THE NEW LEFT IN AUSTRALIA (1969)

by Rowan Cahill

Background: The following paper is of historical interest, being a very early exploration of the Australian New Left, by activist/participant/analyst Rowan Cahill (1945- ). At the time, Cahill was a recently minted Sydney University BA (Hons) graduate in History, undertaking the Diploma in Education year of teacher training at Sydney Teachers College. The paper was suggested by intellectual gadfly and Australian political theorist and media studies pioneer, Associate Professor Henry Mayer, University of Sydney, for presentation as part of the Eleventh Annual Conference of the Australasian Political Studies Association (APSA), 28th-30th August, 1969, University of Sydney. Each Conference paper was assigned an ‘Opener’ who led the discussion following the delivery of a paper. In this case Mayer allocated the task to Senior Lecturer in Government at Sydney University, Owen Harries (1930- ). Harries at the time was a virulent anti-leftist, an apologist for the American led Vietnam War and Australia’s participation in it, part of the Australian offshoot of the CIA-front of intellectual activists and propagandists, the Congress of Cultural Freedom, and later advisor to various Australian and US right-wing governments and founder and editor of the Washington-based journal of rightist commentary and analysis, The National Interest. In his comments on the paper, Harries vociferously dismissed Cahill’s paper as political activism and contested its right to be included as part of the APSA proceedings. For the author it was his first real exposure to the rough and tumble of academic debate and the political and ideological agendas of scholarship.

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In recent years there has been a substantial amount of material published dealing with the "New Left" in Australia.\footnote{A bibliography of some of this material is in R. Cahill, \textit{Notes on the new left in Australia}, published by the Australian Marxist Research Foundation, Sydney 1969. Since this was published the following material has appeared. Gordon, R. "The old right and the new left," Broadside, June 26 1969, pp 5-8. Henderson, G. "How 'new' is the Australian new left?" Broadside, May 29 1969, pp 9-11; "The new left in Australia - a rejoinder", Broadside July 24 1969, pp. 17-19. In \textit{The Australian} May 14, 15, 16 and 20 four journalistic articles on Australian young radical leftists were published. These contain good biographical material. Osmond, W. "An Anatomy of the Monash Labour Club", \textit{Lots Wife}, May 8 1969, pp 13-16. Rowley, K. "Our New Left still needs Analysis", Tribune, July 9, 1969, pp 6-7.} This has set out to report, describe and/or explain, aspects of the upsurge, mainly amongst university students, of leftist political activity and thought since the mid sixties - referred to variously as "the student movement" and the "new left".\footnote{Gordon, R. \textit{loc. cit.} p. 5.} There have been newspaper and magazine articles, pamphlets and a spate of material in student newspapers. The authors and views presented have ranged through the political spectrum. However none of these have really been sure just what the term "new left" means in the Australian context. Perhaps this is accounted for by the fact that the task of trying "to discern a nascent student 'new left' is a pretty hazardous exercise, even for student journalists, let alone journalists on our established dailies."\footnote{Osmond, W. "Australia Too?" \textit{National U}, June 24 1968, p. 2} However the participants themselves have also failed to produce an analysis of this political upsurge in relation to its origins and development, and this has been seen as "one of the very real weaknesses of the (Australian) new left itself, and one of the important features which distinguishes the Australian movement from those of Europe and the United States."\footnote{Gordon, R. \textit{loc. cit.} p. 5.}

Before examining the concept of a new left in Australia it is necessary to see what the term designates overseas. Specifically and briefly I will deal with the new left as it has emerged in Britain and the United States, for it is from here that the term has been coined.

The new left in Britain was "the first of the genus".\footnote{Mortimer, R. "The New Left", \textit{Arena} 13; Winter 1967, p. 17. This article is a good brief but comprehensive account of the British and American new lefts. It also begins to deal with the Australian new left.} Following the traumas of the 20th, Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
and the events in Hungary of October 1956, there was a withdrawal of socialists from the British Communist Party. It is important to realise, as Mortimer points out, that this was not specifically due to the revelations regarding Stalin nor the invasion of Hungary, but that before this there was a growing sense of "moral disillusionment with communist practices inside and outside the socialist countries" and the belief "that communist theoretical work had stagnated and degenerated under the weight of its organizational rigidity, and that the revivification of marxism could only proceed outside bodies which refuse or were unable to remodel party structures which had become iminical to creative research and its application".

