

## **Legacy and Impact of the American New Left: National and International Influence**

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### **Abstract**

*This article analyzes the legacy and impact of the Sixties New Left both at the national and international levels. Indeed, its reformist and revolutionary years, which almost spanned a ten-year-period (1960-1970), have marked Western societies forever. Moreover, the paper shows that the Sixties protesters have sown the seeds of protest for the generations to come and left some remains in society that public opinion now takes for granted. The article also insists on the fact that both American and European movements learnt from each other, although each of them wanted to be considered the main source of inspiration for the other activists..*

**Keywords:** New Left – Sixties – Legacy – United States – Europe..

### ***The New Left as a Guiding Force***

The American New Left, a protest political current which emerged in the Sixties, was composed of a myriad of social groups, better known as “The Movement.” Their common goal was to radically transform the American capitalist society. Blacks, ethnic minorities, women, homosexuals, and students were part of it. The students who mostly belonged to the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), an organization founded in 1960 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, became the spearhead of anti-establishment activities in the United States. Thus, for most observers and participants, “Movement,” “New Left,” and “SDS” were three interchangeable expressions including more or less the same realities. Students were the common denominator of all these activists. The manifesto of the New Left, the *Port Huron Statement*, drafted by Tom Hayden in 1962, rapidly became the main document of the movement. The New Left favored direct actions and differentiated itself from the Marxist-oriented Old Left which was considered too ideological, doctrinarian and sectarian. The New Left went through two main phases.

First, a nonviolent reformist period with no ideological framework between 1960 and 1965, then a more violent period between 1965 and 1970, during which the movement embraced revolutionary ideas because its members had realized that their actions had very little impact on American society and that the time had come to give more weight to their protest actions. The escalation of the war in Vietnam really marked the shift between reformism and revolution and served as the reorientation to the New Left’s political line. However, this lack of consistency and these never-ending strategic and ideological fluctuations inexorably led to the disintegration of the New Left in the early-Seventies. Although it only lasted about ten years on the American political scene, there is no denying that the New Left has had a great impact both at the national and international levels. Indeed, not only have American protesters changed the image of radicalism in the United States and in other industrialized countries, but they have also deeply transformed the global political scene.

The New Left served as a precursor when it became, to a certain extent, the echo chamber of all American evils. As a result, it has sown the seeds that other movements of social transformation have caused to blossom while allowing a redefinition of culture by insisting on personal, interpersonal, and spiritual aspects. As a matter of fact, these movements are the worthy successors of the New Left. Its idealism also spread to the international scene as it influenced most protesters who wanted to make themselves heard. Contrary to the New Right which was—and still is—uncompromising, adamant, and fundamentalist, militarist, patriarchal and homophobic, the movements which emerged in the wake of the New Left were mainly libertarian, communitarian, anti-militarist, spiritual and humanist. The direct actions of the multi-faceted New Left had five main consequences: they allowed society to be more liberal but triggered off governmental crackdowns, paved the way for university reforms and served as a source of inspiration for American and European protesters.

## ***American Legacy***

After the Fifties which were marked by conservative rigor because of McCarthyism, and then with the Sixties which were turbulent and permissive years because of large-scale waves of protest and the counterculture, American society experienced a more liberal political climate in the Seventies and Eighties despite the elections of republican presidents such as Nixon (1969-1974), Ford (1974-1977) and Reagan (1981-1988).<sup>1</sup> Some figures speak for themselves. According to polls carried out by Gallup in September 1979, 68% of Americans said they were hostile to premarital sexual intercourse, whereas in May 1970, one young American out of three thought that virginity was not compulsory when getting married. Another poll, conducted in November 1970, showed that a large part of the population (86%) was opposed to the legalization of marijuana.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it seems that the themes of sex and drugs which were popular within the countercultural movement were gaining ground in some specific social groups whereas mainstream America showed overt hostility to them. Even though these results are not particularly clear-cut, it is important to note that society was somewhat getting more liberal.

