund and disarm police and divert funding to community health, education and housing. Ideally, such a reform not only makes racist murders by police less likely (since arms are not as available), but it also makes further reform more likely, since some amount of power is transferred from the police to the community, and there is less dependence on police to (fail to) ensure community safety. By destabilising the system, the possibility of a radical transformation of the provision of community safety is advanced toward (Abolitionist Futures, 2020).

As part of a broader strategy over time, a set of *non-reformist* reforms is defined by “1. the presence [...] of organic ties between the various reforms; 2. the

rhythm and modalities of their initiation; 3. the presence or absence of a will to profit by the collapse in the balance-provoked by the first reforming actions for new disruptive action" (Gorz, 1968a, p.115). This is to say that actors must pursue the series of non-reformist reforms in a rational and tactical manner in relation to their disruptive effects, and with the revolutionary goal of *transformation* in mind.

Such was the formulation made by influential New Left socialist Andre Gorz as he faced the possibility of a pre-revolutionary situation in France, May 1968, and the chance of radical left government entering the capitalist state (Rooksby, 2019, p.43). As Gorz recommends, a set of *socialist* non-reformist reforms are, of course, directed against the rationality of *capitalism*. They do *not* constitute the abolition of capitalism, but instead, as we have seen, destabilise it such that further and deeper reforms are made possible. The destabilisation caused in the case of capitalism is on the one hand the backlash by elites against the reform, and on the other, the growth of the working-class and socialist movement's capacity arising from the reform. This *dual function of destabilisation* caused by a non-reformist reform provided an answer to Gorz's "principal problem of socialist strategy", namely "to create the objective and subjective conditions which will make mass revolutionary action and engagement in a successful trial of strength with the bourgeoisie possible" (Gorz, 1968a, p.111). Gorz' definition also points to the highly contextual nature of the actual policy content of a non-reformist reform – a particular policy might fulfil the dual function of destabilisation in one national context (universal suffrage in 1910s Finland), while not in another (universal suffrage as exists in the contemporary USA).

As outlined in Chapter 2, a notable section of the socialist left in both the UK and US found itself, in 2015-2020, faced with a similar, if less dramatic, possibility of socialist actors entering national administration. It is unsurprising then, perhaps, that they also turned to the strategy of non-reformist reforms as a possible method of socialist change.

3.2 Non-Reformist Reforms in Anglo-American Democratic Socialism

We must first illustrate that a strategy of non-reformist reforms *was in fact present* in democratic socialist strategy 2015-2020, and that it was influential enough to be properly called a democratic socialist position.

Influential democratic socialist Leo Panitch prefaces his and his longstanding collaborator Sam Gindin’s 2018 survey of the American and British democratic socialist lefts with a section on Gorz’s conception of non-reformist reforms, largely quoting verbatim and in agreement. Gorz’s conception was ‘farsighted’ and ‘pathbreaking’ (Panitch et al., 2020, pp.25-26). Panitch and Gindin proceed to assess the advances in Anglo-American socialist politics in relation to non-reformist reforms: “the measure of the Corbyn leadership [...] should not have been how explicitly socialist its policies were, but rather the extent to which it problematized how to implement reform measures in such ways as to advance, rather than close off, future socialist possibilities” (p.61).

Elsewhere, in his *Socialist Manifesto* (2020), Bhaskar Sunkara (2020, p.222) argues for the adoption of the strategy of non-reformist reforms or, indeed, asks how it is that these can be won (implying that the strategy of non-reformist reforms is one largely already agreed upon by democratic socialists). He engages directly with the question posed by Gorz’s conception – of how radical transformation arises from the destabilisation that non-reformist reforms are designed to bring about – and the role democratic socialists can play in capitalising on the destabilisation by the *building of a socialist movement* (Gorz’s own answer).

We find this argument again in Sunkara and Schwartz’s¹, and Vivek Chibber’s, manifesto-like *Jacobin* articles *What Should Socialists Do?* (2017) and *Our Road to Power* (2017) respectively. In the former, authors specifically raise Medicare for

¹Joseph M. Schwartz: long-time DSA activist, at various times elected NPC member (Joye, 2015; Schwartz, 2017).

All – the demand championed by Bernie Sanders and the DSA for free-at-the-point-of-use, state-funded health insurance with universal coverage – as an example of a non-reformist reform that would disempower capital and empower workers.

Meagan Day² and Micah Uetrict³ in *Bigger Than Bernie* (2021) quote Gorz (p.152), and restate Sunkara’s arguments, emphasising the element of destabilisation, crisis and backlash that non-reformist reforms must both make and capitalise upon on the basis of a subsequently reinvigorated workers’ movement:

[T]he more successful we are at winning ambitious reforms, the more open the capitalist class becomes in its attempts to undermine workers’ gains [...]. That’s a fight worth having, especially if we’re strong enough after decades of struggle to potentially emerge victorious. As Sunkara writes, “The route to a more radical socialism will come from the crisis of social democracy our very success initiates.” (p.150)

In the UK, we find a similar picture. Discussing the potential of a Corbyn-led Labour government in 2019, editors and co-founder of *Novara Media*, Ash Sarkar, Michael Walker and James Butler (respectively), agree that the direct overthrow of capitalism is beyond the scope of ‘Corbynism’. The democratisation, however, of various aspects of economic and social life via the re-empowering of the workers’ movement and of civil society more generally *can* be looked to as a plausible goal of a democratic socialist government. These should be enacted via a set of non-reformist reforms designed to open up space for further transformation (Butler et al., 2019). Creating community participation in national budgeting and worker ownership funds in firms are given as policy examples.

Co-founder of Momentum James Schneider, in reflection of the electoral defeat of the democratic socialist left in the general, as well as Labour leadership, elections, produced a six-part series of articles entitled *How We Win* (2021a). Writing in

²*Jacobin* staff writer and candidate for East Bay DSA’s National Convention 2019 delegate (as part of the influential Bread and Roses Caucus); previous contributing editor for their online publication *The Call* (Day, 2019; *The Call*, 2018).

³Also Bread and Roses member and previous contributing editor to its *The Call* (*The Call*, 2018).

Novara, Schneider includes a section on non-reformist reforms in his article on democratic socialists' engagement with the state (2021b). He emphasises, again, the role of an energised movement in both *allowing* the implementation of the reforms and, in their implementation, the movement's ability to create "momentum in a progressive direction" (2021b) as it fights back against the expected elite backlash.

More convincingly, perhaps, we might look at policy proposals – the reforms championed by democratic socialists as non-reformist – and internal documents of the Anglo-American democratic socialist organisations themselves to illustrate the presence of a strategy of non-reformist reforms.

As mentioned, in the US, the demand for Medicare for All for a free-at-the-point-of-use, state-funded health insurance option – is advocated, if not necessarily by Bernie Sanders himself then by his democratic socialist supporters in and around the DSA, as a (if not *the* key) non-reformist reform. In August 2017, at DSA's first national convention since its rebirth post-2016 presidential election, delegates passed a motion committing the organisation to a campaign for Medicare for All (DSA, 2017). This led to the setting-up of DSA's own campaign organisation for the demand, with its own steering committee and regional organisers – DSA for Medicare for All. Reporting on the convention, Joseph M. Schwartz (2017) notes that, though other capitalist democracies have institutionalised state-funded healthcare programs, in the context of the US, the DSA's demand is both radical and non-reformist "in that it both institutionalizes a new social right and "decommodifies" (takes out of the private sector) health insurance" (Schwartz, 2017).

In the UK, two reports on ownership – *Alternative Models of Ownership* (Anon, 2017) and *Land for the Many* (Monbiot, 2019) – commissioned by the left leadership of the Labour Party, revealed its policy priorities (perhaps more so than its two manifestos, that were to some extent a reflection of the left leadership's embattled position, and necessary compromise with the right of the party) (Panitch et al., pp.57-66). In *Land for the Many* (Monbiot, 2019), the report recommends a gradual but mass transfer of land from private to shared ownership, and the transparency of current land ownership. It recommends forms of community ownership explicitly

on the basis that it might function as a non-reformist reform (p.44), as a measure that may open up the possibility for broader collective ownership of housing, among other more transformational changes (p.43). The Alternative Models of Ownership report discusses various possible measures for altering the ownership of firms in the economy, and revives the classic concern of the Labour left (Panitch et al., 2020, p.57) to avoid the bureaucratic nationalisations of the post-World War Two Labour government (Anon, 2017, p.29). Again, we see an emphasis on a transfer of power to the community and workers away from capital, and the opening up of further possibilities that this may provide (New Socialist Editorial Collective, 2017).

The largely Anglo-American demand for a ‘Green New Deal’ – a transition away from a climate-destructive economy while achieving various socially-just aims⁴ – has also been raised in both contexts as a non-reformist reform. In both contexts, democratic socialists, on the Labour left and in the DSA, emphasised the decommodification and democratisation of aspects of the economy necessary in any Green New Deal, removing them from the growth-centred (and therefore carbon-producing) rationality of capitalism whilst simultaneously growing capacity for further reform. (McNally, 2021; DSA Ecosocialists, 2019)

3.3 Democratic Socialist Non-Reformist Reforms – A Coherent Answer to *SC* ?

Having established its presence in the movement, we should now more explicitly consider the democratic socialist non-reformist reform in relation to *SC* and, initially, whether the strategy presents a coherent answer to it. First, however, let us briefly inspect those socialisms (and their strategies of reform) that democratic socialism must navigate between if it is to begin to provide a coherent answer to *SC*.

Theorists of social-democratic strategy, the most notable moderate, gradualist strategy (Gorz, 1968a; Przeworski, 1993; Rooksby, 2018), link it closely to the

⁴The Green New Deal did not emerge from either the US or UK democratic socialist left, but from a group of largely unaffiliated economists and campaigners (including a Green MP) in the UK in 2008.

‘reformist’ reform as described in section 3.1. In his seminal book on social democracy (which we discussed in Chapter 1), Przeworski (1993) writes:

Reform and revolution do not require a choice within the social democratic view of the world. To bring about ‘social revolution’ [...] it is sufficient to follow the path of reforms. Reforms are thought to be cumulative and irreversible. [...] Mitigating the effects of capitalism and transforming it piece by piece would eventually lead to a complete restructuring of society. (p.31)

As described by Przeworski, this relation to reform aimed toward a socialist goal could only constrain itself and ultimately collapse. Since social-democratic reforms could only, in order to perform a linearly cumulative function, cleave toward “certain leading [economic] ideas, or patterns of thought, which all sensible men [in politics] accepted” (Skidelsky in Przeworski, 1993, p.36) the state helmed by social-democratic governments was ultimately limited to acts that maintained capitalist profitability, property and its relations, such as nationalising unprofitable industries (p.40).

The non-reformist reform might also be counterposed to the revolutionary socialist relation to the reform, which throughout various literature, academic and democratic socialist, is equated with the historical trend of ‘Leninism’⁵ (Blanc and Post, 2019; Rooksby, 2018; Panitch et al., 2020, p.24). The ‘Leninist’ strategy takes the Russian Revolutions of 1917 as a model and, mirroring the real or perceived strategy of the Bolsheviks, seeks a revolutionary break with capitalism via the creation of a scenario of ‘dual power’, i.e., the creation of workers’ councils that engage in struggle with the capitalist state apparatus, eventually overcoming it (Rooksby, 2018, p.34). Given the relation to the state that this strategy implies – that a socialist movement ought to bypass and subsequently ‘smash’ the existing state – the Leninist relation to reform can only be the subordination of a) demands

⁵‘Leninism’ here acts as a simple term of reference without implications regarding the historical Lenin himself, or the Bolsheviks (Lih, 2008, Blanc, 2021a, Post, 2020). (It is true, however, as Rooksby (2018) and Post (2013) note, that ‘Leninism’ is a term is taken up by organisations – both USSR-supporting Communist and critical Trotskyist amongst others – that occupy the strategy described above and claim Lenin’s legacy).

for reforming, state-enacted policies to b) the goal of eventual revolution by the workers and their allies. This is not at all to say that the Leninist strategy makes impossible the adoption of demands for reform, only that, in polar opposition to the social-democratic strategy, the actual enactment of reform by the capitalist state is largely irrelevant⁶. The function of demands for reform is only the building of the workers' movement for a decisive moment of rupture⁷.

