

Letter to friends and movement activists, past and present,
from Alan Haber, for the Movement for a Democratic Society,

BEGINNING New Years, 2012

INVITATION TO THINK TOGETHER --AGAIN !!

IMAGINE: A MANIFESTO FOR NOW.

This time of rising consciousness and expanding activism makes all the more urgent that we give thoughtful attention to the real situation of these times, political, economic, cultural, moral, the values and visions that guide us, critical analyses of what is true, program demands and proper actions.

This was what the young Students for a Democratic Society (sds) said, at this time of the year in 1961, planning for our 1962 convention: "We need a manifesto! The time is now!" We imagined an energetic, optimistic, realistic appraisal and motivation for action, with victory at the end. The outcome of this audacity was the 1962 Port Huron Statement, Now again, it seems, "The time is now!"

The we of then, "bred in at least modest comfort" as we said, were just discovering poverty in America and how the system worked. Now people far more widely are waking up to the bigger economic inequalities and injustices. Last Spring, Tunisians, Egyptians, Libyans, Yemenis and Syrians targeted their dictators. Protests spread in Greece, Spain, Italy, England, France, and Israel in the Summer. A few savvy Canadians pointed us to our own American dictatorship: Wall Street for short: the whole crony capitalist, corporate, quasi-criminal conspiracy that has abused people in general and engorged itself on riches. The "occupations" since September 17, 2011, have charted the "Wall Street Fall," across the country, around the world, on the front pages of global media, with the whole world watching.

When we had made the Port Huron Statement, in 1962, we backed off from the assertion of "manifesto," considering our thinking should be revisited periodically, as experience grows.

50 years is a good time to revisit, and even more so, in times of heightened action, to speak vigorously for the future.

The mds, Movement for a Democratic Society, considering ourselves an intergenerational continuation of the sds spirit, decided to help facilitate such a revisiting and looking forward. An effort at collective writing seems likely to benefit everyone, without presuming synthesis, or consensus or agreements on all questions.

We plan to follow the inclusive plan of invitation that was "invented" 50 years ago.* Ask our friends and those on our lists, **What do you want?** Begin with a question. **"What needs be said in a manifesto for now?"** We are beginning, asking friends we know, and can reach, you who are reading this, those whom you would like to include

The "inclusive we" of now are, in most places, 3 or 4 generations alive, conscious, active, not just our old young selves, thinking we were a "new" left. And the "active we" are global now, not just a few Americans, emerging out of the fog of 50s apathy and McCarthyist repression. Most of our inner identities have clarified themselves and become articulate. The human potential is more understood, and the spiritual side of progressive more legitimate.

We plan to let everyone see what everyone writes. We hope individuals and local groups will think about it, and talk with one another. Criticize and write more. Some will. Whether in long and dense texts or short pithy points and clear guiding lines, we know there are many perspectives among us; perhaps our manifesto will be a become a **"many-fisto"** and help bring to words the new paradigm that is emerging.

We are inviting a committee to help guide this endeavor. By late-**April, 2012**, we intend a planning meeting in Ann Arbor, to look at all what has been done, talk about it, and invest a few willing writer editors to work their creative wills, and determine how to prepare what has been offered for presentation by mid-June.

The Port Huron Statement convention 50 year anniversary is **mid-June, 2012**. We are planning in Ann Arbor, most likely, **Thursday through Sunday, June 14-17, 2012**, a jubilee meeting, celebration, party, reunion, union for 50 years of radical activism, for friends to reconnect and remember each other, for allies to meet, and for those who want, to think and talk together about what has been written, and expressed in other media, and to see if, indeed, there is a manifesto, or many-fisto, for now emerging from this work.

If you want to be on the working committee for this, or advisory, call 734-761-7967, or megiddo@umich.edu

You are invited. We want the invitation to begin, extending out through personal networks of affinity, alliance and friendship, including Port Huron participants, old sds-ers, SNCC, and SOCC and our allied organizations from the 60's, and activists from the generations of 70s and 80s and 90s and "naughtys," and now. We are working on facilities arrangements with the University of Michigan and around Ann Arbor. We will also explore ways for remote participation, also. There could be meetings, in different places interconnected. **We hope you will help in planning.**

We intend our efforts to parallel and support other celebratory and scholarly reflections on 50 years after Port Huron. We have heard of plans in Madison, Santa Barbara, New York and in Ann Arbor later in the Fall. We expect some national or wider meetings of the many "Occupation" sites and the People's Movement Assemblies from the United States Social Forum.

A "global teach-in" is being planned, from Stockholm, with sessions April 25, 2012, highlighting experiences from the occupy movement and the struggles for a new economy, looking at democratic networks, alternative financing systems, and approaches to re-industrialization and green jobs.

The May 2012 NATO/G20 meetings in Chicago will compel attention to direct action strategies and the aggressive, para-military policing that has come to dominate the urban landscape. Given the system we face, with the global Wall Street and its enforcers, right in front of us, what diverse tactics are proper actions? and what not?

There are questions needing thinking together:and harvesting experience. After 50 years of advocacy and practice, what is "participatory democracy?" among ourselves? and in society? What is a winning plan? and how to make it happen? How long is the long haul? What are the most difficult questions we face? Alienation of work? Ending wage slavery? What do we call this "....." capitalism under which we live? Do we have a name for the future?

We, the small we of mds, recognize this "thinking together" and "inviting to meeting" as a large undertakings. We hope for help from many quarters; we will do our best. If you want to join the work group for this endeavor, please **reply now!!** Formats will range from intimate, for those seeking reunion, to formal, for debate and deliberation

If you want to write your message for a manifesto, or express in other media, please begin. We are setting up a web site to host collective comment and editing. Email: mdsnow2@gmail.com or mail: PO Box 7213 Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107.

Reading the Port Huron Statement, again or for the first time, is a good place to start. We did pretty well, back in the day, for beginners. The full url is <http://www.h-net.org/~hst306/documents/huron.html>

A "manifesto for now," or at least an effort in that direction, might help the movements clear our collective throats and find our common voices. Thinking together is always a good exercise. **Please indicate your interest in participating**

Alan Haber (sds President 1960-62) for the Movement for a Democratic Society organizing group including:
Devra Morice, Monty Kroopkin, Elaine Brower, Bert Garskof, Bob Meola, and Cloudy

* I was president of the Students for a Democratic Society from 1960 to 1962. I worked to help organize the Port Huron convention at which our draft manifesto was discussed and deliberated. We decided in Ann Arbor over the 1961 Christmas holiday to make a manifesto for our national convention. As our best approximation of democratic process at the time, we asked everyone on our lists: "What do you think should be in a manifesto?" People responded, writing their ideas in letters to the office. We collected what people wrote, retyped all the ideas on mimeograph stencils for a newsletter which we mailed, and, like a mirror, reflected back everything people wrote and said, asking "so these are first responses, what is left out? what wrong? what more do you think? People wrote back again, Another newsletter reflection was sent out, and further responses came in. All this was the raw material from which a draft was made. The "convention" was given the draft to revise. It was divided into topical parts and "workshops" went over each part and the plenary voted on proposed changes. Big changes were called "bones," little ones "widgets." and a list of approved bones and widgets was sent to the "styles committee" as instructions to guide reworking the draft. While there became then one person (Tom Hayden) as the principal writer and stylist, many people were involved. The technology for sharing documents and drafts is far advanced now, and the democratic artistic process shaping the words we need could be even better.