Under Democratic President Jimmy Carter (1977-1981), the United States became more permissive than in the past. In August 1977, the president proposed to partially legalize marijuana so as to reduce the consumption of harder drugs such as cocaine, heroin, or LSD. A great number of very Republican and conservative families were extremely shocked by such measures they considered decadent. On the contrary, marijuana smokers and the members of the countercultural movement celebrated this decision on May 5, 1979, a day which rapidly became known as "Pot Day." As promised by President Carter, there were no police forces during the demonstration which remained peaceful all the way through. Carter also declared that he was in favor of a new tolerance: after the partial legalization of marijuana, sexual freedom had to gain ground and heterosexuality and homosexuality no longer had to be repressed. For him, this liberalization was in the air and conservative principles had to go away. President Carter also stood for abortion and believed that interrupting pregnancies should no longer be considered an act of cowardice or a murder but a responsible decision insofar as the mother—with or without the consent of her partner—was aware that she was not able to take care of her baby for personal or financial reasons.

After such permissive years, the election of Ronald Reagan in November 1980 did not come as a big surprise. The former governor of California, the "Great Communicator," famous for being a straight-talker and fighting against Californian political and cultural activists in the late Sixties, was elected to put the country back on its feet from a moral, economic and social point of view. His decisions were to be poles apart from Carter's policies. Still, Reagan did not do much to reduce drug consumption. Indeed, the number of marijuana smokers on campuses had declined from 11% to 7% between 1978 and 1981, in other words before his election. At the same time, amphetamine consumption had increased dramatically.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the Reagan Administration could not be held responsible for the return to monogamy. Indeed, other factors might have convinced people to curb their sexual appetites: AIDS made a great number of victims within drug and homosexual communities and the growing development of sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, although some conservative politicians tried to be given credit for a return to moral normalcy, there was no denying the fact that the Sixties protest movements had a great impact on the mores of American society. The crackdown which followed and was particularly strong on American campuses, and whose goal was to thwart any student uprising, was really the work of hard-core conservatives.

Although most student protest movements had disappeared in the late Sixties, some federal agencies like the CIA or the FBI investigated the protesters in the Seventies and Eighties. Governmental crackdown was institutionalized because the time had come to make students understand who was running the country. In 1970, President Nixon asked for a report on campus unrest so as to analyze the uprisings the Sixties had gone through while suggesting the repressive methods to be used to make sure that such events would not happen again. Richard Nixon's election in 1968 had marked the starting-point of the drastic measures taken to fight against troublemakers and the main protest movements.

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<sup>1</sup> Democrats were to get back to power in 1992 with Bill Clinton.

<sup>2</sup> G. H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll, Public Opinion: 1935-1971*, New York: Random House, 1972, pp. 2256-57.

<sup>3</sup> "Marijuana Smoking Off, Use of 'Uppers' Increase," in *The Washington Post*, February 25, 1982.

<sup>4</sup> "Sex in the US: Conservative Views Prevail," in *International Herald Tribune*, October 6, 1983.

A great number of administrations and services, such as the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration or the Community Relations Service, working in close collaboration with the Justice Department, were in charge of investigating the main activists so as to make sure they were not about to foment another crisis.<sup>5</sup> These two agencies, under the control of Attorney General John Mitchell, were part of a program entitled Campus Rebellion. The federal agents working for Mitchell had to track down all the students who had breached university rules and then send them to court. All possible methods were used to spy on these people: wiretapping, reading all the letters they wrote and received, and the creation of special files by the FBI. In other words, the American government had turned paranoid. High-ranking officials feared that these youths might be about to plot so as to overthrow the government and its institutions. Consequently, it was not really surprising to observe that 58% of American students viewed their society as extremely repressive and intolerant in a Harris poll of May 1970.<sup>6</sup> Some intelligence agencies such as the Civil Service Commission, the Education and Welfare, the FBI and the CIA did not lose much time to file all protesters. The most effective agency was J. Edgar Hoover's FBI which went as far as infiltrating some university campuses, academic circles and student groups to know what they might be about to do. Congress passed several laws to make it easier for federal agents to lead their investigations. They were supposed to allow the FBI to work freely. Such was the case of the Omnibus Crime Bill (1970) which allowed intelligence services to centralize information about the activists and have an easy access to this database from anywhere in the country.