Following this, in 1957, two new journals were created in England. These were Universities and Left Review and The Reasoner (later called The New Reasoner). The former journal was the work of a group of undergraduates and junior academics, not all of whom were former members of the communist party. Here "the ideals of socialism were rediscovered, and the kind of humanist analysis that had been forgotten through purges, war and Cold war was revived"; this entailed an emphasis on sociological and literary contributions, the work of the early Marx and its subsequent influence on people like Fromm and Marcuse, debating about concepts like humanism and alienation. The Reasoner was the product of "dissident communists mostly in their middle years" and presented traditional Marxist analysis of British society and the Labour movement. In 1959 these merged to form New Left Review, though tension between the two groups was evident, leading later to the withdrawal of The Reasoner people, and the journal passing into the hands of the younger group where it continues today, maintaining the same analytical trend and exerting an influence in Australia amongst some left intellectuals and activists.

The British new left developed as an ideological and intellectual force rather than as an activist one. This is not, of course, to ignore the anti-Vietnam war campaign nor the student power struggles etc. However the role of the British new left was conceived "primarily as that of a theoretical stimulus in the Labour movement, and secondarily as active agents of socialist ideas inside the Labour Party". What it set out to achieve is what Mortimer has seen as a necessary task for the Australian left - that is a shift in emphasis from administrative concerns to research and theory, "the development of specialised expertise" and the devising of a means of bringing this into the political arena.

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6 Ibid
7 Ibid
10 Cahill, R., op. cit., pp 11-12.
In summary then it rejected the British Communist Party as relevant to the political arena and sought to influence the Labour Party whilst recognising its non-socialist character, but taking into account its contact with the masses. Concerned with ideology it rejected the Leninist concepts of state and revolution as being inapplicable to western capitalist-democracies; hence the appeal of Gramsci whose marxism was conceived with western institutions in mind.

In the United States it was a different story. The passivity of the drop out and apathetic generation of the fifties, characterised by Newfield as "The Beat Generation and the Un-generation", was shaken by the non-violent civil rights movement in the South. This was a crusade in which people were drawn together in the name of action where "no complex political creed or firm organization commitment" was required. Theory was ignored and such left journals as existed "were not seen......as being relevant." Then with the internal repression of the Cold War period at an ebb, American youth, mainly students, began to enlist the tactics of the civil rights movement against, for example, the House Un-American Activities Committee. Again the emphasis was on direct action, and as with the civil rights movement, the appeal was to emotion and feeling rather than to the development and elaboration of theory, goals and tactics as aids in the realisation of ideals which were not being practised. These activists "had learned a set of ideals from their parents and now, much to their parents' discomfiture, they were trying to put those ideals into practise". As Lipset has expressed, "Educated young people everywhere......tend disproportionately to support idealistic movements which take the ideologies or values of the adult world more seriously than does the adult world itself."

The importance of these early activities is that student youth met and worked together "in traditional liberal issue politics", seeing

16 Newfield writes (op. cit. p.40) "My own suspicion is that rebellion explodes not when repression is at its worst, but when it begins to ebb, when the possibility of something better is dimly glimpsed".
17 Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau, op. cit., p.21.
aspects of American society that needed to be changed, and using direct action as the means of bringing about reform. As a result groups characterised by appeals to direct action, emotion, and anti-ideological in nature developed. As one SDS member commented in 1965, "it does seem to me that one of the key problems at the moment is that people lack a sense of priorities, that there is a great deal of inarticulateness; and almost random behaviour among students who want to do effective social action, or - the other side of the coin - some few people do have formulated strategies which in the absence of systematic discussion, get imposed on the rest all unnoticed, all unexamined..." 20

Arising out of involvement in the civil rights movement and the liberal issue type of politics came the new left. Its program included the organisation of communities "in which participatory democracy could... be practised", 21 that is democracy based on the individual participating in the making of those decisions that affect his life. The 1962 SDS Port Huron Statement was a general critique of American society, suggesting ways in which radical politics might develop, and emphasising reform through working with 'liberal' institutions such as Americans for Democratic Action, and political parties. "It shows a faith in the student civil rights movement as the engine of change to build a coalition of liberal-labor-civil rights forces". 22

However during the period 1964-65 this phase of the new left program was replaced by another. Its death knell was the Berkeley revolt, when students campaigned for the right to use the Berkeley campus of the University of California as a base for political activity. The result was that, in the struggle, criticism of the university was linked with the criticism of American society, the university was seen to be part of society joined by an intricate net of relationships. The tactics of direct action were utilised and the university campus became the centre for radical action.