It appears quite clear that, given our exploration of non-reformist reforms thus far, such a strategy does attempt to navigate between these two strategic poles at least at a definitional level. While the Leninist conception of reform forgoes consideration of the potentially provocative role of the existing state in favour of a focus on building revolutionary forces, and the social democrat sees the state-enacted reform as sufficient alone, the democratic socialist strategy emphasises how reforms enacted by the existing state may open up the possibility of building the capacity of extra-parliamentary movements *and* further reforms. Where the Leninist unproblematically dis-equates reform and transformation, and the social democrat equates them, the democratic socialist attempts a middle path. Indeed, democratic socialists invariably argue for their strategy *on the basis of* the failures of traditional social democracy and Leninism (Panitch and Gindin, 2018, p.1; Sunkara, 2020 pp.105-128; Transnational Institute, 2021, p.3).

However, conceptually differentiating the democratic socialist strategy of reform cannot remain at this definitional level if it is to provide a coherent answer to *SC*, and we must assess the strategy in relation to *SC*'s two key motivations, the structural constraint and rational choice concerns.

⁶This is also not to say that individual tactics of the Leninist organisation would not change based on reforms – pro- or anti- worker – enacted by the state.

⁷This may take the form of what is sometimes called a 'transitional demand': a demand that *cannot* be enacted by the state under capitalism, and therefore a mass movement that is formed to seek its implementation will be forced to abolish capitalism (Bernes, 2020).

3.3.1 Democratic Socialist Non-Reformist Reforms – A Coherent Answer to *SC* ? Structural Constraint Concern

If we return to our description of the structural constraint concern in Chapter 1, we recall that it is a concern grounded in the object of socialist transformation: the capitalist-democratic society itself. Throughout the literature surveyed in Chapter 1, we found that *both* moderate gradualist and revolutionary socialisms – historically social-democratic and ‘Leninist’ strategies – are faced with a certain ‘robustness’ of the institutions of capitalist democracy (Wright, 2010, p.309). As we saw, three key aspects are contained within this: 1) the possession of overwhelming means of state defence (police, military, secret services); 2) a dependence on business confidence to avoid crises of living conditions; 3) the ability to include into capitalist-democratic institutions, and thereby pacify, workers and the labour movement.

Beginning with (2), it seems this is a problem-area that the strategy of non-reformist reforms is partially aimed at addressing. British democratic socialist economist Grace Blakeley, in her argument for a suite of economic non-reformist reforms, emphasises the certainty of a backlash against nationalisations of certain industries and democratisation of finance (2019, p.240). Given this, for Blakeley, reforms must have as a central aim the ability to undercut the power of the capitalist class to veto socialist policy via falling ‘business confidence’, and they should do so by shifting the balance of power away from the capitalist class towards an empowered working-class movement. The movement is able then to defend the gains of a democratic socialist government, whilst also being able to participate in new institutions of a democratised economy with various services and utilities ‘decommodified’ – taken out of the market and provided free at the point of use (Blakeley, 2019, pp.244-246). For Sunkara (2020, p.222), Day and Uetrict (p.2021, p.150), it is the crisis itself, generated by initial non-reformist reforms, that heightens the struggle between the newly empowered working class and the now openly hostile capitalist class, making further transformation more likely.

The crisis of living conditions caused by capital flight and disinvestment (etc.) that would otherwise undermine a social-democratic strategy of simple cumulative reform, is diverted both by growing the capacity for transformative action, and by giving workers a direct stake in the process, both by democratisation and by providing material benefits. The problem of the ‘Leninist’ strategy – that revolutionary forces can be ultimately destabilised by a crisis caused by an evaporation of business confidence – is seemingly resolved by engaging directly with the cause of the power of business confidence, rather than attempting to circumvent it via the building of dual power to confront the state from without.

Whether the democratic socialist strategy of non-reformist reforms makes a coherent attempt to address (1) – the possession of overwhelming means of defence – is perhaps less obvious at the outset. Following Gorz, democratic socialist theory has largely inherited a radical uncertainty in relation to the exact interplay and escalation of non-reformist reforms into an outright revolutionary or transformational situation, one in which the problem of armed forces would become real (Rooksby, 2018, p.46).

However, in co-founder of Momentum James Schneider’s manifesto-like series on strategy *How We Win* in *Novara*, he writes specifically on the need for non-reformist reforms to “fundamentally shift[...] the balance of forces” in society in order to overcome “ruling class attacks”. A coherent solution may therefore exist in the possibility of non-reformist reforms to build such capacity in the movement that direct subversion by military or intelligence becomes unfeasible, either because it is likely to fail or because an explicit clash would only serve to further polarise society on the side of the movement. We find a similar argument in *The Call*, the online publication of the influential (Henwood, 2019; Post, 2021) Bread and Roses Caucus of the DSA, in an article on the armed coup faced by Socialist president Allende in Chile in 1973: “we also need working-class movements that can bolster and defend the program of a socialist government from below while cutting into the power of capital through their own initiative” (B. and D’Aprile, 2018).

We might be tempted by the argument that this is not at all a coherent response to *SC*, on the basis that it straightforwardly duplicates the Leninist, revolutionary

socialist response – that the capacity of the extra-parliamentary forces must simply be large enough to overtake state forces. After all, the problem expressed by (1) is *precisely that* means of state defence are too large to be simply overwhelmed in this way. However, the difference clearly exists in the function of the reform to, not *only* raise the capacity of the movement, but to diminish the capacity of capitalist forces in relation to it. The non-reformist reforms leading up to any moment of explicit confrontation ought to have lessened the power of the capitalist class such that any offensive by military or intelligence services would be precisely *offensive*, with socialist forces already holding a degree of power, rather than purely defensive in the Leninist scenario. ‘Main theoretician’ of Bread and Roses (Post, 2020), Eric Blanc, in his evaluation of the Finnish 1917 revolution (2017), praises the successful socialist reform of universal suffrage and how it acted to, in the manner of non-reformist reform, shift the balance of power toward the workers’ movement, draw out an armed backlash by capitalist forces, and create a revolutionary situation. In short, the non-reformist reform hopes to provide, in the democratic socialist argument, a more advantageous, *defensive* position vs state forces.

In relation to (3) – the ability to pacify the labour movement by inclusion into capitalist-democratic institutions – the democratic socialist strategy of non-reformist reforms also does not appear, at the outset, as a coherent answer. After all, the non-reformist reform, in its democratic socialist form, often seeks to *further* include workers in the working of the capitalist-democratic society; employee ownership funds, presence on firm decision-making bodies, democratic input in nationalised industries have all been raised as possible non-reformist reforms in the Anglo and American contexts (Panitch et al., 2020). What is missing from this assessment however is, again, the function of the reform in the democratic socialist view. Where the social-democratic reform includes labour into the functioning of the society on the basis of capitalist ‘stability’ – take as example the UK Labour government’s 1964 Joint Statement of Intent on Productivity, Prices and Incomes, signed by the TUC, government and employers’ associations (Panitch, 1986, pp.71-72) – the democratic socialist reform includes labour on the basis of *destabilisation*. The

findings of Vössing (2008) that provided us with this element of the structural constraint concern – that the political form of the labour movement becomes less socialistic the higher the level of inclusion of the working class (pp.628-633) – are precisely in relation to labour-inclusion-as-stabilising-force. *If* democratic socialist reforms can indeed function to include in order to destabilise – drawing out a capitalist backlash and raising the power of a workers’ movement in comparison to capitalists – then it seems that it is a coherent response. It is again Blanc (2021a, p.406) who emphasises this possibility in response to the structuring effects of high labour inclusion: that socialist workers’ movements, *if* re-formed in capitalist democracies by non-reformist reform, can still act autonomously to preserve and escalate those reforms in a transformational direction.

3.3.2 Democratic Socialist Non-Reformist Reforms – A Coherent Answer to *SC*? Rational Choice Concern

In relation to the rational choice concern, the democratic socialist strategy of non-reformist reforms again seems to provide some aspects of a coherent response. If we return to our description of the rational choice concern in Chapter 1, we recall that it is a concern grounded in the subject of socialist transformation: the socialist organisation and individual workers (and their possible allies).

First, we might consider Cohen and Rogers’ (1983) argument that in a capitalist democracy, the worker can successfully struggle for short-term gain on the basis of their position as a worker (improved living and/or working conditions), while the pursuit of long-term gain on such a basis (social transformation) is irrational so long as the costs are plausibly high, or uncertain. Both the social-democratic and Leninist strategies of transformation are challenged by this problem: the costs caused by a crisis at a certain point in the progress of linearly cumulative reforms on the one hand, and by insurrection on the other. However, what we might take to be the key question of costs – the crisis of living conditions for the ordinary worker caused by socialist advance – finds a coherent response in the form we discussed in 3.3.1. The democratic socialist non-reformist reform hopes to undercut the ability

of the capitalist class to cause such a crisis (by a run on the currency, capital flight, holding back investment etc.) by democratising elements of the economy and decommodifying others, together with the increased capacity of the labour movement to defend and advance these gains. This, as we saw, is the argument advanced by democratic socialists Grace Blakeley (2019), Bhaskar Sunkara (2020) and Meagan Day (2021) amongst others. While none of these theorists deny that some economic crisis will be caused by socialist advance, each stresses the highly favourable position of workers in such a situation. Given that non-reformist reforms both provide material gains for workers (e.g. services provided free-at-point of use in Medicare For All, cheapened cost of living in the communalised forms of land proposed in the Land For The Many Report), and give workers a stake in defending them and the capacity to do so, the cost for individual workers of a crisis caused by socialist advance compared to the benefits of socialist advance itself appears lessened. How the calculus, at the moment of crisis, in fact bears out; whether decommodified aspects of the economy can remain sufficiently isolated from market forces; these questions are certainly not settled. Nevertheless, it seems the *coherence* of the democratic socialist response to this rational choice concern is maintained, and that in order to *evaluate* democratic socialism, effective critics must address this response.

Second, is the Przeworskian (1993) rational choice concern that the socialist organisation in a capitalist democracy, in attempting to maintain a social base amongst workers and the labour movement, will fail to gain power so long as it fails to find allies, since workers do not constitute a large enough social force to either win power or govern. In finding allies, usually amongst the middle-classes, the socialist organisation proves unstable and is faced with only two rational choices: dilute its purely pro-worker socialist end-goal, and in turn alienate a portion of its worker-base, or jettison its allies and maintain a lack of influence (King and Wickham-Jones, 1990). At the outset, the democratic socialist strategy of non-reformist reform also faces this as a challenge. As Murray (2016) has pointed out, both American and British democratic socialist lefts have been characterised by being essentially class-focussed and, as we have seen, this is reflected in the function

of a non-reformist reform to build the capacity of the working class in relation to the capitalist class. The democratic socialist non-reformist reform, however, can provide a possible attempt at an answer that is at least coherent when we inspect the kind of policy that is often put forward as non-reformist.

Invariably democratic socialist proposals for non-reformist reform involve the decommodification of some commodity, to be held as commons (land, housing (Monbiot, 2019)) or by the state with democratic input by users and workers (healthcare (DSA, 2017), utilities (Panitch et al., 2020)). Such proposals do not favour *purely sectional* worker-interests, and, though they certainly benefit workers and remove power from the capitalist ownership-class, they are often adopted on the very basis that they provide a mass of the population a stake in, and therefore an interest in maintaining, the new status quo, via material benefits and democratic input (Schneider, 2021b). Blakeley (2019, p.231) compares such reforms to Thatcher’s right-to-buy scheme⁸, which grounded otherwise working-class individuals in the interests of property-owners and provided the Thatcherite project with its own social base. Democratic socialist non-reformist reforms would be a mirror image of this, grounding more middle-class individuals in working-class interests and providing democratic socialism with its own social base in this way.

3.4 Democratic Socialist Non-Reformist Reforms – A Convincing Answer to *SC* ?

Having illustrated that democratic socialism, in its strategy of non-reformist reforms, *does* provide a coherent attempt to navigate between the problems presented by purely gradualist or revolutionary socialism, we should now rule out the many arguments that straightforwardly equate the democratic socialist strategy of reform with reformist social democracy, and evaluate it on this basis. This was, and remains, the kind of attack often mounted by other socialist or anarchist groups in the Anglo-American context. The American anarchist group Black Rose Anarchist

⁸Whereby those who lived in state-provided housing were permitted to cheaply buy their homes.