Moreover, federal agents could investigate on American campuses at any time without any prior notice. The university was viewed as the place where people secretly plotted to overthrow the government. Besides, university administrations could dismiss any student suspected of illegal or revolutionary behavior and suppress the grants students could profit from. Faculty members were in the exact same situation as they could be fired immediately if they misbehaved or supported illegal or objectionable actions. Just like UC Berkeley, these universities hired psychologists in charge of questioning students before their admission so as to diagnose predispositions or potential signs of protest activities. The loyalty oaths of the Fifties did not go that far. University administrations also reinforced their security staff and asked companies to install state-of-the-art surveillance cameras at strategic locations on campus so as to see what was going on and be ready to send guards in case the situation spun out of control. In addition, the war in Vietnam could be used as a means of pressure insofar as student repeat offenders could be sent to Southeast Asia, which was supposed to deter them from protesting.

As a result, the influence of protest movements belonging to the New Left might not have been necessarily positive for civil rights and individual liberties because of the strict repressive methods institutionalized by the paranoid Nixon administration. Government crackdown aimed at student protesters slowed down after the Watergate scandal which ultimately led to Nixon's resignation on August 9, 1974. For example, Congress passed the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) in 1975 allowing the population—and especially activists—to have access to their FBI files to find out the methods used to track them down and spy upon them without their noticing it.

The Ford and Carter administrations were drastically different from the Nixon administration and students could really feel the change. The election of Ronald Reagan marked another turning point in police surveillance. This could be explained by the fact that he had been confronted to the Berkeley events and hippie gatherings when he was governor of California from 1967 onwards, a title which enabled him to sit on the Berkeley Board of Regents. Reagan did everything he could to prevent students from having access to their personal files for fear they might try to track down the federal agents or people who had given precise information about them.

It is hard to say whether the direct actions of most New Leftists had a positive impact on the future generations as far as individual liberties were concerned. However, their successors can be thankful for the Sixties activists for easing the university rules and making some academic reforms possible for them. Indeed, student protest improved the living conditions on campus and made the university administration sensitive to the efforts that were to be made to have a better atmosphere on campus.

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<sup>5</sup> Richard E. MORGAN, *Domestic Intelligence: Monitoring Dissent in America*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980, pp. 113-33.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

For example, UC Berkeley wished to improve the relationships between students and administrative staff and renew the dialogue with the whole student community so that everybody could enjoy the new university climate. Although hierarchy could not be wiped out for obvious reasons, the Berkeley administration authorized a few students to sit in the Board of Regents when some important decisions about the university and their future were to be made. As a result, these student claims had been taken seriously and it seemed that the principles of participatory democracy they had stood for had found an echo with the administration. Some courses students had asked for had also been included in their curriculum. These courses mainly dealt with topical issues and what was happening in American society. Others were about the war in Vietnam, unemployment, racial segregation, the role played by students in society, drug consumption and even sexually transmitted diseases, which really showed that the administration had paid attention to what students had asked for. Berkeley also improved the living conditions of its student community by renovating buildings and student houses, offering better food and better meals in dining halls and making the library opening hours more flexible, mainly during exams so as to allow students to work more and have full access to the books they needed. The university also tried to consider students human beings and no longer numbers printed on their ID cards, although this was difficult in such big universities. For example, the letters sent by the university were more personal and some were even signed by the student's faculty advisor to show that his or her professors really cared, which was supposed to be reassuring and comforting. Another major decision from the administration was to put an end to the military instruction courses students disliked; this became official in the early-Seventies. It also tried to make sure that army recruiters would come less often on campus so as not to disturb the student community.

Despite all these major improvements, a great number of students thought that the strategy of the university administration simply consisted in preventing another uprising. For them, the university strove to make students happy by improving their lives from a material point of view, which made some say that it adopted the same techniques as the government in the Fifties whose goal was to anaesthetize the population to make sure it would not rebel.