Then in 1966 the new left community projects failed, partly due to uncertainty regarding the direction of future development and problems of leadership; the non-violent negro youth were forced to self defence and black power. "It became clear to many young radicals that their emphasis on spontaneity and grass root activity and their opposition to ideology had led them into a reformist dead end". 23 One result of this was the initiation by SDS of the Radical Education Project (1966) aimed at assisting their better understanding of American society through original research, a review of available existing knowledge, conferences, the publication of books, pamphlets and papers. Also left behind was the "liberal issue" strand, apparent in the Port Huron statement, in favour of left opposition. As Draper expresses this latter, it is the "wish to stand outside the Establishment as an open opposition, achieving even

20 Excerpt from a paper by Dick Flacks in Jacobs and Landau, op. cit., p. 169.
short-term changes by the pressure of a bold alternative, while seeking roads to fundamental transformations."

From the preceding it is seen that the term 'new left' designates different things, depending upon the society in which it is an aspect. The British new left began as a reaction against the political style and methods of an established political left, whilst the American new left formed "in response to challenges posed by the strains in American society as a whole". The movements have developed in relation to the peculiarities of the individual societies, and influencing factors must include the nature of the radical tradition of the respective societies, the styles of radical politics as they have developed, the nature of the established left. One must not think that Britain and America are the only societies in which there is a new left. There appears to be a tendency amongst commentators to select only one model for a new left, that is the American, but there are also new lefts in Germany, Italy and Sweden.

Before moving on to the new left in Australia I put forward the following by way of defining what is broadly, and generally, meant by the term "new left". The new left is a social movement mainly composed of students combining the revolt of youth in its sexual, moral and intellectual forms with the search for new political structures, entailing the rejection of rigid organisation and ideological dogmatism, and emphasising the concept of "participatory democracy" (this latter means that each individual should have a share in the making of decisions that affect his life and furthermore "that society be organised to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation". This is the ideal contained in the slogans "student power" and "workers control"); it poses humanist values and ideas against the impersonal values of bureaucracy, rejecting the fatalism which holds that we are powerless to change things, the determinism which says that social change can only come about through certain slow and tried political processes (thus the appeal of revolutionary leaders like Castro and Che Guevara, people who dared to go about things the "wrong way", who emphasized the role of the individual human being, defying fatalistic determinism and bringing about change.), and the attitude that "history has in fact come to an end" and that there will be no more substantial change made in society, only adjustments by "standard procedures."  


25 Mortimer, R., loc. cit., p. 22.

26 This is the approach suggested and followed by Mortimer in his essay on the New Left; refer especially to pages 27-29.

27 H. McQueen raises this point in Broadside June 26, 1969, pp. 18-19.


A phenomenon of the post-war generation it is a product of higher education and its institutions, and the perception that youth, especially students, is capable of constituting a new grouping in society, capable of exerting political power, of having "a positive social meaning" rather than a biological one. 30

By offering this definition I do not imply that the new left is only a student phenomenon; but that it concerns youth generally. However in Australia it is centred in the universities amongst students and academics. It is also important to realise that some of the ideas associated with the new left are not confined to any one generation. Nor is the reading of the works of Fromm, Marcuse, Gramsci, Marx, Mills, Fanon, Laing, for example, and the absorbing of their ideas, the feature or prerogative of one generation. For example in the British Communist Party there has been some re-thinking done along the lines of thought characteristic of the British new left, but it is hard to say whether this is due to the influence of the British new left, or the fact that other marxists, independent of the British new left, have developed along similar lines. 31 Similarly if we notice some re-thinking in the Australian Communist Party along lines suggested by the Australian new left, it will be hard to say whether these trends result from marxist analysis within the Party, independent of new left influence, or whether in fact the ideas of the new left itself have had some impact.