Federation, for example, argue for the insufficiency of democratic socialist reforms on the basis of their status as unthinkingly running alongside the rationality of capitalism rather than challenging it (Black Rose Anarchist Federation, 2018a). As we have seen, it is precisely an attempt to formulate reforms that challenge capitalist rationality that defines the democratic socialist strategy. While particular reforms proposed by democratic socialists as non-reformist may end up insufficient to challenge capitalist rationality, and this is a legitimate critique, any assessment of democratic socialist strategy must engage with the *attempt* to create such reforms.

We are now in a significantly better position to evaluate the democratic socialist strategy. However, while the following presents one broad and preliminary argument as to whether a *convincing* answer to *SC* is provided by non-reformist reforms, clearly much more work is required to fully evaluate the strategy.

The confusion with a social-democratic strategy of reform is not to be simply dismissed. As Gorz (1968a, p.115), in his original formulation of non-reformist reforms, makes clear, non-reformist socialist actors may find themselves in agreement with social democrats (and vice versa) on certain reforms. We can see this in the period 2015-2020, with the right of the British Labour Party broadly agreeing with reforms championed by the democratic socialist left as non-reformist, such as nationalisations of certain industries with worker input (Davies, 2021). The social democrat may advocate nationalisation on the basis of improved living conditions for workers under capitalism and the necessary role of the state to provide a capitalist society what cannot always be provided by market forces (Przeworski, 1993, p.39). The democratic socialist may advocate for the same nationalisation as an attempt to shift the balance of power from capitalists to workers, and as an advance that hopes to provoke a backlash that a subsequently more empowered working class can defensively combat, opening up further potential reforms. Given this possibility of agreement, however, any strategy of non-reformist reforms must always run a risk of degeneration into simple reformism that Gorz associates with social democracy (Rooksby, 2018, p.46). For Gorz, who presents the intuitive solution, such degeneration can only be avoided if these differences of intent are not

masked, and are instead an explicit centrepiece of debate between the two groups. In any alliance entered into by both non-reformist socialists and social democrats, socialists should make clear their difference and educate to that effect within their own ranks. It is certainly a barrier to the convincingness of democratic socialism's answer to *SC* that this has often not happened, and that a masking of differences has often taken place in the Anglo-American context.

Since the democratic socialist left both in the USA and UK found itself, 2015-2020, bound up with organisations within which it was not a dominant member (Democratic Party on the one hand and Labour Party on the other) a certain structural 'masking' effect was perhaps inevitable, as democratic socialists campaigned vigorously to get candidates elected (Corbyn and Sanders) that to some degree represented those organisations, and also therefore had supporters with a broad ideological range of views. Even at the level of theory produced by the democratic socialist left, however, this problem – of the masking of the differences of intent between social-democratic and democratic socialist reform – can be seen. Return to Schnieder's (2021b) *How We Win*, the Momentum co-founder holds up the NHS as an example of a non-reformist reform. While, at the point of its formation, the NHS represented a radical demand that surpassed the otherwise radical calls by liberal reformers for single-payer social insurance, and was championed by socialist Aneurin Bevan (Burtenshaw, 2019), Schnieder (2021b) fails to acknowledge the way in which a defence of the NHS functions in a contemporary context. Arguments in favour of the NHS today can be found across the political spectrum, and are invariably made on the basis of a sensible policy in the national interest (The Conservative and Unionist Party, 2017), that is to say, a policy that obscures class differences all-together and can effectively exist to aid the stable functioning of the capitalist nation (Panitch, 1986, p.57).

Demands for reforms which: a) *may* function as non-reformist but that are also championed by social democrats; b) are called for without making clear the transformational aims of democratic socialist strategy – these kinds of demands clearly slip into reformism, and can be seen in democratic socialism. Where this is a

dominant tendency, the democratic socialist strategy of non-reformist reforms must fall into all the problems of a purely moderate, gradualist socialism – of both rational choice and structural constraint types. And in general, such a tendency leads to eschewing the end goal of socialism, and an implicit disavowal of the need for a theory of the eventual transformation that non-reformist reforms should provoke.

It seems, then, that whether the democratic socialist strategy of non-reformist reforms is in fact a convincing answer to *SC* stands or falls on the ability of democratic socialist actors to, as much as possible, maintain their explicit differences with and independence from social-democratic actors – in propaganda and theoretic output, in political and electoral alliances, and in internal communication and education.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I considered the thesis' central questions – of coherence and convincingness in relation to *SC* – as applied to a central strategic element of contemporary Anglo-American democratic socialism: 'non-reformist reforms'. I first defined, in theoretical terms, what constitutes 'non-reformist reforms' as an element of strategy. Having done this, the chapter attempted to establish the actual presence of the strategic element within the democratic socialist formation by a close reading of primary texts and sources. With this achieved, I argued that the strategy of non-reformist reforms *does* provide a coherent answer to *SC* and, secondarily, that whether non-reformist reforms can provide a convincing answer to *SC* is ultimately dependent on the strategic independence of democratic socialists.

4

In and Against the State

The first task of this chapter will be to define in theoretical terms, what constitutes ‘in and against the state’ as an element of strategy. Having done this, the chapter will attempt to establish the actual presence of the strategic element within the democratic socialist formation, which will require a close reading of primary texts and sources. With this achieved, this element will be inspected as a possible coherent *answer* to *SC* and an argument will be made that it is, both in regards to rational choice and structural constraint concerns. Having established this, I hope to have provided the groundwork and a possible direction for an evaluation of the democratic socialist strategy of ‘in and against the state’ that avoids misinterpretation of democratic socialism’s answer to *SC*. The chapter will therefore conclude by arguing that whether ‘in and against the state’ provides a *convincing* answer to *SC* is indeed open to critique, and I will raise a few key areas in which that critique might be expanded fruitfully, in particular, its dependence on a perhaps incomplete understanding of the nature of the state itself.

4.1 Defining ‘In and Against the State’

At a general level, ‘in and against the state’ describes a strategy whereby members of a movement or its representatives enter the state through elections and attempt to

shift the balance of power within the state toward actors that the movement favours and transform aspects of the state that otherwise work against that movement's goals. Such a definition in this broadest form however, unlike for non-reformist reforms, does not yet provide a useful understanding of the strategy, and we must immediately consider it in the case of a socialist goal and a socialist movement if we are to properly define it.

To begin with, the strategy adopts a particular understanding of the state in capitalist society. The state does not simply exist as a monolithic institution with a single overarching function (e.g. repression of the working class), but is rather a crystallisation of the ever-changing class relations in society-at-large. It follows from this understanding that, therefore, while the state is not class neutral, the state *is* necessarily a terrain of struggle between contesting class forces within it: its many activities and functions are continually fought over and reshaped by these forces. The state therefore also embodies within it the results of past class struggles, and the inter-class squabbles of fractions of classes – financial capitalist, landlord, industrialist (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 2021, p.54; Poulantzas, 2014, pp.129-130). Nevertheless, since the capitalist class is the dominant class in society-at-large, the particular apparatuses of the state become configured in such a way that it has a tendency to organise the capitalist class as a whole while disorganising the working class (Rooksby, 2018, p.38). It also, therefore, broadly stands in a relation of dominance and control to individual members of the working class (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 2021, pp.52-54).

With this understanding established, the strategy of in and against the state can be quite intuitively derived: socialist actors must seek to modify the relationship of class forces within the state, thereby making progress toward the transformation of its functions, activities and institutions in favour of the popular masses (Poulantzas, 2014, p.259). Such an undertaking requires the interplay of two connected tasks. Firstly, in entering the state by election, socialist actors must seek to undermine centres of concentrated bourgeois power manifested in particular institutions (e.g., the treasury), whilst expanding or creating centres of popular

power. In practice this means, amongst other measures, the democratisation of any number of state functions (budgeting, investment, welfare provision etc.), the deeper, institutionalised involvement of state-employee unions in state activity, and institutions to facilitate the democratic input of users of state services regarding the manner in which those services are run. This, then, is the second task: since the state exists as a condensation of class-forces in society more broadly, a left government cannot successfully tip the balance of power in favour of the working class (broadly construed) without a mass class-based movement external to the state that also pushes the state in the same direction. A strategy of in and against the state requires socialist actors to “combin[e] the transformation of representative democracy with the development of forms of direct, rank-and-file democracy or the movement for self-management” (Poulantzas, 2014, pp.261-262). It is, in the final instance, the organic, productive relationship between mass working-class power and the transformed elements of the existing liberal state that is sufficient to create the new terrain of the state as a whole and lay the ground for a rupture or series of ruptures that proceed in a socialist direction (Poulantzas in Rooksby, 2018, p.40).

This, though presented here in a simplified form, was the formulation made by influential New Left socialist Nicos Poulantzas in his 1978 book *State, Power, Socialism* (2014), an understanding that was reflected in the amorphous ‘libertarian left’ in various countries following the international uprisings for which ‘1968’ is common shorthand (Wheeler, 2021a). Notably, it was this left in England that produced a pamphlet which bares the original expression that I have used to refer to this strategy - *In and Against the State* (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 2021) – which grapples with the strategy in relation to state-employed workers specifically.

4.2 In and Against the State in Anglo-American Democratic Socialism

As in Chapter 3, if we are to assess democratic socialism’s strategy of in and against the state in relation to *SC*, we must first illustrate that such a strategy was in fact

present in the democratic socialist movement 2015-2020, and that it was influential enough to be properly called a democratic socialist position.

Unlike the strategy of non-reformist reforms, in and against the state, while certainly existent on the democratic socialist left as we shall see, presents itself differently in the British in contrast to the American context.

In the UK context, we can see the strategy quite explicitly, championed by Corbyn's central ally in the PLP and Shadow Chancellor, John McDonnell.

Across multiple speeches (McDonnell et al., 2018), interviews (Wheeler, 2021b) and articles (McDonnell, 2018), John McDonnell expressed the basic strategy of in and against the state: to “go within the state institutions to change the state relationship from one of dominance to democratic control” (McDonnell, 2018). In general, this should be achieved by “open[ing] up the doors of the state itself” (Wheeler, 2021b, p.141), that is to say, both democratising key state functions and institutions and creating new means of direct democratic input. In terms of specific institutions and policy, McDonnell told the 2018 Labour Conference that “for too long the establishment has used the Treasury as a barrier against putting power back into the hands of the people. [...] So we will reprogramme the Treasury, rewriting its rule books on how it makes decisions about what, when and where to invest” (Brady, 2018). As part of this, the Treasury's ‘Green Book’, the guidelines about how it approves decisions regarding state-funded projects, would be re-evaluated by a Corbyn-led Labour government (McDonnell, 2019), and the Treasury itself would be broken up, locating many of its functions to the North and devolving decision-making structures to regional and local elected officials there (Halliday, 2019). McDonnell affirmed in 2018 that, under a Labour government, “the full weight of the Treasury will be used to take on any vested interests that try to thwart the will of the people”. Thus, the Treasury as a centre of capitalist power would be undermined and the institution put in a relationship with a closer (if not direct) form of democratic participation, in theory transforming its relation to the working class.

Such a strategy amongst the UK democratic socialist left was not isolated to top officials, however. At both TWT 2018 and 2019, the festival held a panel and

discussion with attendees on socialist actors' relationship to the state. The former hosted a discussion on McDonnell and theorist Hilary Wainwright's attempts at an in and against strategy while within the Greater London Council in the 1970s, with McDonnell and Wainwright in attendance (McDonnell et al., 2018), while the latter hosted a panel with influential democratic socialist Leo Panitch amongst others, with Panitch arguing explicitly for an in and against the state strategy (The World Transformed, 2019a). In the facilitator's preparation document (The World Transformed, 2019b) for the 2019 panel, recommended reading is listed that includes Poulantzas' key work on the in and against strategy (2014), as well as the original *In and Against the State* (2021) pamphlet from the London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, and an article by Panitch and his collaborator Sam Gindin of the same name (2018), which makes a similar argument. For Panitch and Gindin, capitalist states are "structured so as to reproduce capitalist social relations, [and] their institutional modalities would need to undergo fundamental transformations so as to be able to implement [radical change]" (2018).