The anti-Establishment activities which developed during the next two decades were more moderate. Still, the influence of student activists enabled the emergence of other social movements in American society such as Indians, women and homosexuals, while giving a new impetus to black protest. Students also served as a source of inspiration for European movements. Contrary to other protest organizations, student movements disappeared from the social scene in 1973. Therefore, they could not be credited for the end of the war in Vietnam since the conflict dragged on for some time after them. Most campuses became quiet again in 1974, although others went sporadically on strike, for instance against apartheid in South Africa in 1978-1979. It is also important to note that students became increasingly conservative in the Eighties and Nineties and a large majority of them even supported republican candidates such as Ronald Reagan or George Bush, which is another major difference between the Eighties, Nineties, and the Sixties. Although Republicans came back to power in the late Sixties, early Seventies and Eighties, it is possible to say that the protest movements belonging to the New Left influenced other American organizations considered fringe organizations by the established order.

White New Leftists had supported the Civil Rights Movement although it had been difficult for them to be well accepted by blacks who had considered their commitment hypocritical. As a result, white activists did not really influence the direct actions of the black community. Black protest became less and less visible insofar as it experienced major tensions and divisions in the mid-Seventies. For example, two main factions emerged: the Marxists who wanted to fight against white America and the integrationists who tried to reach compromises with white people. Most blacks thought the integrationists collaborated with their enemies as they were not critical enough of the Reagan Administration.

In the Seventies, the 800,000 Indians had not been particularly influenced by student activists but mainly inspired by the strategies used by the Civil Rights Movement: sit-ins, marches such as the Long Walk in Washington in 1978, rallies or building occupations. Indians wanted the federal government to recognize their rights and their status and wanted it to respect their culture and traditions. They also wanted to remind Washington of the 25,000 Indians who had died for freedom during World War II. Consequently, they claimed that the government could do something for them instead of depriving them of their ancestral lands. Indians denounced Reagan's policies because they considered them negative for the survival of their reservations—to make matters even worse, the budget of their reservations had been halved in the Eighties.

The Indian community longed for immediate social and sanitarian measures because Indians were an ethnic minority whose unemployment rate was high, whose life expectancy was the shortest—45 on average—and whose death rate was the highest in the country.

White radicalism somewhat influenced the actions of feminist movements. Women were weary of the inferior role they were given both in the Civil Rights Movement and in the student movement after 1965. They wanted to play an important socioeconomic and political role, all the more so because they represented a voter bloc to be reckoned with. Women approved of the principle of participatory democracy SDS had promoted and intended to implement it within their own organization. A minority of them favored an androgynous form of society deprived of any sexual role. Most feminists who had joined the student movement favored political battles aimed at the entire social and economic system. The most influential feminist movement, the National Organization for Women (NOW), had 250,000 members in 1987.<sup>7</sup> NOW fought against issues such as abortion, rape, porn magazines and films whose goal was, they thought, to humiliate women while using them to make millions of dollars; they also denounced sexual discrimination they suffered from in a macho society. NOW also promoted equal opportunities between men and women on the job market. American feminists hoped for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment of 1972; unfortunately, for them, it was rejected in 1982 because it did not obtain the three-fourths majority of States necessary for ratification.

The homosexual movement was also influenced by protesters, mainly by the counter-cultural movement, which had openly addressed the question of sexual preference. Homosexuals had succeeded in making public opinion forget the image of troublemakers they had used to achieve the goals they had set for themselves. Just like women, homosexuals were a huge group of potential voters that both parties were trying to attract. Indeed, they accounted for nearly 10% of all people allowed to vote in the late Seventies.<sup>8</sup> It is not really surprising that the Democratic Party, because of the themes it stood for, approved of the creation of a delegation composed of 77 homosexuals during the 1980 national convention. At the same time, the Republican Party had only 2 homosexual delegates. Gay people were proud of their social and sexual particularism and did the best they could to assume it although they recognized that they were sometimes discriminated against when trying to find a job or an apartment. They organized gatherings which were widely covered by the media like those of young radicals and large-scale demonstrations in June and October 1979 such as Gay Pride Day in cities like New York or San Francisco, two cities famous for having a large gay community.<sup>9</sup> These events enabled homosexuals to show public opinion that they were not as different as they were depicted in stereotypes, that they were proud of their identity and part of a community that was gaining ground in a great number of business sectors. They also insisted on the measures to be taken to fight against the AIDS epidemic which was killing off their community.