It has been seen that the British new left came into being following disillusionment with communist political style and methods, and following the 20th. Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the invasion of Hungary in 1956 when some socialists withdrew from the British Communist Party. In Australia a similar phenomenon took place. Barcan suggests "that between 1956 and 1958 there was an acceleration in the decline of communist strength, a mild socialist revival within the left-wing of the Labor Party and the emergence of a 'new left' based on magazines and discussion groups", like that which formed around OUTLOOK. 32

Amongst students there was also a decline in left political activity. At Sydney University, for example, the ALP-DLP split in 1955 weakened the student Labor Club. A year later the events of Hungary "produced......anti-left feeling and the continuance of the Cold War soon reduced political life at Sydney University to a virtual stop." 33 A period of student apathy and conservatism followed.

31 Mortimer, R., loc. cit., p. 22.
However in early 1960 from Melbourne came the reformist student action based on a variety of liberal issues, for example aborigines, immigration reform, racial policy in South Africa and the Southern United States, capital punishment, federal aid for education; this was unideological and based on the ad hoc committee basis.\(^34\) It has variously been claimed that the student power movement in Australia is part of the social turbulence that began with student action\(^35\), that an accurate analysis of the new left has to take it into account\(^36\), and on the other hand that it is irrelevant because some of those students who "played an important role in student action now appear to support the DLP.\(^37\)

The current support of the DLP by some former student action people does not negate the role of student action in the emergence of the new left. Its role was similar to that of the SAFA (Student Action for Aborigines) Bus Ride in February 1965, in that students began to look critically at Australian Society, that they began to see themselves as a social group capable of having political influence; this, after a period of conservatism and apathy related to the decline of the campus left and the repressive influence of the Cold War. I suggest this reactivation of Australian students was in part due to the activation of students overseas, in the civil rights movement and the OND, this heralding the end of Cold War repression and giving vent to youthful idealism.

The SAFA Bus Ride is an important factor deserving examination. The object of the bus ride was to examine conditions of Aborigines in some towns in Northern NSW. Various incidents highlighted the tour. In Moree, when the students tried to gain admission, to the local swimming pool, for aboriginal children a crowd gathered to abuse and spit on them. Someone in the crowd yelled, "Let's string them up". Eggs and fruit were thrown by irate white Australian citizenry at the students' bus, and punches were thrown at the students themselves.

SAFA was an independent group consisting of members of various political and religious clubs who came together for the express purpose of organising around the Aboriginal rights issue. The interest in this issue stemmed partly from the development of the US civil rights movement, which was then at its peak. Since 1964 Sydney students had been active in support of the US civil rights movement and had demonstrated outside the US Consulate on Commemoration Day, 1964, resulting in mass arrests. This interest prompted students to examine race relations in their own society. Their first action on this issue was a demonstration outside Parliament House later that year.

36 Gordon, R., loc. cit., pp. 5-6.
The aims of SAFA were explained by its secretary: "In discussions beforehand we thought that short-term student action should try to draw attention to Aboriginal problems in housing, education and so on. This became our prime aim. Second, we should try to integrate as many facilities as we could by student action. Third, we aimed to get the Aborigines interested in standing up for themselves and opposing segregated facilities." 39

For the following reasons SAFA was important in the emergence of the new left:

(a) Prompted by US developments students examined their own society

(b) It was the first time the tactics of the US civil rights movement were applied to the Australian situation. Since then these tactics have been utilised by Australian students in the anti-Vietnam and anti-conscription campaign.

(c) Student action began to reveal tensions that existed under the surface of Australian society.

(d) It was an experience of unity amongst a variety of student groups. This unity has since developed around other specific issues eg. poverty, and education.

(e) Students developed the realisation, which had first been made in the early sixties, that it was possible for them to exert political pressure, to be a force for social change.

As well as student action, the early sixties saw the revival of left wing student political clubs on campus. By 1961 "socialist students were beginning to reorganise their clubs and the years up to 1965 saw a growth in membership of left-wing clubs and a general resurgence in political life..." 40

This revival initially owed a great deal to the student socialists who continued to function during the Cold War period, who worked for consolidation following the process of fragmentation launched by the DLP-ALP split and the events of 1956. The resurgence of the student left was facilitated by the Vietnam war, the Australian commitment to it, conscription, and overseas events like the student movement at Berkeley, California. However a full account of this period will have to analyse the role during the Cold War and early sixties of the Eureka Youth League and its relation with leftist student clubs, where there was a cross membership - students who were EYL'ers and also Labor club members. Certainly its influence was strong in Sydney where the first demonstrations against the Vietnam war were called by the EYL. However in other States there were varying degrees of influence; for example in Melbourne this was virtually non-existent.