Co-founder of Momentum James Schneider, in his manifesto-like *How We Win*, notes that "several of the leading lights of Corbynism followed directly in the footsteps of people like [...] Leo Panitch in their "in and against the state" approach". Schneider critiques Labour however, like Panitch, on the basis of their failure to concretely prepare for the implementation of this strategy. He explores what is necessary for an in and against strategy to work, namely "a high level of organisation among progressive forces, [...]; a higher level of proficiency in navigating and resisting the many obstacles placed in their way [within the state]; and an ability to mobilise mass support for our policies" (2021b). Once again, an explicit endorsement of the kind of strategy described in 4.1.

In the US context, we can see the strategy much less explicitly, in the literature and in demands and policy proposals around the DSA. The manifesto-like articles and books from the US democratic socialist left that we considered in our previous two chapters, seem to show a general lack of interest in an explicit analysis of state power (Day and Uetracht, 2021; Sunkara, 2020; Chibber, 2017). The difference

in explicit emphasis between contexts *might* be explained by considering that the British democratic socialist formation was located in and around the Labour left, and therefore the prospect of entering the national state ‘directly’ by a government led by representatives of the Labour left was a real one. In the USA, while the DSA (and the theoretic literature that arose from it) *endorsed* Sanders, it was not the case that the DSA would be ‘entering the state’ in any concrete sense at a national level – Sanders was not a member of the DSA, and policy proposals coming out of DSA meetings and conventions were not formalised inputs into his campaign. Therefore, the US democratic socialist left lacked the impetus for a more explicit strategy of state that existed in the UK. Nevertheless, while it is not referred to explicitly as ‘in and against the state’, when we inspect the theoretic output of the US democratic socialists where a strategy of state power *is* explored, we can see a similar strategy emerge.

David Broder, a *Jacobin*¹ editor, in his 2019 article *The State We Need*, maintains a basic in and against the state strategic position. He recommends (by a positive appraisal of the French left around Jean-Luc Melenchon), a “reclaiming [of] the state” by the challenging of certain anti-democratic constitutional arrangements that disempower the working class, while at the same time combining these efforts with popular democratic efforts to “dissipate institutional power throughout [...] society”. Such a strategy might hope to avoid the possibility of “democratic-socialist movements [...] being thwarted or co-opted by the existing power structures in society”.

We might also productively return to the writings of theorist of the influential Bread and Roses caucus (Henwood, 2019; Post, 2021) of the DSA, Eric Blanc. In an article in *Jacobin* defending the theory and strategic perspective of Karl Kautsky – influential Marxist theorist of the German Social-Democratic Party from the late 1880s to early 1910s – Blanc (2019a) praises Kautsky’s insistence on entering the state via elections and that, once within it, socialists ought to seek to democratise it, particularly those elements which are expected to push back against reform (the

¹*Jacobin* published Poulantzas’ central writing attributed to the in and against the state strategy - the final chapter of his 1978 book *State, Power, Socialism*- in full in 2020.

state bureaucracy in particular). This democratisation can, Blanc (2019a) argues, function as “a jumping off point for anticapitalist transformation”.

The basic ‘in and against’ orientation Blanc gives is seen again also in his debate in *Jacobin* with critic of democratic socialism and Leninist, Charles Post (Blanc and Post, 2019). Blanc echoes Poulantzas, saying: “a left government, in alliance with struggles from below, would seek to democratize the existing state”, at the same time, “we’ll also very possibly need the emergence of some forms of bottom-up [...] institutions, which can be combined with (rather than replace) representative bodies elected by universal suffrage”.² We can clearly see the basic outline of the in and against strategy repeated here, as it is in the UK context.

4.3 In and Against the State as Democratic Socialist Strategy – A Coherent Answer to *SC*?

We can now go on to test the strategy of in and against the state in relation to *SC*: to what extent does it present a *coherent answer* to the dual unlikelihood (due to structural constraint and rational choice concerns) of both revolutionary and moderate, gradualist socialisms? Once again, we make the ‘coherent answer’ question primary largely in order to establish how those who seek to evaluate democratic socialism ought to do so.

First, let us inspect how we should understand moderate gradualist and revolutionary socialisms’ relations to the state. It is, after all, the problems of these socialisms (and their strategies in relation to the state) that democratic socialism must navigate between if it is to begin to provide a coherent answer to *SC*.

Theorists of social democracy (Poulantzas, 2014; Przeworski, 1993; Rooksby, 2018) – the most notable gradualist strategy, as explored in Chapter 3 - invariably link it to a particular strategy in relation to the state. In Przeworski’s history

²Both these *Jacobin* articles are centrepieces of the so-called ‘Kautsky debate’ (Flakin, 2019; Rupture, 2021), which took place largely in *Jacobin* magazine in early 2019 and saw participants either embrace (largely democratic socialists) or reject (their critics) certain elements of Kautsky’s thought, and functioned as a proxy debate for or against a more or less critical perspective on the role of state, elections, and the struggle for reform within capitalist democracies.

of social democracy (1993), we can see, alongside an unproblematic conflation of reform with socialist transformation (see 3.2), an unproblematic conception of the state that *implements* that reform. For the archetypical social democrat, socialist forces entering the state is itself a, if not *the*, central victory, since after this point, it is simply up to them to implement reforms that will linearly cumulate into socialist transformation³. Engagement with the capitalist-democratic form of state, both in attempting to form a government and in government, is not merely tactical but sufficient as a means to carry out socialistic reform⁴ (Przeworski, 1993, p.15). For such a strategic position to hold, the state must be sufficiently *autonomous* within the social order (from the ‘economic’ sphere in particular) to act upon democratic-capitalist society as a political instrument of the will of the social-democratic government (Rooksby and Doherty, 2021). Relatedly, it must be *neutral* in the sense that, having been elected into *government*, social democrats also find themselves wholly *in power*, without obstacles thrown up from within the state, either caused by its inherent function as a capitalist state, or by structurally generated vested interests and their representatives (Rooksby, 2018, p.39).

Invariably, the literature on social-democratic strategy in relation to the state also points to a mirror image of the social-democratic strategy - the historical formation of ‘Leninism’, or else ‘Bolshevism’⁵, which might be considered the archetypical revolutionary or ruptural socialism (Poulantzas, 2014; Rooksby 2018; Vössing, 2018). As we established in Chapter 3, the ‘Leninist’ strategy takes the Russian Revolutions of 1917 as a model and, mirroring the real or perceived strategy of the Bolsheviks, seeks a ruptural break with capitalism via the building up of working-class revolutionary forces and, in the subsequent revolutionary situation,

³Though, as Przeworski goes on to point out, this goal of transformation necessarily collapses, as we have already noted.

⁴Przeworski locates this attitude historically to after the growth of suffrage in much of Europe in the late 1910s/early 1920s, after which time: “To win votes of people other than workers [...] a party cannot appear to be “irresponsible,” to give any indication of being less than whole-hearted about its commitment to the rules and the limits of the parliamentary game”(Przeworski, 1993, p.15).

⁵Once again, we use these terms as in-keeping with the literature *without* making an intervention into the historical debate (Blanc, 2021a, Lih, 2008) about the *actual* strategy of Lenin and the Bolsheviks and its uniqueness.

the creation of a scenario of ‘dual power’, which describes the creation of workers’ councils that engage in direct confrontation with the capitalist state, eventually overcoming and replacing it (Rooksby, 2018, p.34). For the Leninist, then, the capitalist state is the mirror image of the state as conceived by the social democrat: it is a fortress, which can in no scenario be used as an instrument of a socialist movement, and should only be confronted, surrounded, then smashed. By its nature, function and bourgeois personnel, it is only an instrument of bourgeois rule. It is therefore neither *autonomous*, nor *neutral*.

Given our description of the strategy of in and against the state in section 4.1, and its expression in the Anglo-American democratic socialist left as seen in 4.2, it appears quite clear that, at least at the definitional level, such a strategy does attempt to navigate between these two strategic poles. The vision of the state as implied by the strategy denies both the social-democratic conception of a neutral and autonomous state *and* the Leninist view of the state as only an instrument of bourgeois rule – neither neutral nor autonomous. As we saw in section 4.1, the strategy of in and against the state *necessitates* a conception of the state as a terrain of struggle, whilst admitting that the capitalist state is nevertheless structured in such a way that gives it a strong tendency to maintain capitalist-class power. In the democratic socialist understanding, the state’s non-neutrality and non-autonomy are contestable and shapable by socialist actors. The state can therefore *neither* be entered and used unproblematically and easily as an instrument of socialist government, *nor* must it simply be surrounded and destroyed. Indeed, this counterposition between Leninist and social-democratic visions and strategies of state is made in the democratic socialist literature on state and state-related strategy itself (Blanc and Post, 2019; Panitch and Gindin, 2016), and, indeed, made by Poulantzas (2013, p.259).

4.3.1 In and Against the State as Democratic Socialist Strategy – A Coherent Answer to *SC*? – Structural Constraint Concern

We must now move beyond definitional coherence, to assess whether in and against the state in fact presents a coherent answer to the *problems* thrown up by the opposite poles we have discussed, which cannot be assumed by its simple definitional distinction to them. Let us begin by inspecting the strategy in relation to the structural constraint concern – the set of motivations for *SC* that arise from the nature of the capitalist-democratic society itself.

First, as noted in previous chapters, there is the structural constraint of the possession of overwhelming means of state defence. Both the Leninist assault of the state-fortress and the social-democratic attempt to unproblematically wield the existing state for socialist ends quite clearly face this challenge, both leaving the state and its defences untouched. In navigating between the two approaches, the democratic socialist strategy of in and against the state does seem to present a coherent response. Indeed, it seems partially tailor-made for such a challenge, since its very aim is to undermine directly the elements of the state that give capitalist democracy its ‘robustness’ (Wright, 2010, p.309), i.e., those elements where socialists should expect backlash.

In Eric Blanc’s positive strategic appraisal of Kautsky that we discussed earlier (2019a), Blanc points out that “Kautsky argued that resistance to a democratically elected socialist government should also be expected from within the existing state structures — first and foremost the military. He thus always insisted that overthrowing capitalist rule required the dissolution of the army and the arming of the people”, and that this, for Kautsky, was an integral part of the democratisation of the state – a democratisation that Blanc and his allies endorse, as we saw. Equally, as in democratic socialists’ use of non-reformist reform in the previous chapter, a democratisation of the state would seek to include and empower a workers’ movement and thereby place them in a more powerful *defensive* position

should a backlash originating in the military or intelligence services nevertheless occur (B. and D'Aprile, 2018; Blanc, 2017).

And yet, Blanc, alongside other democratic socialists, seems to stop short of advocating any particular measures by which a socialist government might undermine the military (Blanc and Post, 2019). We might imagine that a democratic socialist government would strip power from particular military personnel, and Blanc *implies* as much (Blanc and Post, 2019). We might also imagine, looking at McDonnell's proposals on reining in the Treasury as an oppositional institution to left government, attempts to restrict military actions that attempt to push beyond direct sanctions by (a further democratised) parliament. But we are nevertheless left in this imaginary space, with Labour manifestos, DSA resolutions, and discussions in *Tribune* and *Jacobin* and at TWT lacking concrete engagement with the question of state defence beyond a theoretical level. It seems, then, that while the democratic socialist strategy of in and against the state itself does present a coherent response here, how concretely it would have played out (or may still in the future) in policy terms is unclear, and this is certainly a possible area for critique.

Second, there is the structural constraint of a dependence on business confidence to avoid crises of living conditions. Once again, such a problem is clear in relation to the social-democratic and Leninist approaches to the state. In the former, the socialist actors within the state leave it untouched, and thus central levers of influence over business confidence remain in institutions that might be otherwise identified as centres of bourgeois power – the treasury and the central bank. These institutions may then, either intentionally or by reference to pragmatic, sensible economic management, sabotage socialist aspirations. In the latter, the state is left utterly untouched until that time in which organs of dual power may effectively take over management of society, by which point the existing state, oriented to maintain capitalist stability, may likely have presided over a crisis of living conditions.