As a consequence, protest movements seem to have influenced most protest organizations which emerged in the Seventies and Eighties. However, the methods that were used during the two decades were softer, more moderate, and more thought of than those used during the Sixties were. These protesters shared the same mistrust as New Leftists aimed at any form of bureaucracy, hierarchy, and authoritarianism, which made them the worthy successors of those advocating radicalism and social change in the Sixties. The United States was not the only country to go through such a tidal wave of protest in the Sixties. Other movements also mushroomed throughout Europe because of a political and socioeconomic situation conducive to social protest. Were Americans responsible for the internationalization of anti-establishment activities or did Europeans rebel spontaneously and independently without paying too much attention to what was going on in the United States?

### **European Legacy**

According to Jean-Jacques Brochier and Bernd Oelgart, who wrote *L'internationaleétudiante* in 1968, there was no real influence whatsoever between American and European movements.<sup>10</sup> For them, Europeans developed autonomously and independently even though their expectations and means of action were almost similar to their American counterparts. For example, the Berkeley student movements had developed autarkic ally without following what European movements were doing, whereas Europeans were informed about what was going on in California on a regular basis.

<sup>7</sup> It has about 500,000 members in March 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Toby Hancock, *The Politics of Homosexuality*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984, p. 208.

<sup>9</sup> These events are organized every year, even now.

<sup>10</sup> Julliard : Paris, 1968.

This part will briefly present the European protest activities which developed in the wake of American protest. It is quite logical and normal for the various European movements which emerged in the late Sixties to refuse to admit that American movements had influenced or inspired them.

Indeed, European movements wanted to be viewed as genuine protest organizations and not as people trying to imitate purely and simply what New Leftists had done. A student uprising erupted in Poland on January 30, 1968 when about fifty young people were arrested by the police for demonstrating and asking for artistic freedom at the end of *Dziady* ("Ancestors"), a play by Adam Mickiewicz which showed hostility to Russian politics and propaganda. Their fellow students, shocked by the repressive and totalitarian methods used to muzzle them, decided to go on strike. The movement spread to all universities nationwide and campuses became real battlefields because of various clashes between students and police forces. The youths were supported by the working class which thought they were courageous to denounce the government's outrageous methods. They were able to do it as they were not part of the system, contrary to the working class which could be the target of government crackdown at any time. The government eventually got the situation under control in April 1968, shortly before the spring exam session.<sup>11</sup>

Rome was the starting-point of Italian protest in March 1968: students confronted police forces in front of the school of architecture when they were about to demand the school administration to pressure parliament to pass a law reforming academic life. As a matter of fact, this event was nothing but the outcome of student protest that had started in 1967 and paralyzed about thirty universities throughout the country. Like their American counterparts, young Italians occupied buildings to show their determination to public opinion. There were nearly 530,000 students in Italy, most of whom favored the creation of a counter-university similar to those in America. The idea was to help traditional universities which were confronted to student overpopulation. Some figures spoke for themselves: there was one professor for 40 students nationwide compared to one for 200 students in Rome. Young Italians complained because they had very little contact with their professors, who were more interested in politics and their professional careers than in teaching and student achievements. Moreover, Italians also supported the American peace movement: they demonstrated against the Vietnam War in front of the American embassy in Rome on March 16, 1968. Student unrest in Italy declined in early June when university administrations decided to close all campuses until the start of the next academic year. This was a good decision and a good strategy because students were calmer than before and ready to go back to class.<sup>12</sup>

Spain's Franco also went through a student rebellion from March 1968 onwards. General Franco's government closed the University of Madrid after a demonstration against the Vietnam War used as a pretext to demand the end of the Spanish totalitarian regime. The Spanish demonstrators were immediately expelled to set an example. They all belonged to the Federation of the Democratic University established in 1962, a movement favoring more flexible university rules and fighting against fascism. The movement was close to SDS insofar as both asked for university revolt and social revolt. Other universities were closed until further notice like the University of Bilbao or the University of Salamanca, and the Spanish national militia arrested a great number of protest students. The government which wanted a return to normalcy officially announced some reforms on May 22. The main measures included the construction of three new universities and two institutes of technology shortly after the Education Minister was asked to resign. In return, the government asked students to refrain from criticizing Franco's regime contrary to what they had done up to that time, and the students agreed on that point.<sup>13</sup>