Whilst the Vietnam war and conscription served as issues around which the left could mobilise it does not explain why a new left developed; why didn’t the students go into the Labor Party, or the Communist Party? It is important here to realise that in 1966 "the young left looked forward to a Labor victory. It worked incredibly hard. In Victoria the students and youth ran the 'Vote No' Campaign and the Liberal Reform Campaign. They felt a tremendous sense of purpose and looked forward to great achievements. The defeat that followed either shocked them into apathy or slowly gave rise to undirected militancy". 41 One result in Victoria was the formation of the NLF-Aid Committees.

In Sydney there was a similar development. A group of young student leftists and academics set up the Sydney Committee for Labor Victory, with the aim of getting students to campaign for the ALP. It worked with enthusiasm and expended much energy with speeches and pamphlet distribution. According to one report the Committee only succeeded in losing votes for the party, in the electorate where its activities were centred, by its radicalism regarding the Vietnam war and conscription. A participant recently related that, "the party has never forgiven us, as things will never be the same for the ALP in that electorate. As a result we were slapped in the face by the ALP, and the students who had expended so much time and energy felt rather cut." 42 In December 1966 some of those who had been in the Committee for Labor Victory set up SDS.

Thus we have two explanations why student leftists started up their own extra-party organisations. First the ALP had been defeated, and the Victorian experience indicates a great sense of disillusionment amongst the students who worked for victory, culminating in "undirected militancy" - as McQueen puts it. In short "conventional party politics seemed to offer little chance of bringing about any change in policy." 43 Second, in Sydney, the students were "punished" by the ALP for being too radical, and so SDS was created. For whilst the students could only work within and for the party "the conservative and reactionary elements of the ALP were being given an excellent opportunity to compromise (the students) political sincerity." 44 It should be noted here that in 1967 Monash students were also given cause to react against the ALP when the Peace Movement prevented students from taking proposed militant action (ie. burning the US flag and staging a sit-down outside the US Consulate on July 4) by threatening that the ALP would publicly withdraw from the protest. 45

45 McQueen, H., "A Single Spark", loc. cit., p.52.
However this does not necessarily mean that the new leftists 'drop out' of the ALP altogether. In 1968 an interview with seven student radicals was published in *Australian Left Review*. Three of these were ALP members; one expressed the view that "radicals should work within the Labor Party to radicalise it in an attempt to present a real opposition." 46 Recently Sydney radical organiser Bob Gould stated that "in Australian conditions on the level of mass political parties its madness to operate anywhere but in the ALP." 47 One of the creators of SDS, Mike Jones, is a current ALP member. 48

As has been seen earlier one of the aims of the British new left was to work to bring about a change in the British Labour Party. Furthermore, when looking at the American new left, it was seen that the Port Huron statement stressed working with established 'liberal' institutions and political parties. The rejection of ideological dogmatism, the aim of breaking new theoretical ground, of seeking new political structures, means that the new leftists will no longer be contained by those things they reject; it does not necessarily mean that they reject mass political parties altogether, but that they may work in political parties on their terms, not on party terms. An extreme manifestation of this independence is seen in the following statement by Mike Jones; "...the (students) radicals who don't agree with the ALP are virtually saying to them that unless you begin to do a few things we want, we'll turn on a riot next year (1969) - eg, a riot two days before the election would virtually kill Mr. Whitlam's chances of becoming leader and he knows it, he's scared of it." 49

Commentators have drawn attention to links between the new left and the Communist Party of Australia. 50 Certainly there has been contact between the new leftists and the CPA. For example new left activists have written for CPA publications; 51 the National Committee of the CPA pledged full support for SDS in its campaign against conscription. 52 Current CPA interest in students and academics dates from the 21st Party Congress (Sydney, June 1967) where one of the documents debated concerned

46 "Student Activism", *Australian Left Review* No.4, August-September 1968, pp. 48-49.
53 This document, titled "Towards a Coalition of the Left", was released by the CPA in December 1966.
radicalism in the universities; one result of this was the policy decision by the CPA to seek a coalition of the left, and the party's leadership "has attempted to forge and maintain links with the student movement."

