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# Realigning Community, Locality, and Post-capitalist Alternatives: Deconstructing the US Left's Ambivalent Relationship to Community-as-locality

Sean Demoranville\*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Center for Research on the English-speaking World (CREW - EA 4399) – Université Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3 – France

## Abstract

Since the early 2010s, leftwing radicals in the United States have reinvested the local as an arena of political struggle in municipalities like Seattle, WA, Sommerville, MA, or Jackson, MO, fueling a noteworthy revival of municipalist politics across the country (Finley and Vansintjan 2021). This revival raises the question of the possibilities, challenges, and dilemmas of constructing and pursuing a locally anchored counter-hegemonic politics. Yet, historically, the US Left has maintained an ambivalent relationship between community and locality within its post-capitalist perspectives. In the abstract, "community" can be understood here as a "being-in-common" (Nancy 1991) that political forces and social actors may articulate to other concepts such as "locality" (i.e., a particular city, town, or neighborhood). In fact, scholars interested in the US Left as well as radicals themselves have tended to treat community-as-locality as either an inherent obstacle to push aside or a trap to avoid rather than an opportunity for a viable counter-hegemonic politics (cf. J. K. Gibson-Graham 2006; Purcell 2006).

In the current paper, I analyze the history of this ambivalent relationship by deconstructing the various ways in which community and locality have been problematized and articulated within various post-capitalist discourses (e.g., socialism, communism, New Left radicalism, communalism) in the context of the US Left. More precisely, I describe, explain, and historicize how and why US radicals articulated or, conversely, disarticulated community, locality, and post-capitalist alternatives within their diverse political projects. My analysis focuses on three key conjunctures in the history of the US Left, namely the pre-World War I era, the New Deal era, and the 1960s-1980s period. In deconstructing and historicizing this ambiguous relationship, I contribute to efforts to complicate the historiography of the US Left and may shed new light on the contemporary revival of leftwing municipalist politics in the United States. Finally, this paper participates in furthering reflection and discussion on the politics of community within the US Left.

**Sean DeMoranville** is a PhD candidate in American Studies at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris, France. His research interests include the history of the Left and municipalist politics in the United States. He is currently working on a dissertation that explores the history of municipalist politics in Burlington, Vermont, in the 1970s and 1980s under the supervision of Pierre Gervais (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle) and Steven Griggs (Staffordshire University). He is affiliated with the Center for Research on the English-Speaking

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\*Speaker

World (EA 4399) and the Doctoral School 625 MAGIIE.