Great Britain was also confronted to student protest. Young people demonstrated against nuclear proliferation in 1967 after the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which had begun in 1958, was officially given up. This decision coincided with the election of Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson. In 1968, nearly 25,000 students demonstrated in front of the American embassy in London to convince Washington that the war in Vietnam was an absurdity. In May 1968, students published *Black Dwarf*, an underground newspaper favoring a large-scale international revolt: "WE SHALL FIGHT WE WILL WIN-PARIS LONDON ROME." The student revolt gradually wound down to be replaced by a racial conflict from July 1968 onwards.

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<sup>11</sup>David Caute, *The Year of the Barricades: a Journey Through 1968*, New York: Harper and Row, 1988, pp. 71-75.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 76-81.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 81-85.

The movement, which was picking up steam, was headed by Enoch Powell, a Member of Parliament hostile to any form of immigration. In other words, the revolts succeeded each other.<sup>14</sup> German students also demonstrated in the late Sixties. However, the country had already experienced the free university in Berlin in 1948 which was supposed to offer an alternative to Humboldt University based in the Soviet sector of the city since 1945.

Students were authorized to attend contemporary political science classes and express their views about the way the country was run, which was positive for the development of their freedom of speech. Thus, the government, as well as university administrations responded favorably to the students' demands well before their American counterparts. The main German movement in charge of most protest activities was the Sozialistischer Deutscher Student enbund (SDS), set up by the Social Democratic Party in 1946 and run by Rudi Dutschke. Dutschke was strongly opposed to the German policy in the Soviet Union and in East Germany because he considered that it only enslaved individuals. He also criticized the democratic bourgeoisie for its being perverted because it did not do anything to make things change. As a matter of fact, it made the most of the status quo as it enabled it to protect its financial interests while getting richer and richer. There were about 3,000 students in the German SDS, which amounted to 10% to 25% of the student population in Germany's biggest universities. After Dutschke was assassinated in April 1968, the student movement rapidly declined as it was unable to find another charismatic leader. So as to give a new impetus to the movement, the new leaders adopted radical stands towards what they called the "Nazi State" but this reorientation was short-lived as the movement was going through some inner tensions without being able to adapt its rhetoric to the German situation and it eventually disintegrated at the turn of 1970.

Yugoslavian youths were influenced by the actions of the German SDS. Students demonstrated in Belgrade in June 1968 and occupied the administration buildings after several students were arrested by the police during a free concert organized to show support for the working class. Young people also asked for the resignation of some Serbian ministers because the youths thought they spent their time manipulating public opinion and concealing important political and socioeconomic information. Like students in America, they handed out political literature, occupied buildings and were supported by their faculty, who also shared their views about the dubious actions of the red bourgeoisie. Confronted to such a large-scale political and social disorder, Marshal Tito was forced to give in and asked the government to pass drastic university reforms. Students who saw that as a clear-cut sign of victory went back to school on June 9, 1968.<sup>15</sup>

The May 1968 events in France resembled the wave of American protest. Indeed, most French activists were also brilliant students enrolled at Nanterre, a modern university which had opened in 1964. They denounced the impersonal behavior of their authoritarian university administration which banned all demonstrations organized against the war in Vietnam. The French revolt rapidly spread to the academic world and society when the youths were supported by the working class and unions like the CGT, France's biggest workers' union. Contrary to American students, the Paris students and their main leaders, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Alain Krivine, Jacques Sauvageot and Alain Geismar, were more interested in the rhetoric of Third World revolutionary figures such as Che Guevara or Mao than in the message of the main thinkers of the American New Left.