As we have partially already seen, democratic socialists hope to enter the state partially *in order to* undermine, by democratisation, bourgeois power within the state, which must include its dependence on business confidence. In the theory and

the demands of democratic socialists this can be seen. Democratic socialists Panitch (Panitch and Leys, 2020, p.223) and Blakeley (2019, pp.252-255) both emphasise the necessity of capital controls and investment planning as non-reformist reforms, and as measures to prevent disinvestment and a run on the currency, but *only* on the basis of a democratised state, achieved through the in and against strategy. For both theorists, such policies would require a socialist government “developing the state’s capacity to transform financial services” (Panitch and Leys, 2020, p.223), necessitating, as per the in and against strategy, undermining centres of bourgeois power and empowering the mass of people through democratisation – of the Banks of England and of Scotland; through the setting up a network of state-owned, democratically run retail banks (‘Post Banks’); through the creation of a whole system of public banking with democratically determined priorities of investment (Blakeley, 2019, pp.230-257). This new state capacity, built through democratisation, would hope, then, to stave off the possibility of financial crisis (disinvestment, run on the currency etc.) leading to a general crisis of living conditions. It is clear, then, that the democratic socialist strategy of in and against the state is a coherent attempt to address an element of the structural constraint concern as we derived it from the literature in Chapter 1 (Block, 1987; Przeworski, 1993) and that, therefore, its treatment of the possibility of a crisis of living conditions cannot be critiqued on the basis of its equation with social democracy, or indeed an implicit Leninism.

Third and lastly, is the structural constraint presented by the tendency within capitalist-democratic societies to include into its political institutions, and thereby pacify, workers and the labour movement (Vössing, 2018). This is quite clearly a challenge for the social-democratic and Leninist strategies in relation to the state. In the case of the former, this is, as we have seen, part of the explanation given by theorist of social democracy Przeworski for its ultimate failure at achieving socialist transformation – that social democrats’ inclusion into the political state (and their uncritical view of it), meant that their orientation necessarily became a “commitment to the rules and the limits of the parliamentary game” (1993, p.15). In relation to the latter, as Vössing himself establishes (2018), the Leninist

project in relation to the state – of encirclement and replacement – easily breaks down when the labour movement, and specifically its elites, are presented with the opportunity to be included in political decision making and achieve some concrete gains for the movement.

However, it also, at first, appears very much a challenge for the democratic socialist. The strategy of in and against the state, after all, seeks the very inclusion into state affairs of the labour movement that causes pacification in the tendency Vössing (2018) and others have identified. What is missing in this understanding, however, is the crucial aspect of state transformation implied by the strategy. Unlike the social democrat, the democratic socialist who is included within the state attempts to reshape the nature of this inclusion, and the inclusion of the labour movement that a democratic socialist government would imply. By the *empowerment* of organs of direct democracy and state-worker unions and state service users, while simultaneously *pitting them against* identified centres of elite power within the state, the inclusion of the workers' movement seeks to polarise and radicalise rather than pacify. This is the argument presented by Wainwright⁶ (Wheeler et al., 2021), who cites the activities of the late Greater London Council as making an attempt to put this into practice – empowering community groups in London to create policy around service provision and local economics while polarising against the national Conservative government. Indeed, it is this period of the GLC that John McDonnell explicitly references as inspiration for his in and against the state vision for a Labour government (Wheeler, 2021b). We have, then, a quite distinct position compared with either the Leninist or social-democratic one, and one that clearly *attempts* to navigate between the problems of both.

⁶Hilary Wainwright, editor of radical magazine *Red Pepper* and vocal supporter of and regular speaker at TWT, defending an in and against the state strategy with John McDonnell at TWT 2018 (Mc Donnell et al., 2018).

4.3.2 In and Against the State as Democratic Socialist Strategy – A Coherent Answer to *SC*? – Rational Choice Concern

In relation to the rational choice concern, the democratic socialist strategy of in and against the state again seems to provide some aspects of a coherent response. Returning to the description of the rational choice concern in Chapter 1, we recall that it is a concern grounded in the subject of socialist transformation: the socialist organisation and individual workers (and their possible allies).

First, is Cohen and Rogers' (1983) claim that in a capitalist democracy, the worker can successfully struggle for short-term interests on the basis of their position as a worker (improved living and/or working conditions), while the pursuit of long-term gain on such a basis (social transformation) is irrational so long as the costs are plausibly high, or uncertain. This is a problem faced by the Leninist and the social democrat, where the former's direct confrontational strategy in relation to the state itself implies highly uncertain costs, and the latter's uncritical instrumentalism gives anti-socialist wings of the state freedom to break down governability, also implying high costs for the worker. The in and against strategy of the democratic socialist, on the other hand, makes some attempt to deal with the problem of high or uncertain costs, partially, as we saw in 4.3.1, by undermining those state institutions which have the power and inclination to undermine governability. At the same time, since the strategy must create a productive relationship between a government and the movement in order to shift the balance of forces within the state, the individual worker finds herself expressing her short-term interest *through* newly democratised state institutions (improved service provision, investment in her community), thereby also advancing the long-term goal of creating a state with the capacity for socialist transformation. The individual worker is therefore given a stake in defending a project of state transformation and the capacity to do so. While there is a possibility of a free-rider problem emerging, whereby an individual worker may reap the benefits of a democratised state without becoming oriented to defend or expand it, the democratic socialist strategy emphasises the kind of

movement that should be build – a class-based one that identifies itself as class-based in opposition to capitalist interests (Day and Uetrict, 2021, p.175). When the worker is given a ‘stake’ in the new settlement then, this also attempts to create the worker as a class-identifying subject, who is not disposed toward free-riding.

As we have seen, it is this combination of undermining problematic areas of the state while democratising and empowering a class-based movement to reshape the state that *defines* the in and against strategy as advanced by key democratic socialist theorists and actors (Blanc and Post, 2019; McDonnell, 2018; Panitch and Gindin, 2016). Therefore, it seems we may reasonably assert that democratic socialist state strategy does present at least a coherent effort to address this rational choice concern, again making a real attempt to navigate between the problems of social-democratic and Leninist alternatives.

Second, is the Przeworskian (1993) rational choice concern that the socialist organisation in a capitalist democracy, in attempting to maintain a social base amongst workers and the labour movement, will fail to gain power so long as it fails to find allies, since workers do not constitute a large enough social force to either win power or govern. Though Przeworski levels this criticism at a social democracy engaged in elections, it might also be applied to a Leninist state strategy, where the function of the workers-as-social-force is not to win and govern through the capitalist-democratic state but to create dual power and ultimately displace the state. Here, still, in the Przeworskian view, a workers’ government is impossible without allies (which, being rational, the party must find, and does so in the middle classes), which then creates the tendency of the collapse of the socialist aim as the classes’ interests come into conflict. As we have noted, democratic socialism too, as a ‘class-focussed’ movement on both sides of the Atlantic (Murray, 2016), hopes to empower the working class and its centres of power within the state, but looking at the particular nature of this empowerment, we can see a possible answer to this rational choice concern. As with their proposals of non-reformist reform (see 3.3.2), the *kind* of working-class interest that would be developed and included into state functions is not, as Panitch and Gindin put it, a “defensive

particularism” (2018) (i.e., a simple sectoral interest in competition with other interests). Instead, for the democratic socialist, the rebalancing of class forces within the state necessarily implies a democratisation of the state that gives a broad *mass* of the population a stake in service provision, state investment, and economic ‘planning’ more generally (Blakeley, 2019, pp.230-235). Like non-reformist reforms, the democratic socialist strategy of in and against the state answers this rational choice concern by attempting to establish a wide social base with a stake in its project of state transformation.

4.4 In and Against the State as Democratic Socialist Strategy – A Convincing Answer to *SC*?

It is quite clear, then, that the democratic socialist state strategy *does* make a clear and coherent attempt to answer *SC* – to navigate between the dual improbability of either a moderate gradualist or revolutionary method of social transformation in the context of a capitalist democracy. With this established, the ways in which we can assess if that answer is *convincing* come into view.

Certainly, we can now dismiss arguments that, reading off the signifier of democratic socialism’s engagement with the state, make a simple equivalence with a social-democratic strategy of uncritical instrumentalism. Such are the arguments that, as we saw in 3.4, sometimes arise from grassroots groups to the left of democratic socialism: British libertarian communists Angry Workers of the World (2020) argue that “democratic socialist strategies are based on the [false] assumption that the state stands above ‘capitalism’ and could intervene in it as a politically neutral form”, and that this is key to its failure. Given our analysis in this chapter, we can see that this angle of critique is highly unproductive.

Of course, one reasonable critique of the democratic socialism state strategy in relation to *SC* is one that asserts that the specific demands of the Anglo-American democratic socialist left are insufficient to mount a truly effective in and against the state strategy. Such arguments are marshalled by some democratic socialists

themselves, Panitch (Panitch et al., 2020, p.63) and Schneider (2021b) among them, while maintaining an in and against position. Necessary for such a critique to flourish fully, however, would be an in-depth empirical and theoretical analysis (not possible here) of the institutions within the US and UK states, both the sites of possible backlash and the areas of possible working-class advance – each of their departments of government, their militaries, their state banks. Only with such an analysis might it be possible to judge whether particular demands and policies might make true inroads into rebalancing class forces within (that fraction of) the state, or whether a more muscular set of demands would be necessary. We have already pointed to the lack of attentiveness to the military as a possible area of criticism, particularly with threats by generals (Mortimer, 2015) and violent anti-socialism present in the rank-and-file of the British army (BBC, 2019), but this can only be the beginning of a project of critique on this basis.

A further possible critique of whether the democratic socialism state strategy in relation to *SC* does in fact constitute a convincing answer, might engage with the conceptualisation of the state it depends on. The Poulantzian understanding of the state as non-neutral and non-autonomous, but nonetheless a terrain of struggle, is an intuitively plausible one. Its plausibility, as Rooksby (2018, p.38) points out, echoing the original *In and Against the State* pamphlet, can be seen when state workers strike, and it becomes clear that the state is not an impenetrable totality of class rule, nor a neutral entity above society. Intuitive too is the idea that “no political strategy could possibly bypass [the state]—all social struggles are by definition articulated in relation to the field of state power” (Rooksby, 2018, p.40). It is indeed difficult to imagine a mass movement, even one committed to disengagement with the state, neither finding an expression in electoral form, nor in *some* way shaping the state. However, as value-form theorist Heinrich (2007) points out, what this understanding of the state lacks is an account of the *terrain itself*. Heinrich’s argument runs approximately as follows. The ‘terrain of struggle’ conception of the state is primarily oriented toward the specifics of the state as it really exists: the *particular* dominance and weakness of classes and class fractions within the state

and the way in which these groups interact. This kind of state-analysis is therefore a kind of ‘sociology of power’ (p.4), which can be highly successful in its analysis of the flows of class power in real capitalist states. What this kind of understanding lacks, however, is a conception of the capitalist state *as such*, at a general level, abstracted from the particular dynamics of really-existing states.

Heinrich derives this argument from the way in which Marx seeks to analyse capital, which begins with an analysis, at the abstracted level of form, of certain economic categories - use-value, exchange-value, money – to see how capitalism functions at its ‘ideal average’. Only then, once these ‘average’ dynamics of capitalism have been understood, argues Heinrich, can Marx proceed to productively inspect more empirical elements, such as his inspection of labour practices and living conditions in particular English counties later in Capital Volume 1. In relation to the state, the ‘sociology of power’ approach attempts to skip this initial stage and *begin* with the particularities of the state, without understanding what the state must constitute under capitalism at its ‘ideal average’, its most general dynamics.