In this, it has been opposed by a strong section of the party which views this as "an abandonment of the workers". However, it does not follow from this that the communists are "behind" the new left and at the root of student unrest; it does not follow that a causal relationship exists between the two. As far as the CPA is concerned, I would suggest that contact between it and the new left did not really begin to materialise until after the events of May (1968) in France, when the potential of students as allies was realised. After the May revolt, Tribune began to take an interest in what was happening on campus and academics and students were invited to contribute articles.

A very real point to consider here is the role of the new left in influencing the CPA. The Queensland State Secretary of the CPA has stated that, "We communists, working to improve our party, can learn from the students..." Gordon points out that where the CPA has supported the new left, it has been "support for student-initiated action. The truth of the matter is that the activities of the student movement are leading to at least a partial reassessment by the CPA of the nature of its role." Mortimer has made the point that whilst the British new left set out to influence the Labour Party it's most lasting effects will be on the British Communist Party.

Given the links that do exist between the new left and the CPA the question has to be asked why new left personnel have not joined the party. Certainly some reject the CPA as being politically irrelevant. Others see the communists as "past masters in the methods of controlling and running United Front organisations" thus forcing those new leftists who associate with them to compromise their political sincerity. The view of the CPA as a bureaucratic organisation, obsessed with "old and dead battles", permeated with a Stalinist view of the world, does not meet with the approval of those who are attracted to the work of the British new left and the neo-marxists.

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56 Tribune, March 12, 1969.
59 Refer here to the view of Gould that it is madness in Australia "on the level of mass political parties" to "operate anywhere but in the ALP". *The Australian*, 20 May 1969.
61 Source material illustrating some of the very real differences that exist within the CPA is the party's publication *Discussion*. *A Communist Forum on Australian and International Affairs*, No.4, October 1968. The subject of this issue was Czechoslovakia.
From the previous data it should not be taken that the new left developed only after the defeat of the ALP in November 1965. In August of that year a new left group SDA (Society for Democratic Action) was formed in Brisbane. The conception of SDA took place during 1965 amidst the development of a small but significant degree of social criticism on the University of Queensland's campus. A group of students concerned about the Vietnam war attempted to voice their political dissent by holding demonstrations and distributing leaflets in Brisbane's streets. Their attempts to do so were frustrated by the State Government acting on provisions within the State Traffic Act. SDA was formed to combat these latter. During the next year other issues were included - education, Aborigines, conservation, local government, as well as conscription and Vietnam. At first these were seen as being entirely unrelated, however it evolved to the stage where they were seen as parts of a whole; SDA came to an understanding that the capitalist system is in fact suppressing human needs.

The important point to make about SDA is that it developed the "notion of a student-worker alliance well before the world was made aware of the possibilities of such co-operation in France". This was achieved by working with the trade union movement via the Queensland Trades and Labor Council, and by absorbing elements of the Young Socialist League. Early in 1966 SDA founded a youth club (FOQD) in Brisbane's Trades Hall and for a time one leading activist became Research Officer of the Queensland Trades and Labor Council. Perhaps one reason why this student-worker alliance developed was because the students had to make contact with the trade union movement because there was no other developed opposition to the status quo, and taking into account the peculiar nature of Queensland (see the recent censorship controversy) the pressure of standing alone in opposition must have been considerable for the students. In fact there is evidence to suggest that the students consciously aligned themselves with what was seen as the radical tradition of Queensland's trade unions.

64 O'Neill, D., loc. cit., p.12.
65 Ibid., p.13.
66 Brian Laver, one of the leaders of SDA at the time, devotes half of his article "Behind Student Action", loc. cit., to sketching in the history of Queensland's trade unionists struggle "to achieve a power position which would establish their right to form associations to fight for a more efficient planning and equal distribution of wealth." He mentions Burdalline in the 1890's, the Brisbane strike of 1912 when unionists were met with fixed bayonets, the Red Flag Riots of 1918 when police opened fire on demonstrators wounding 16, (pp.22-23).
Drawing a general point from this material relating to the attitude of the new left to the ALP and the CPA it can be said that the Australian new left is not as hostile to the established political parties of the left, and the labour movement, as are overseas new lefts, for example the American new left which started out by regarding the "old left" as irrelevant. As Altman points out some young activists "maintain links with Young Labor and the YSL; because the Victorian ALP has shown more concern with the war than other State branches more activists belong to the YLA in Victoria than in other States". 68 In fact there may be in Australia an element of opportunism; McQueen urges students to work "through the existing power-structures of the working-class, namely the ALP, the CPA, and the trade unions" in order to reach the rank and file as a preparatory step "in the construction of a mass revolutionary party in Australia". 69