The development of student protest movements in the United States seems to be quite different from the one of the European left. In the early Sixties, the direct actions of American organizations were marked by a form of radicalism that was typically American but that was to be gradually modified by Marxist philosophy, which could account for the violent actions of the Weatherman in 1968, the revolutionary arm of SDS. Contrary to that, European protesters went the other way around. Indeed, they originally embraced Marxism and favored the class struggle but were to become progressively more moderate by resorting to radical principles, *i.e.* going down to the roots of problems in order to better understand their malfunctioning without necessarily engaging themselves into revolutionary actions to solve them. European movements also seemed more intellectual than American movements and more interested in ideological debates, considered useless and time-consuming by Americans. Several similarities existed between the French New Left and American radicalism, however. Both systematically resorted to idealism, anti-authoritarianism, autonomy and nonviolent activism for the most part and were also engaged in two types of revolution—political and counter-cultural—conducted both on university campuses and in society, one scene being the extension of the other one.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 89-95.

<sup>15</sup> Caute, *ibid.*, pp. 97-112.

These similarities could also be found in other European movements such as the German movement composed of environmentalists, feminists, anti-militarists and anti-nuclear activists whose main goal was to give shape to a better society.

In Europe, as in the United States, young protesters intended to build a world of their own. This explained why the movements of social transformation whose atmosphere was friendly had become a refuge for students or even the perfect alternatives to a declining society.

Like American students, European movements used nonviolent means of action such as sit-ins, marches or building occupations. Moreover, the utopian themes of young American and young Europeans were similar. As a matter of fact, society, because of its limited role and power, had to be radically transformed, just like the educational system that did not match the realities of the job market, and students were determined to be considered political individuals and reasonable altruistic citizens whose actions—like participatory democracy—were only aimed at improving the world they lived in.

Although the influence of the New Left could be felt among various social movements in both the United States and abroad, environmental activists seemed to be its main successors. Like them, the New Left—mainly the hippies—thought that the world could live peacefully, in harmony and perfect communion with Nature, far from rampant modernism and materialism.<sup>16</sup> For Fritjof Capra and Charlene Spretnak, who wrote *Green Politics* in 1984, the main themes of most environmentalists looked like those of the New Left: ecology, civil responsibilities, nonviolence, decentralization, and spirituality.<sup>17</sup> These themes were also used by Marie-Christine Granjon in *L'Amérique de la contestation* and Manuela Semidei in *Les Contestataires aux États-Unis*.<sup>18</sup> Daniel Royot also referred to environmental issues in *Histoire de la culture américaine*. For him, the natural world represented a refuge away from civilization and was associated with noble values such as harmony, simplicity, and love; the American wilderness was socialized because it offered a new dimension to the American Dream.<sup>19</sup>

These ideas and reflections represented a compromise between an ecological spiritual democracy and a participatory democracy as spelled out in the *Port Huron Statement*. The spearhead of the American green movement was the Green Party USA, set up in 1984. With its ideology and actions, the Green Party USA appeared to be the worthy successor of the American New Left, mainly during its reformist years. The principle of participatory democracy was also one of the underlying aspects of the party, which was quite telling: Every human being deserves a say in the decisions that affect their lives; no one should be subject to the will of another. Therefore, we will work to increase public participation at every level of government to ensure that our public representatives are fully accountable to the people who elect them. We will also work to create new types of political organizations that expand the process of participatory democracy by directly including citizens in the decision making process.<sup>20</sup>

This mission statement really sounds like what Tom Hayden had written in the *Port Huron Statement*, as the Greens even used the same terminology and rhetoric as the Sixties radicals. American environmentalists also dealt with important issues such as ecological wisdom, according to which everybody had to protect the earth to give it as clean as possible to the future generations, social justice and equal opportunities, nonviolence, the respect of diversity in any situation, and decentralization, which were valuable to young radicals. Contrary to the New Left, which was viewed as a macho movement, the Greens declared themselves opposed to any form of sexual discrimination within their movement.

The American green movement, in the wake of the countercultural movement of the Sixties, has regularly organized Earth Days, every year on April 22, since 1970. The event enables ecological activists to raise awareness about environmental problems.

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<sup>16</sup> "All They Are Sayin' is Give Pigs a Chance (Animal rights movement in Berkeley, California, and other university town," *in US World and News Report*, June 19, 1989, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> New York: Dutton, 1984.

