

thoughts from Alan on PHS+50 and a manifesto for now

08 jun 2012

this is a beginning of thinking together.

YES!!

PHS+50

Next week, we gathered, fifty years ago, to consider who we were, what we wanted to do, what we thought. were we a we? what was a winning plan and how to make it happen? is there one? are we hopeful? That was the students for a democratic society convention near port huron michigan, in june 11-15, 1962, when we considered a "draft" manifesto, and produced, after more editing, what came to be called "the Port Huron Statement."

Now, next week, we are gathering, in the spirit of that 50 year ago audacity to presume manifesto, in our multi generations, old and young and in-betweens, and in our global reachings, and our many identities, to consider, what would be a manifesto for now?

physically and face to face this gathering will be in ann arbor, michigan, at 310 south ashley street, from june 14 to june 17. thursday evening potluck social, 6pm, 7:30 opening, through sunday afternoon.

remotely, this "wiki" and the port huron+50 blog invite a wider gathering. we call this "thinking together"

the initial we, within the bigger us, who are calling this thinking together, call ourselves "movement for a democratic society" carrying the "participatory democracy" spirit of the sds, encouraging radical thinking, movement building and local organizing.

thinking together is not easy. thinking alone is not easy. let us reason together was an ancient call for sanity in the midst of disaster. what is to done? is another posing of the question, and undone?

i see this gathering time as like bringing in, inviting in the harvest, the winter wheat, barley and rice, grains of sustenance. spring greens and fruits of labor. hoping for some good spices, herbs and condiments, and a stone or two for the soups, a few days together should produce some recipes worth sharing.

given we are not beginning, as in 1962, with a written draft from which to work, but with ourselves, face to face and remotely, each offering perspectives and facets of the picture we will come to imagine as the product of this undertaking.

i hope by sunday afternoon we will have a plan of how to follow-up, edit and share what has come to focus. One intend to prepare some activist input into the university of michigan academic conference on the port huron statement @50, scheduled from october 30-november 2, in ann arbor

we are not expecting finished drafts of perfect statements, connecting all the dots. the joy will be in thinking together the many little pieces, the dots, dashes and flashes, rough cut

that all said, i'll offer some of my views

a manifesto for now

one new idea cluster, and lens through which to view the world is the commons, the struggle for the commons, against both privatization, and bureaucratization. common-ing and commoners.

an other view i have come to is that the historic struggle, the morality play in we are actors, is the struggle between the war system and the peace system, and our task is to bring forward and make ascendant the peace system, and to resist and diminish, and transform the war system.

the war system has characteristics of hierarchy, patriarchy, command structure, domination, violence, impunity, etc. the peace system emphasizes partnership, community, caring, sharing, mutual aid, non-violence, democracy, healing, etc.

corporate capitalism is the current expression of the war system but its global supremacy goes back much further, to the beginnings of states, armies, empires, kings and all that. for the last 5000 years we've, humanity, has been living in a war system. almost all the lines people past have drawn on the earth of the product of wars, likewise the distributions of wealths and powers we have grown up seeing around us are themselves principally the products of whips and bullets, enshrined in hallowed laws.

the war system based on power, and control of the means of violence to enforce power. the task of the movement is to resist power as it is, to create alternative power, to contest and to prevail.

alternative power, in one sense could be called the peace system, the multitudes mobilized, resisting, challenging, defending, creating new community, reclaiming the commons, growing our own, practicing the culture of peace and non-violence, etc.

in another sense, though, practically speaking, power is the government; and to speak of alternative power is to speak of alternative government.

a problem of the old movement was an incapacity to describe a transfer of power from the old regime to the new, them to us as it were, 1% to 99% in current parlance, without blood in the streets and violent revolution. for most people, that not being seen as a desirable path to betterment, people held/hold back from full commitment, even when they approve and support particular objectives and campaigns.

the challenge of the movement is to describe a better path, revolution without executions, the democratic construction of a platform for an alternative government, assembling teams of competence who could actually be the agencies,

cabinet and in the presidency of an alternative government, at the national level, and other officers. able to put program into active policy, and then to carry on the grass roots, precinct campaign of our side against theirs, and then, when the time comes, to vote for the alternative, write in, outside the box. work on the possibility of an authentic democratic, popular victory, emphasize the sanctity of the voting booth and ballot box, the sovereignty of the citizen, in port huron times, our prevailing view was to seek political change by realignment within the democratic party, empowering liberals. in these times i look more to a realignment outside the democratic party, promoting an independent politics and political sphere, relying less of liberals to champion the changes that are needed.

allying with the democratic party is common sense in beating back threats from the right, which is what i consider to be george romney and his bands of latter day saints out to purify america of the likes of me and a lot of us. 2014, 2016 are the electoral times for which we need be organizing for a winning plan. in the short run i see continued base building and a few local and national campaigns, electoral and otherwise, community development, inviting people into the democratic process

for the long haul though, we need a recasting, opening of the politics of opposition, defense and solidarity that we, mostly, have been practicing. the impending climate change calamities, forks in the energy future road, fascism, terrorism, vampire bestiality rampant, points of no return passed, species extinctions, killing famines and criminality conspiracy and collusion in high places, etc. etc. far beyond what called us to declare a new left in 1962, moved by the bomb and discrimination, beside everything else. there is a lot more now. numbing to know too much.

the work of the "earth democracy" group of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, wilpf.org, moves in this direction, of seeing ourselves in relation to the whole life system.

so, these begin a few thoughts on the question of manifesto for now. alan haber