At this abstracted, formal level, Heinrich suggests a number of “spheres of this form-determination [that] we can distinguish” (p.6). Most key among them is the need to reproduce labour-power as a commodity. The capitalist state ideally, therefore, provides for some basic needs that capitalist firms cannot, alongside guaranteeing a formal equality under law such that individuals without property are forced to sell their labour-power to those with. If a socialist project seeks to undo capitalism, then how its strategy might engage with these formal aspects of the capitalist state ought to be key, but the in and against strategy remains largely at the level of ‘sociology of power’. Whether the democratic socialist strategy is *fundamentally* incapable of addressing (and transcending) the capitalist state-*form* is unclear given the lack of explicit engagement with it in the democratic socialist literature. Equally, it is unclear precisely *how* a strategy should be shaped based on an *abstracted* level of analysis of the strategy’s object of change, which is ultimately a real empirical object. Nevertheless, this is certainly an area where further critique could be developed.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I considered the thesis' central questions – of coherence and convincingness in relation to *SC* – as applied to one central strategic element of contemporary Anglo-American democratic socialism: 'in and against the state'. I first defined in theoretical terms, what constitutes in and against the state as an element of strategy. Having done this, the chapter attempted to establish the actual presence of the strategic element within the democratic socialist formation by a close reading of primary texts and sources. With this achieved, I argued that the strategy of in and against the state *does* provide a coherent answer to SC and, secondarily, that whether in and against the state can provide a convincing answer to SC is open to critique, and I raised a number of key areas in which that critique might be expanded fruitfully, in particular, its dependence on a perhaps incomplete understanding of the nature of the state itself.

5

Class-Struggle Elections

This chapter will proceed with precisely the same schema as the previous two, in this instance inspecting the strategic element of ‘class-struggle elections’ and the relation between electoral party and movement this strategy expresses. Again, I will make the case that the element is a coherent one in relation to *SC*. With this, I hope to have provided the groundwork and a possible direction for an evaluation of the democratic socialist strategy of ‘class-struggle elections’ that avoids misinterpretation of democratic socialism’s answer to *SC*. The chapter will conclude by arguing that whether ‘class-struggle elections’ provide a *convincing* answer to *SC* is open to critique, particularly on the question as to what *kind* of class struggle is generated.

5.1 Defining ‘Class-Struggle Elections’

What we will call the strategy of ‘class-struggle elections’ describes a particular way in which socialists may engage with elections, and in which they may operationalise a particular relation between a class-based movement (in the community and workplace) and the socialist actors (politicians and organisation) that participates in the system of representative government.

As part of this strategy, socialists engage in electoral campaigns for certain candidates. To be a ‘class-struggle election’, the campaign itself, undertaken by activists, *and* the platform espoused by the candidate should do a number of things. They should (a) polarise and politicise the constituency on a class basis, attacking the capitalist class and their interests, for example, campaigning for policy against gentrification by real estate companies, against businesses that pay low wages, against environmental destruction caused by capitalist development. Such active polarisation hopes to have a politically educating effect about the causes of, per our examples, high wages, rents and environmental destruction, as well as linking their solution to a socialist campaign. It should also (b) raise the expectations of the working class (broadly construed) – making it a real, imaginable possibility that ordinary people can themselves make political change, namely the possibility of a highly improved standard of life. It should also (c) create new and build upon existing networks of organisers and activists in the constituency, and build up their confidence and skills. (Gong, 2019)

By doing these things, and thereby engaging in electoral politics with a ‘class-struggle’ orientation, socialists will serve the ultimate goal of the strategy, which is to *intensify class struggle*. By this we simply mean to increase the capacity and willingness of people to self-organise at the level of workplace and community against the capitalist class or its interests when represented by the state. The strategy aims to relate this struggle to a struggle for the political project of socialism. (Day and Uetrict, 2021, p.49; p.125)

With this basic description of the nature of a class-struggle election, we can see that a certain relation between the class-based movement and socialist actors located in the system of representative government is implied. For their part, candidates relate to the developing movement as organisers and agitators when standing for office (and preferably when in office), enacting (a)-(c) by standing on picket lines, channelling resources towards related grassroots, class-based campaigns, making sustained rhetorical attacks on the actions of large corporations etc. On the other hand, socialist campaigners within a class-based movement of unions and community

organisations, in waging a class-struggle election, act to connect this growing movement to their socialist organisation (which has either produced or endorsed the ‘class-struggle’ electoral candidate). This kind of relation is sometimes called the ‘merger formula’: the idea that a workers’ movement *and* a socialist political project, when advanced together in the closest possible relationship, may develop ‘ordinary’ class-based resistance into a politically transformational process (Cant, 2020, p.179).¹

Unlike the strategies of non-reformist reforms and in and against the state though, class-struggle elections do not hope to, themselves, exist as a direct precursor or cause for a rupture (or series of ruptures) that might lead to socialist transformation (Poulantzas and Weber, 2008, p.343). Rather, the strategy acts over the medium term, hoping to set the stage for a development in working-class resistance, while socialist ideas increasingly take root in class-based struggles (Gong, 2019).

Like our previous chapters on in and against the state and non-reformist reforms, the principle of the broadly parliamentary and the extra-parliamentary working harmoniously to polarise and to intensify class struggle can be seen in the writings of New Left thinkers such as Gorz (1968a) and Poulantzas (2014). However, the origin of the particular formulation of class-struggle elections is best seen in the contemporary democratic socialist theory itself, as we shall see. In order not to preempt our next section, we will therefore go without a concrete example of the strategy, since it is in the literature covered in (5.2) where we find the most vivid examples.

5.2 Class-Struggle Elections in Anglo-American Democratic Socialism

As in Chapter 4, if we are to assess democratic socialism’s strategy of class-struggle elections in relation to *SC*, we must first illustrate that such a strategy was in fact present in the democratic socialist movement 2015-2020, and that it was influential enough to be legitimately called a democratic socialist position.

¹The ‘merger formula’ comes out of scholarship attempting to understand the socialism of the Second International and its approach to the class in relation to the party (Lih, 2008, p.41) but it has since been used more generally to describe this kind of relation between class movement and socialist politics (Cant, 2020, p.179)

Like the ‘in and against the state’, the strategy of class-struggle elections, while certainly existent on the democratic socialist left as we shall see, presents itself differently in the British in contrast to the American context.

In the US context, we can see the strategy quite explicitly, championed by the DSA. At the DSA’s 2019 National Convention, Resolution #31, brought by members of the influential Bread and Roses caucus, passed without amendment. It committed the DSA to “use elections, public offices, and legislation as vehicles to encourage working-class organization” and only endorse candidates who “through their election campaigns, and once in office, see mobilizing and fighting alongside working people as one of their primary responsibilities” (Democratic Socialists of America, 2019). This resolution was brought and its position argued for, as ‘class-struggle elections’, by members of the influential Bread and Roses caucus in *Jacobin* (Uetrict, 2018) and in their own publication *The Call* (Svoboda, 2019) since 2018.

This orientation did not only begin in 2019/2018 however. Many of the key US theorists we have already drawn upon theorise various DSA-endorsed electoral campaigns as having a class-struggle character from Sanders’ 2015 campaign onward. Day and Uetrict (2021) for example, emphasise both Sanders’ attempts at the Democratic nomination – his consciously polarising class-focussed rhetoric (p.40), his campaign’s effect of “expanding the horizons of people’s political imaginations” (p.39), and, crucially, his advocating of something like a merger formula. During his 2019 campaign, Sanders asserted that, were he to win, he would act as ‘organiser in chief’, taking his role to be one of building up grassroots, class-based movements outside the state (p.42). Despite never reaching the Oval Office, both his campaigns acted in precisely this way, even beyond the official campaign period. In 2018, Sanders utilised his platform to attack Disney as workers at Disneyworld fought for \$15 an hour, marching in their rally, and writing in support in the *Guardian* (2018). In 2019 (Jamieson), he utilised his campaign’s data infrastructure to mobilise, by text and email, his base to physically attend pickets at a one-day strike at the University of California. These are only two examples of many that Day and Uetrict (2021), as well as other US democratic socialists like Sunkara (2020),

Gong² (2019), Ries³ (2020), marshal in order to characterise Sanders' campaigns – both on the ground with support from socialist organisers, and his platform itself – as having a 'class-struggle' character, which ought to be replicated.

Another example of an effective class-struggle election raised by US democratic socialist theorists (Blanc and Gong, 2018; Day and Uetrict, 2021; Gutmann-Gonzalez and Brower Brown, 2019), is Jovanka Beckles' campaign for California State Assembly (the state's lower house). Beckles had a platform with a similar style to Sanders': calling out her opponent's corporate funding, demanding policies on a class basis such as rent controls, higher wages, and universal healthcare. Unlike Sanders, Beckles herself was a DSA member (of its East Bay chapter) and DSA activists and organisers took key roles in her electoral effort while also making use of her radical platform to agitate for, what Beckles herself emphasised, the idea that her electoral opponent was not the central opponent, but, rather, that this was the whole capitalist class and its interests. Though Beckles was electorally unsuccessful, the skills and networks built between organisations, the style employed, and the people recruited to DSA could be utilised again immediately as the national wave of teachers' strikes came to the area. East Bay DSA was thus able to play an important role, among other activities, acting as a militant minority within the workplace, and initiating the strike fund donation drive, raising over \$170,000 (Gutmann-Gonzalez and Brower Brown, 2019). Both as theory and practice, we can see a class-struggle election orientation and its implication of a merger formula.

Despite these two examples often being marshalled together by democratic socialists, we should draw attention to an important difference, even if only to clarify the concept of class-struggle elections. While Sanders' platform and various actions during and between campaigns lent his election a class-struggle character, and this allowed democratic socialists in and around the DSA to use it to this end, Sanders himself and his top staff did not consistently conceive of it as such.

²Jeremy Gong, at one time contributing editor at *The Call* (The Call, 2018) and elected member of DSA's NPC in 2017 (Democratic Socialists of America, 2017).

³Curt Ries, organiser with Sanders' 2019/2020 campaign and activist with the Marin County chapter of the DSA (Ries, 2022)

Objectively it functioned as a class-struggle election, but *subjectively* only partially. Beckles' campaign, on the other hand, was *consciously* waged as a class-struggle election, and theorised as such by Beckles herself and her key campaigners, all DSA members. The campaign was therefore both an objective and subjective class-struggle election. While the strategy does not require both, for the democratic socialist, it is more effective when consciously implemented, as well as functionally.

In the UK context, we can see the strategy less explicitly, in the literature and in practice around the Labour left, TWT, *Tribune* and the like. Indeed, where there is an undertheorisation of the electoral arena, quite the opposite view is sometimes defaulted to. Schneider (2021), co-founder of Momentum, writes: "a basic and necessary step is winning elections within the current system and balance of forces, so as to be able to make major changes". Here, there is no effect on class struggle by the contesting of the election itself, only the policies once in office, by the strategies of non-reformist reform and in and against the state as we saw in previous chapters.

We *might* explain the difference between contexts by reference to the different positions of democratic socialists in the UK versus the US in relation to the possibility of direct electoral success. In the US, the DSA had no official, reciprocal organisational relationship with the Sanders campaign and therefore the sense in which democratic socialists could 'win' an election at the national level was limited. They could nevertheless intervene, however, at the state and local levels, to mobilise citizens to *fight* electoral campaigns. In the UK, democratic socialists were located around the Labour left, who were faced with the real possibility of *themselves* being successful in a general election. This is to say that US democratic socialists were incentivised to think at the level at which they had more influence, at the level of the electoral *campaign*, whereas democratic socialists in the UK could abstain from theorising the electoral struggle itself in favour of thinking at the level of policy once an electoral victory had been won. Nevertheless, while there is certainly a strain of uncritical thought on elections within the UK democratic socialist left, where there is direct theorisation of the electoral struggle, we can see a strategy emerge that can be called 'class-struggle elections'.

Largely, this can be seen in literature by UK democratic socialists critically inspecting the progress and activities of Labour and Momentum. Panitch and Gindin (2020, p.68), for example, link the Labour left's second electoral defeat, and subsequent retreat, to the failure of the Party and its main left institution Momentum to engage at the level of community and workplace to build social and political networks that might provide the concrete base for an electoral victory grounded in class struggle. This proved difficult, says Panitch (Panitch and Leys, 2020, p.253) for a number of reasons, including the fact that Momentum's growth took place at the national level rather than seeing democratic socialists join local groups where organising could take place. Momentum's prime use became a mobilising tool for getting activists to knock doors during election periods "at the expense of engagement in class-based struggles, organising and education" (Panitch and Leys, 2020, p.253). Panitch's *critique* clearly mirrors US democratic socialists' *praise* of campaigns like Beckles': the electoral struggle is divorced from class struggle; there is no build-up and subsequently bolstered continuation of class-based campaigns before and after the election; and ultimately the socialist project of the organisation/party and the building of the movement are not advanced together, i.e., the merger formula is absent.