<sup>18</sup> Marie-Christine Granjon, *L'Amérique de la contestation : les années 60 aux États-Unis*, Paris : Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1985, pp. 574-76.

Manuela Semidei, *Les Contestataires aux États-Unis*, Paris : Casterman, 1973, pp. 153-62.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Royot, Jean-Loup Bourget, Jean-Pierre Martin, *Histoire de la culture américaine*, Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1993, p. 464.

<sup>20</sup> The Greens, Green Party USA, *Ten Key Values*, 2001, p. 1.

Gaylord Nelson, who organized the first Earth Day in 1970 when he was Senator of Wisconsin, defined what this day should be and what it could bring to millions of Americans: “To shake up the political establishment and force this issue onto the national agenda. It was a gamble, but it worked.”<sup>21</sup> The first demonstration drew nearly 20 million people throughout the United States, having the same image of the world as Sixties protesters. In 2000, Earth Day drew over 350 million people worldwide belonging to over 5,000 ecological organizations in 184 countries.

Although most political observers thought that green movements were rather to the left of the political spectrum, Capra and Spretnak believed their actions could not be limited to this restrictive assessment: “It is an ecological, holistic, and feminist movement that transcends the old political framework of left versus right.”<sup>22</sup> This new political force began to gain ground during election times in Europe in the Eighties. Both the New Left and the Greens stick to a radical political line which differentiates them from the two main political lines existing in the world. Greens avoided and gave up the traditional political debate between left and right, which is something that the New Left had difficulties doing most of the time. During the 2000 presidential elections in the United States, Ralph Nader, who ran for the Green Party, obtained over three million popular votes, which, to a certain extent, prevented Al Gore from winning the White House, which is ironical as ecologists are supposed to be closer to Democrats than Republicans are. Nader’s program included eight points: equal protection, democratic government, protecting consumer rights, the environment, a just economy, restraining corporate power, education, peace and justice in foreign policy. Once again, these themes are a clear echo to New Left rhetoric. Therefore, New Left ideas have gone a long way.

Although the New Left did not achieve all the goals it had set for itself over a ten-year-period between 1960 and 1970, such as the transformation of American society—less poverty and less racial segregation, citizen participation in politics and the end of the Vietnam War—and although it disintegrated leaving a feeling of unfinished business, it sowed the seeds for future protest that other movements could cause to blossom—and some did, in China for example in 1989, in Spain in 2011-2012 or in Canada in 2012. The New Left has also given hope to a wholly generation and to the generations to come, dusted off radicalism which was drifting away in a capitalist society, and given a new impetus to American politics, which seemed rather difficult, if not impossible, in the apathetic late Fifties. The New Left should be flattered because it made the academic world aware of its enormous powers to reform the American educational system and also succeeded in mobilizing American public opinion and international opinion against the war in Vietnam and the perverse effects of American imperialism. The New Left also enabled an entire country to wonder about the realities, or pseudo-realities, of an American Dream that a silent majority considered a real nightmare in a never-ending American night. Although the New Left had completely disappeared from the American political scene in 1972, its early members, like Gitlin, were convinced that it was somewhere out there, ready to reemerge from its ashes:

The Movement is everywhere; it exists perhaps as a disembodied idea, a historical ghost come too early or too late (...) If the Movement exists it exists despite itself, because so many people need to believe in it—a curious and fragile existence indeed.<sup>23</sup>

For Gitlin, a new New Left could see the light of day some day, learning from the lessons of the past and the failures of the Sixties, and improving the projects it had spelled out like participatory democracy. The user’s manual was simple to read and understand—it is one of the most famous passages of the *Port Huron Statement*, which could serve as the new guideline for a new transformation of society:

We seek the establishment of a democracy of individual participation governed by two central aims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; that society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation. If a new social movement really wants to take up the torch of the Sixties New Left and continue the fight, it will know where to start to launch its far-reaching program of social transformation.

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<sup>21</sup> *The Earth Day Organization*, 2001.

<sup>22</sup> *Op.cit.*, p. xix.

<sup>23</sup> “Toward a New New Left,” in *Partisan Review*, Summer 1972, p. 458.

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