

What case in *Quiet No More* speaks to you around the potential of grassroots activism? What are its contradictions?

pg 174 *Yes He can*: the promise and pitfalls of pro-Obama activism

I found two cases in the book that spoke to me. They were both chapters relating to individuals, who played a role in grassroots activism. The first was reading about Jack Layton and his legacy within the Canadian political realm and the second was the study of Barack Obama and his presidency. I think these two cases both stuck out to me because they were both very influential individuals that shaped the way I today view politics.

Obama's first run for presidency was in 2008. At the time, I was 15 and had barely any opinions on elections and politics in general. However, when the Obama fever swept the nation and eventually the world, I became captivated. I saw him as a candidate that was engaging, charismatic and cared about improving his country. Similarly in 2011 (I being slightly more aware of politics), Jack Layton drew people in with his charisma and optimism to improve the country.

A grassroots movement educates people and gets them involved in taking action. I think that both of the individuals embodied this approach in their campaigns and it is why so many people felt they were the answers to so many problems. They were unlike many politicians, both Obama and Layton were personable and approachable. Obama's slogan was "*Yes We Can*" which showed that together, we can make a difference. I think these individuals made politics more approachable and made it feel like working together as a community, we could hold politicians accountable and demand for the changes we want to be made.

However, in being the President of the United States and the leader of the official opposition party, these roles don't exactly align with how grassroots activism is approached. Grassroots works from the bottom-up approach rather than top-down. Activism comes from the people and I think that holding such high position of power does contradict with the very basic principles of this movement. This being the case, I do personally believe that it is beneficial to have these type of people in these types of positions because they understand the concepts of grassroots movements and I believe would be more open to working with activists and community organizations.

In the case of the Obama presidency, he was able to mobilize a lot of people to get involved and become educated on voting and elections in the US. He was meant to be the voice of change and be a great president for climate action. Yet looking back, it doesn't feel like much has changed in terms of getting off fossil fuels and developing more sustainably. I hoped that Obama would have been the president to take action on climate issues and work with our Prime Minister to push Canada to develop more sustainably. But that wasn't the case.

What I have taken from both of these examples and through reading the chapter on the Obama presidency is that as activists, as people who want change, we need to hold our politicians accountable. We need to get communities involved in educating and mobilizing. One of the lines that stuck out the most for me in this reading was at the very end of the chapter which was a point made by Eugene Debs. He was a presidential candidate in 1920. He said "you must use your heads as well as your hands and get yourself out of your present condition." I think this speaks volumes to the grassroots movement and shows that if you want something to change, to do something to create change.