It has been claimed by Henderson that the Australian new left as a movement is derived "almost completely from the United States". 70 This has been contested; Gordon distinguishes two types of new lefts in Australia. 71 There is the socialist oriented group - two examples are Brisbane SDA (now regrouped as the Revolutionary Socialist Alliance) and Adelaide SDA which although in no way connected to the former, has developed along similar lines, for example in its attitude to the trade union movement. This type is influenced by the European style of new left. Ideologically Adelaide SDA has been influenced by the British new left. 72 On the other hand there is "the self-proclaimed anti-theoretical stand of SDS (Melbourne and Sydney) and their overriding commitment to action," 73 influenced by the American new left. Thus the new left in Australia is not a monolithic movement. Rather it consists of a number of groups, spread throughout the country and organised both on and off the university campuses. It is "a diffuse and diverse 'movement' acting with differing strategic theories, with differing financial, organisational and ideological strengths."

I have drawn attention in this paper to the existence of SDA Adelaide

67 P. Jacobs and S. Landau, op. cit., p.20.
68 Dennis Altman, "Party Youth Groups in Australia", in Henry Mayer, op. cit., p.184.
69 McQueen, H. "A Single Spark", loc. cit., p.54.
71 Gordon, R., loc. cit., p.5.
72 Cahill, R., op. cit., p.11.
73 Gordon; R., loc. cit., p.5.
SDA (now RSA) Brisbane; and SDS, which is now organised in Hobart, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaida. Although a national phenomenon SDS is not a rigid bureaucratic, centralised organisation. Each group is an autonomous unit and individual differences are to be noted (for example Melbourne SDS is more prepared, and able, to present intelligent discussion and informed analysis by way of written material than is Sydney SDS). In Sydney there is the youth organisation Resistance; some of the university Labor Clubs, the traditional vehicle of the student left, must also be termed new left (eg. Sydney and Monash Labor Clubs). Given the socialist orientation of some of these groups it should be pointed out that whilst they are interested in developments overseas in socialist countries they do not have any real stake in them as the leftists of the thirties had in the USSR. They reject communism as it has become known to us today but are not anti-communist in the Cold War sense of the term.

Regarding all these groups the following is noted. Firstly, there are few full-time organisers, mainly because it is a student led part-time movement and finances are meagre. In some groups there are no compulsory membership fees. Money is raised via bookstalls on campus, appeals and donations. In at least two capital cities groups have each established a city bookshop which serves as a base of operations and a source of income. Secondly, there is or will be in the near future, a turnover of membership amongst the groups comprising the new left. Students do not always remain students - they graduate or drop out. Again, there is a small degree of mobility as membership changes from one group to another.

Returning to the issue about the "derivation" of the new left, granting that the Australian new left is influenced by its overseas counterparts, and accepting the fact that leftist youth in Australia, at least since the time of student action, has been influenced by overseas movements such as CND, the US civil rights movement, the European and US new lefts, to what extent can it be argued that it is a derived movement and therefore irrelevant - a passing fad? Before this can be answered the question should be asked, to what extent are Australian social movements derived in the above sense? In the context of the new left, to what extent are the Australian versions enriched by their overseas counterparts; to what extent do the latter "reinforce existing trends and analyses"? On the other hand when an Australian new leftist uses the jargon of the overseas new left, what is he trying to say? Could "participatory democracy" really be part of the Australian tradition, a political expression of some of the values of

74 Desmond, W. loc. cit., p.2.
75 Descriptive material relating to new left groups in Australia is in R. Cahill, loc. cit.
76 R. Cahill and T. Irving, loc. cit., p.20.
"mateship"? Taking the example of Brisbane SDA and the trade union movement - did the activists see themselves as part of the radical tradition of Queensland's trade unions and consciously seek to align themselves with it? Or was it simply the case of middle class students trying to act like "lefties" by mixing with the workers? Furthermore how is it that the new left of the sixties has developed intellectually in a way similar to the new left of the mid-fifties, in the absence of communication between the two generations? Describing the new left of the mid-fifties Barcan noted that it rejected dogmatism and the party line, and was concerned with humanism, the 'alienation of man', political liberty. "Its theory of political economy leans towards concepts such as control from below, decentralisation, producers' self-management." These are similar to the concerns of the new left of the sixties. What I am asserting here is the need to study the new left in the context of Australian society in its broadest sense, and not as an alien interloper.