Nevertheless, where an objective and subjective orientation towards what we have called 'class-struggle elections' and the 'merger formula' has been present, UK democratic socialists have commended it and hoped to replicate it. We can see this in *Tribune's* highlighting of Manchester Momentum, where activists undertook a community organising effort, fighting on housing, immigration and abortion rights issues, as well as putting on cultural events. When the 2019 general election came, the branch had a network of individuals and groups which it could mobilise into electoral campaigning, as a continuation of the class-based fights they had already been undertaking (Redmond and Rose, 2019).

We can also see this orientation in UK democratic socialists' emphasis on the successes of Labour's Community Organising Unit – promised by Corbyn after his initial leadership election and created in 2018 to rebuild class power at the level of

community (Panitch and Gindin, 2020, p.53; Sultana, 2021). For Lavery (2020), writing in *Tribune*, its campaigns allowed the electoral struggle to go beyond the election itself and become rooted in working-class communities. For Muldoon (2020), also in *Tribune*, at its best, the Unit ensured that the local, class-based building of power was not made subordinate to short-term electoral campaigns, but rather the former attempted to lay the ground for long-term socialist electoral success.

5.3 Class-Struggle Elections as Democratic Socialist Strategy – A Coherent Answer to *SC*?

Having first defined the strategy, and seen it adopted and argued for by democratic socialists, we can now go on to test class-struggle elections in relation to *SC*: to what extent does it present a *coherent answer* to the dual unlikelihood (due to structural constraint and rational choice concerns) of both revolutionary and moderate, gradualist socialisms? Our focus on the ‘coherent answer’ question is necessary work to establish how those who seek to evaluate democratic socialism can legitimately do so.

To begin, we must understand how gradualist and revolutionary socialisms relate to elections and the interaction between workers’ movement and socialist organisation. It is, after all, the difficulties thrown up by these socialisms that democratic socialism must navigate between if it is to provide a coherent answer to *SC*.

Theorists of social democracy (Panitch, 1989; Przeworski and Sprague, 1986; Rooksby, 2011) – the most notable moderate, gradualist strategy – invariably link it to a particular strategy in relation to the fighting of elections. For the paradigmatic social democrat, an election is a technical exercise of achieving the victory of a certain representative. If there is an understanding of a workers’ movement sympathetic to a socialistic political project, it is only to conceptualise them as subordinate to realising the electoral goal – as a base to be mobilised. Social democratic leaders are “representatives and the struggle for socialism [is] delegated to representatives” (Przeworski and Sprague, 1986, p.184). As Panitch (1989, p.21) puts it, social

democrats ultimately “accept the very structure of parliamentary decision-making, embodying the Burkean notions of a sharp separation between decision-makers within the state and the class ‘without’”. As with their conceptualisation of the state, the election is an unproblematic tool for use by social democratic actors.

The literature on social-democratic strategy in relation to elections also consistently points to a mirror image of the social-democratic strategy - the revolutionary ‘Leninist’ model that we have explored in previous chapters (Panitch, 2017; Rooksby, 2011). Like the social democrat, the archetypal Leninist treats elections as instrumental. Rather than an instrument for electoral victory, however, elections act only as a means for the building of a revolutionary movement that can ultimately overcome capitalism. The electoral struggle in the Leninist model is an exercise in propaganda and agitation, far subordinating the task of seeking the most effective route to a win. The strategy treats the representative functions of the capitalist state (as with the state as a whole) as basically illegitimate, in mirror image of the social democratic treatment of the state and elections as an unproblematic route to power (Blanc, 2021b; Maher and Khachaturian, 2021, pp.193-194).

It appears quite clear that, given our exploration of class-struggle elections thus far, such a strategy does attempt to navigate between these two strategic poles at least at a definitional level. Where the social democrat ultimately subordinates any existing workers’ movement to a win at the ballot box, and the Leninist does the reverse, adopting an apathy toward electoral victory in favour of propaganda and movement-building, the democratic socialist attempts to advance the two together, each spurring on the other in a kind of merger formula. While, like the social democrat, the democratic socialist does seek electoral victory, like the Leninist, they hope to empower and embolden the workers’ movement. This creates a definitional distinction that the democratic socialist literature itself emphasises, both against Leninism – arguing the importance of engaging fully and wholeheartedly in elections that ought to be treated as legitimate (Blanc and Post, 2019) – and against social democracy – arguing the necessity of class struggle and community organising

for linking representative politics with the movement (Day and Uetrict, 2021, p.149; Sunkara, 2020, p.217; Zultana, 2021).

5.3.1 Class-Struggle Elections as Democratic Socialist Strategy – A Coherent Answer to *SC*? – Structural Constraint Concern

For our purposes, however, coherence cannot simply be at a definitional level. We must now move on to assess whether the strategy in fact presents a coherent answer to the *problems* thrown up by these opposing socialist poles. Let us begin by inspecting the strategy in relation to the structural constraint concern – the set of motivations for *SC* that arise from the nature of the capitalist-democratic society – which we derived from the academic literature on socialist strategy in Chapter 1.

First, there is the structural constraint of the possession of overwhelming means of state defence. As we saw in earlier chapters, democratic socialist theorist Eric Blanc (2017) gives a direct answer to the question of defence in relation to elections in his use of the Finnish example. In Finland, leading up to the revolution of 1918, socialists engaged in elections in the only democratically elected parliament in the Russian Empire, both seeking to win electorally *and* hoping to galvanise class struggle and advance the workers' movement. Blanc argues, drawing on Finnish socialists (Kuuinsén, 1906), that it was partially the Finnish socialists' commitment to elections that allowed class struggle to progress to a revolutionary situation. When socialists were met with military force, socialists could marshal a fightback that was ultimately *in defence* of a majoritarian democratic mandate, seen as legitimate, thus garnering mass support from the workers' movement. So the democratic socialist argument goes, therefore, that by treating elections even under contemporary capitalist democracies as illegitimate, the Leninist can only hope for a successful *attack* – an insurrection – with far less chance of success, against overwhelming state defence; whereas the social democratic strategy, having gained electoral victory without building a class-based movement, has no mass base on which to defend its gains (Blanc and Post, 2019).

Second, there is the structural constraint of a dependence on business confidence to avoid crises of living conditions. Such a constraint does not, initially, seem to find a solution in the *kind* of strategy represented by class-struggle elections, and is perhaps better answered by those democratic socialist strategies that locate the actor as already inside the state. Nevertheless, democratic socialists do invariably emphasise the necessity of combining electoral struggle with movement-building as a means to counter, as much as possible, crises caused by falling business confidence – disinvestment, a run on the currency etc. Blakeley (2019, p.240), Blanc (Blanc and Post, 2019) and Panitch (Panitch and Gindin, 2020, pp.106-107) all make arguments along the same lines: that a crisis should be expected, and that a strong class-based movement – of unions, community organisations, single-issue campaigns etc – is necessary to ensure that it is not the cause of defeat. Such a movement might push the socialist government, faltering in the face of crisis, to enact further non-reformist reforms such as socialising industries that now lack necessary investment. In a more extreme crisis, the movement may take over certain governmental functions as a popular organ of resistance, even, perhaps, distributing necessary goods (Panitch and Gindin, 2020, pp.106-107). In any case, however, simply seeking to elect a socialist government (as the social democrat hopes to) is insufficient to weather such a crisis, while *only* building a class-based movement, as per the Leninist strategy, without gaining democratic legitimacy and social power through the election of a socialist government, would also lead to a similar outcome (Blanc and Post, 2019).

Third and lastly, is the structural constraint presented by the tendency within capitalist-democratic societies to include into its political institutions, and thereby pacify, workers and the labour movement (Vössing, 2018). This is perhaps a central test for the coherence of the strategy of class-struggle elections, since this tendency plays out in large part, according to Vössing (2018), through working-class engagement with elections and representative institutions generally. So too for Panitch (1989, p.21), who argues that social democracy became moderated historically via its engagement with elections and acceptance of the prevailing electoral logic – pragmatism and compromise, leading to anti-movementism. If the

democratic socialist strategy of electoral engagement does not present a response to this tendency, as critics invariably assume (Black Rose Anarchist Federation, 2018a; McGregor, 2019; Angry Workers of the World, 2020), then class-struggle elections cannot present a coherent answer to *SC*.

However, we can look back to both the conceptualisation, and practical examples, of class-struggle elections to see that it does provide some response. US academic Patrick Barrett (Transnational Institute, 2021) considers the strategy of class-struggle elections to be “serious and welcome” precisely because it *attempts* (unlike, as we’ve seen, ‘Leninism’ or social democracy) to create a dynamic relationship between arenas with “two very distinct logics of collective action” – movement-building and electoral politics – the former maintaining a connection with the later such that it does not fall into electoral pragmatism. Whether these distinct logics can ultimately complement each other, Barrett maintains, is dependent on the muscularity of the drive to further democratise the electoral process and the state more broadly, also an element of democratic socialist strategy (see Chapter 4). Meagan Day goes further, emphasising that, in terms of strategic choice, there is *no distinction* between simple movement-building and engaging in elections. This is because elections done right (enacted as *class-struggle* elections) galvanise a popular movement such that a socialist project is *advanced* rather than pragmatically retreated from (in the style of social democracy), and she highlights various real contemporary US examples such as those described earlier in this chapter (Bhattacharya, 2020). Clearly, there is here a meaningful attempt by democratic socialists to address such a structural constraint with the strategy of class-struggle elections, and therefore to present a coherent answer to *SC*.

5.3.2 Class-Struggle Elections as Democratic Socialist Strategy – A Coherent Answer to *SC*? – Rational Choice Concern

In relation to the rational choice concern – the concern grounded in the *subject* of socialist transformation, that is, the socialist organisation and individual workers –

the democratic socialist strategy of class-struggle elections again seems to provide some aspects of a coherent response.

First, is Cohen and Rogers' (1983) claim that in a capitalist democracy, the worker can successfully achieve their short-term interests based on their position as a worker (improved living and/or working conditions), while the pursuit of long-term gain on such a basis (social transformation) is irrational so long as the costs are, plausibly, high. In many ways, the strategy of class-struggle elections seems tailor-made as a response to this claim, given where the strategy is centrally located, the same place Cohen and Rogers locate their concern - at the dual levels of political project on the one hand, and the worker at the level of workplace and community of the other. For the democratic socialist, the strategy of class-struggle elections is in part *defined* by the attempt to concretely relate these levels, to fuse the short-term worker's interest – for improved wages, housing, healthcare – with the long-term political struggle for socialist transformation, such that struggling for better living conditions is done *through, with* and/or *as* the struggle for a socialist political project. This is, after all, the substance of the merger formula. As we established in 5.1 and 5.2, a successful democratic socialist class-struggle electoral campaign (and politician) will 'raise the expectations' of the class as a whole, and polarise on this basis. Therefore, when class struggle takes place, inspired by or in preparation for an electoral struggle, it will do so not at the technical level of the achieving of individual short-term interests (as per Cohen and Rogers' description) but be the actions of a class that "see[s] itself as a class, with interests that are opposite those of the capitalists" (Day and Uetrict, 2021, p.175). As Gong (2019) emphasises, in the medium term this hopes to affect, what Panitch calls, 'class reformation' (Panitch and Gindin, 2020, p.108). But let us consider again the hypothetical purely rational individual worker, who remains untouched by the attempt to form a solidaristic class identity that would otherwise ward off free-rider behaviour. If the strategy is successful, even they are now faced with the option of advancing their interest in the workplace, for example, by speaking to their manager about improved pay, and voting for the centre-left party, *or* engaging with the reinvigorated powerful

class-based movement (that is now aligned with a socialist political project); they reasonably choose the latter on rational short-termist grounds while *functionally* working toward the long-term interest of pro-worker social transformation.

The social democrat, as we've seen, cordons off the long-term political goal to representative actors and the long-term and short-term interests of the workers' movement remain at odds. Meanwhile, the 'Leninist' can only hope to cleave together the short-term interests of the worker with revolution itself, something that Cohen and Rogers' claim is precisely aimed at criticising. Here, then, class-struggle elections and the 'merger formula' they imply seem to present a coherent answer to this rational choice concern, navigating between these two poles.