There is, I feel, one important question to ask about the new left: "what is its contribution to society?" Altman suggests that whilst the youth organisation of the Liberal Party is "likely to provide us with our future Cabinet Ministers the emerging Australian young left may supply us with our future political ideas." Gordon makes the point that already the Australian new left has led "to at least a partial reassessment by the CPA of the nature of its role". There is evidence to suggest that in the trade union movement it may also have some effect; for example the General Secretary of the Union of Postal Clerks and Telegraphists has written: "The intuition and understanding of workers is now being matched by the new awareness and understanding of the students and, for a time, as starting points, the latter's awareness may be more important than the former's." Not only are the traditional political structures of the working class being affected; for people disillusioned by the history of the last decade of the Australian left are beginning to be politically reactivated.

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77 Writing in 1968 Laver saw the SDA Civil Liberties struggle of 1967 in the context of the trade unions' struggle for civil rights resulting from "the suppression of industrial rights". However he pointed out that: "Today however, and especially in the 1967 Civil Liberties struggle, I think it would be true to say that not many unionists saw the connection between industrial and civil liberty". "Behind Student Action", loc. cit., pp. 22 - 33.

78 Barcan, A., op. cit., p.6.

79 Dennis Altman, "Party Youth Groups in Australia", in Henry Mayer op. cit., p. 185.

80 Gordon, R., loc. cit., p.6.

81 Baker, J.S. "Trade Unions", Outlook, Vol.12, No.6, December 1968, p.16.
Some commentators draw a parallel between the upsurge of left political activity during the thirties with that of the sixties. Will the new leftists of today become the conservatives of tomorrow? It needs to be pointed out that the thirties and sixties are two entirely different periods of time and historically unique. Therefore what happened in the thirties will not necessarily be repeated in the sixties. The leftists created in the thirties were shattered psychologically by the depression, the economic and social problems of unemployment and loss of status. The middle class leftists of the sixties have been created in the midst of affluence. Factors contributing to their creation, for example conscription and the Vietnam war, have reflected back on the quality and type of society they live in. They have taken a stand against it not because they have suffered a trauma at the apparent collapse of capitalist society, but because of the trauma of seeing, as they believe, an immoral, unjust and hypocritical society flourishing, regardless of humanity and seemingly impervious to the dictates of reason.

When the question, "what do you think will happen to present-day student radicals after they graduate?" was put to seven student leftists, three thought that more radicals would remain radical than was the case in previous times. One thought that an organisation was needed to help radicals maintain their militancy; another felt that the experience of the thirties could be repeated, but that it was possible there "may be a further concentration of radicals in universities as university staffs expand and this could help to maintain and develop radicalism". The remaining two said that they did not really know what is likely to happen.

The activists who formed Brisbane SDA in 1966 have now graduated from university, or dropped out. In April this year they decided to dissolve SDA and set up Action Committees in their places of employment; "at whatever level we may be working or studying - from job levels to colleges, from specific educational institutions to faculties, from the public service to the underprivileged" and strive to build a "movement to challenge the structures of this Society". A recent SDA (Sydney) article put forward the strategy of permeation, that graduates should become part of the Establishment and "attempt to make alterations to policies, institutions, and value-priorities...".

Whilst the Australian new left has failed as yet to produce an analysis of itself in relation to its origins, aims, and to lay guidelines for the future, some work has been done, and the current trend of published material suggests that in the very near future such an analysis will be forthcoming.

The new left is wide open for research; I hope that you take the phenomenon seriously, and that some research will be done.

82 "Student Activism", Australian Left Review, No.4, August-Sept. 1968, p.49-60
84 O’Connell, C., "A Strategy of Social Change", Hard Boil, June 25 1969, p.7. Regarding the permeation strategy as a mode of operation Hal Draper op. cit., p.170 has written: "What separates the style of the radical 'New Left' from liberals who may agree on many given issues, is their rejection of the permeationist method."