Second, is the Przeworskian (1993) rational choice concern that, since workers and the labour movement do not constitute a majority in capitalist democracies, the socialist will fail to gain power so long as it fails to find allies. Being rational, the party seeks allies and must find them in the middle classes, which creates the tendency of the collapse of the socialist aim as the classes' interests come into conflict. Again, the strategy of class-struggle elections and the relation between movement and organisation seems to provide a response. It is Panitch (1989) who points out that, though the labour movement is *at present* in the minority, as are workers that are *specifically industrial and productive of surplus-value*, this is not a necessary starting point for the formulation of socialist strategy (p.21). This rational choice concern holds for a socialist organisation engaging in elections *only* if the organisation is a mobilising force alone, and does not seek to actively alter its base's relationship to class. Indeed, the ally-seeking rational socialist party implied by the Przeworskian concern is one that does not simply engage in elections, but has "accept[ed] the very structure of parliamentary decision-making, embodying the Burkean notions of a sharp separation between decision-makers within the state and the class 'without'" (p.21). As we saw earlier in this chapter, this is precisely what differentiates the democratic socialist strategy, which sees the socialist organisation use elections, not simply to mobilise, but to build itself a class base that does not presently exist. It attempts to broaden working-class self-identification beyond

simply the industrial productive workers to all those whose interests do not lie in the accumulation of their capital (Day and Uetricht, 2021, p175), and to connect this base to the socialist political project. This, as we saw, is what is behind calls for ‘community organising’ (Sultana, 2021), ‘class reformation’ (Panitch and Gindin, 2020, p.108). and for “turn[ing] to the modern workplace and become agents for reviving the world of labor that we have lost” (Maisey and Williams, 2020).

5.4 Class-Struggle Elections as Democratic Socialist Strategy – A Convincing Answer to *SC*?

We have seen now that democratic socialist strategy concerning elections, and the relation between movement and political organisation, does form a coherent attempt to answer *SC* – to navigate between the dual improbability of either a moderate gradualist or revolutionary method of social transformation in the context of a capitalist democracy. With this established, the ways in which we can assess if that answer is *convincing* come into view. This section hopes to point to some of those ways.

First, we can now clearly dismiss those arguments that begin by noting that democratic socialists engage in elections, and then immediately proceed to make an easy equivalence between democratic socialism and a social-democratic strategy of pragmatic electoral win-seeking that subordinates any class-based movement to this aim. Such are the kind of arguments that, as we have seen in our previous two chapters, sometimes arise from those to the left of democratic socialism. “CSEs anticipate these movements [...] will be obediently subordinated to the initiatives of socialist politicians and parties” (D., 2020) is one such claim. “Elections [engaged in by democratic socialists] siphon energy and resources from social movements while simultaneously limiting their power by shifting the terrain of struggle from our daily lives [...] to the marble halls of power” (Black Rose Anarchist Federation, 2021b) is another such claim. But, as we have seen, it is precisely the opposite

that the strategy of class-struggle elections is formulated in order to achieve, and any successful critique must recognise this.

The most apparently reasonable critique of the democratic socialism strategy of class-struggle elections in relation to *SC* is one that asserts that its specific form adopted by the Anglo-American democratic socialist left is insufficient, i.e., class-struggle elections have not been class-struggle *enough*. This is the kind of argument marshalled by Charles Post (Bhattacharya, 2020), who looks at the election of DSA member Julian Salazar to the New York State Assembly and the subsequent building of pro-tenant organisations and winning of pro-tenant reforms spurred on by the fighting of the election as a class-struggle election. He highlights two things: first that the tenants' organisations that were emboldened following the DSA campaign were broadly advocacy organisations, providing legal help and lobbying elected officials, rather than membership organisations capable of direct action; second that the reforms that were ultimately secured lacked crucial protections such as against no-fault eviction. He goes on to argue that this is explained by how, despite the attempt otherwise, democratic socialist class-struggle elections *still* build an electoral majority first and a class-movement second. It is ultimately a logic of electoral success that seeks to build coalition with powerful advocacy and lobbying organisations first, neglecting “the sort of direct-action, illegal organizing that will be required to stop evictions”, which would relate the socialist organisation to the class more effectively but would be more difficult to work into an electoral campaign. Therefore, though the class-struggle election does, in its present form, develop the movement to some extent, it is not to the extent (or the *kind* of development) that it purports, or that would be necessary to achieve ‘class reformation’ and lay the ground for socialist political change. In effect, this has the democratic socialist strategy drift toward the social democratic one, where an electoral victory is achieved without substantively advancing class struggle.

The democratic socialist may counter by emphasising that Post's critique is ultimately contingent. While certainly *some* class-struggle elections as waged by democratic socialists might have given way to electoral logic at the expense of

movement-building, and there are certainly pressures to do so when waging an election when victory appears more likely by moderating rhetoric, policy or style to appear to more middle-class voters, this is not a problem with the strategy itself. It may prove difficult, and it may require political will, but campaigns such as Beckles' prove that socialists may adopt a class-struggle elections strategy and maintain it in the face of impending electoral loss, *and* nevertheless find themselves and their class emboldened.

Levenson and Kalisz (2019) go further, however, arguing that even more obviously successful elements of class struggle developed by elections themselves exist in a kind of electoral mode. For example, democratic socialists have praised the capacity of class-struggle campaigns, such as those around Corbyn and Sanders, to raise the expectations of the working class, providing hope, breaking through a 'capitalist realism' (Savage, 2018; Sunkara, 2020, pp.126-217). However, for Levenson and Kalisz (2019), while this success is to be 'cheered', it is not concrete:

Since the Sanders campaign launched in 2015, socialism has been largely articulated in terms of a strategy that serializes workers, to borrow Sartre's term. In Critique of Dialectical Reason, he [Sartre] describes people who are serialized as "united though not integrated through work, through struggle or through any other activity in an organised group common to them all" – in short, as "reciprocal isolations." Despite the promise of augmenting working class organizational capacity, a Sartrean "series" is the sort of unity produced by electoralism.

Therefore, even those actions that appear as a development of a class-based movement inspired by the socialist organisation's class-struggle elections, remain ultimately unproductive because of the means by which they were generated – by an electoral attempt. This cannot produce, in a concrete way, a class that "see[s] itself as a class, with interests that are opposite those of the capitalists" (Day and Uetracht, 2021, p.175), but only a 'series', who are fundamentally aligned as *voters* even when they then engage in collective action outside the electoral area. The means by which a series can be transformed into a self-identifying class is unclear.

These arguments, and those similar to them, are potentially productive because they view the strategy of class-struggle elections on its own terms. They acknowledge the real attempt made by class-struggle elections to advance the movement and political project together, and say something about that attempt. To significantly dent the ‘convincingness’ of class-struggle elections as an answer to *SC*, however, more empirical work is clearly necessary: for example, some comparative work of various elections across the UK and US where a class-struggle orientation has been adopted, community organising used etc. It would have to ask what class struggle resulted from the election campaign; what were its goals and results. Also, what *kinds* of networks were built from the class-struggle election; were stable structures for the long-term formed, or did a more inward-looking social scene develop? Did the views of workers targeted become ‘non-electoral’, i.e., did they become oriented toward a collective identity which prompts further action, or are they still thinking like members of a ‘series’, related only as ‘reciprocal isolations’, and prompted toward passivity? Only with such empirical work might we generalise this kind of critique to the democratic socialist strategy of class-struggle elections overall, and also then be better positioned to say why the strategy did not live up to its purported purpose in these instances.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I considered the thesis’ central questions – of coherence and convincingness in relation to *SC* – as applied to the final central strategic element of contemporary Anglo-American democratic socialism considered in this thesis: ‘class-struggle elections’. I first defined in theoretical terms, what constitutes class-struggle elections as an element of strategy. Having done this, the chapter attempted to establish the actual presence of the strategic element within the democratic socialist formation. With this achieved, I argued that the strategy of class-struggle elections (and the relation between movement and socialist organisation it implies) *does* provide a coherent answer to *SC* and, secondarily, that whether class-struggle elections can provide a convincing answer to *SC* is open to critique, particularly

on the question as to what kind of class struggle is generated, although further empirical work is needed to establish the strength of this critique.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

This thesis has attempted to explore the strategic questions and possibilities raised by the coming to prominence of ‘democratic socialism’ in the UK and US in 2015-2020, with the rise of Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour left on the one hand, and of the Democratic Socialists of America, spurred on by the campaigns of Bernie Sanders, on the other. Specifically, it argued that the democratic socialist strategy, and its key constituent elements – non-reformist reforms, in and against the state, and class-struggle elections - presents a *coherent* answer to a key strategic challenge (*SC*) facing a socialist political project:

How, given the dual improbability of either a revolutionary or moderate, gradualist method of socialist transformation, to proceed as a socialist actor seeking transformational change in the context of a capitalist democracy.

In making this argument, the thesis attempted to take democratic socialist arguments on their own terms and in good faith, rather than simply reading off the ‘big signifiers’ of the strategy – electoral campaigning, demand for reform etc – and enacting, ultimately, unproductive critique on this basis. However, the thesis argued that there *are indeed* productive critiques of the *convincingness* of democratic socialist strategy in relation to *SC* to be made that take into account actual democratic socialist thought. While it is *coherent*, whether democratic socialist strategy is a *convincing* answer to *SC* therefore remains open to debate.

Rather than repeating the structure of the thesis in total (for this, readers can refer back to the introduction) we might conclude by suggesting or reemphasising

the further work which might be undertaken as a result of the initial critiques of the convincingness of democratic socialism in relation to SC developed in Chapters 3-5.

In Chapter 3, we emphasised the necessity of strategic independence of democratic socialists wanting to demand and enact non-reformist reforms if the strategy is to be completely convincing in relation to SC. If this critique is to be more fully constructed however, further research might be done on how ‘strategic independence’ might be achieved. Research might take a historical route and inspect the successes and failures of sects within and splits from the British Labour Party and US Democrats, while relating them to the possibilities of democratic socialist strategy. Or it might take a more political scientific route, seeking to empirically investigate and then generalise how political parties relate to more radical sects within them, and whether and how these sects can maintain strategic and rhetorical independence while having some influence. Arguments might then be made when relating such generalisations to the democratic socialist context. Such research would significantly help with a richer exploration of whether non-reformist reforms *can in fact* function while their advocates remain related to a more moderate organisation and can therefore provide a convincing answer to SC.

In Chapter 4, I pointed to the theory of state that the strategy of in and against the state depends on, and that it is enacted purely at the level of a so-called ‘sociology of power’, whilst excluding an analysis of the capitalist state at a more abstracted level, considering its ‘ideal average’. The further research here is clear; a theorisation is needed of *how* to relate analysis of capitalism at an abstracted level to concrete political strategy. Some work on this has been undertaken, which attempts to relate an analysis of ‘value’ under capitalism (as it is presented in Marx’s *Capital*, in an abstracted form) to a possible political project (Endnotes, 2010), but even this provides only a conceptualisation of revolution rather than a set of practices that might be undertaken by socialist organisations. Nevertheless, if such a theorisation can be established, we would be in a much-improved position to say whether or not the in and against the state strategy provides a convincing answer to SC.

In Chapter 5, we saw that a productive critique can be made of class-struggle elections in relation to *SC* that questions the *kind* of movement that is generated by such a strategy, and whether that movement has transformational capacity. While there is, as we pointed to in the chapter, a relative wealth of first-hand accounts of the capacities of such movements, there is an absence of systematic research into them. Such research might be more specific, looking at the local and national movements generated specifically by class-struggle elections undertaken by Anglo-American democratic socialists and asking how they self-perceive, how they operate, how personnel and skills are transferred from community organising to electoral campaigns and back, and how these movements show transformational capacity compared to movements (local or national) that are built without engagement with the electoral sphere. Or, research might seek to be more general, taking a variety of case studies in which radical movements spring up around election campaigns and those that do so independently of them and, in a political-scientific manner, drawing broader conclusions about election–movement dynamics. Such research would do much to allow a fuller exploration of whether class-struggle elections can indeed generate a transformational, socialist, class-based movement, and therefore provide a convincing answer to *SC*.

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