Port Huron Statement

The Port Huron Statement is the 1962 manifesto of the North American student activist movement Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). It was written primarily by Tom Hayden, then the Field Secretary of SDS, with help from 58 other SDS members, and completed on June 15, 1962, at a United Auto Workers retreat in Port Huron, Michigan, for the group's first national convention.\[1]\[2]

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Argument
The 25,700-word statement "articulated the fundamental problems of American society and laid out a radical vision for a better future".[2] It issued a nonideological call for participatory democracy, "both as a means and an end",[2] based on non-violent civil disobedience and the idea that individual citizens could help make "those social decisions determining the quality and direction" of their lives.[3] Also known as the "Agenda for a Generation", it "brought the term 'participatory democracy' into the common parlance".[4]

It has been described as "a seminal moment in the development of the New Left"[2] and a "classic statement of [its] principles", but it also revealed the 1960s' tension between communitarianism and individualism.[5] In particular, the statement viewed race ("symbolized by the Southern struggle against racial bigotry") and Cold War–induced alienation ("symbolized by the presence of the Bomb") as the two main problems of modern society.[6]

Policy recommendations

**Disarmament**

"Universal controlled disarmament must replace deterrence and arms control as the national defense goal."[6]

**Reform of the Democratic Party**

"An imperative task for these publicly dispossessed, then, is to demand a Democratic Party responsible to those interests. They must support Southern voter registration and Negro political candidates and demand that Democratic Party liberals do the same (in the last Congress, Dixiecrats split with Northern Democrats on 119 of 300 roll-calls, mostly on civil rights, area redevelopment and foreign aid bills; and breach was much larger than in the previous several sessions). Labor should begin a major drive in the South. In the North, reform clubs (either independent or Democratic) should be formed to run against big city regimes on such issues as peace, civil rights, and urban needs. Demonstrations should be held at every Congressional or convention seating of Dixiecrats. A massive research and publicity campaign should be initiated, showing to every housewife, doctor, professor, and worker the damage done to their interests every day a racist occupies a place in the Democratic Party. Where possible, the peace movement should challenge the "peace credentials" of the otherwise-liberals by threatening or actually running candidates against
University reform

The Port Huron statement argued that because "the civil rights and peace and student movements are too poor and socially slighted, and the labor movement too quiescent", it should rally support and strengthen itself by looking to universities, which benefit from their "permanent position of social influence" and being "the only mainstream institution that is open to participation by individuals of nearly any viewpoint". However, it stated that this "will involve national efforts at university reform by an alliance of students and faculty" who "must wrest control of the educational process from the administrative bureaucracy", ally with groups outside the university, integrate "major public issues into the curriculum", "make debate and controversy". In short, "They must consciously build a base for their assault upon the loci of power."[6]

Quotations

- "The awe inspired by the pervasiveness of racism in American life is only matched by the marvel of its historical span in American traditions. The national heritage of racial discrimination via slavery has been a part of America since Christopher Columbus's advent on the new continent. As such, racism not only antedates the Republic and the thirteen Colonies, but even the use of the English language in this hemisphere."[6]
- "Our work is guided by the sense that we may be the last generation in the experiment with living. But we are a minority—the vast majority of our people regard the temporary equilibriums of our society and world as eternally-functional parts."[6]
- "We regard men as infinitely precious and possessed of unfulfilled capacities for reason, freedom, and love."[6]
- The decline of utopia and hope is in fact one of the defining features of social life today. The reasons are various: the dreams of the older left were perverted by Stalinism and never recreated...the horrors of the twentieth century, symbolized in the gas-ovens and concentration camps and atom bombs, have blasted hopefulness. To be idealistic is to be considered apocalyptic, deluded."[6]
- "The apathy here is, first subjective—the felt powerlessness of ordinary people, the resignation before the enormity of events. But subjective apathy is encouraged by the objective American situation—the actual structural separation of people from power, from
relevant knowledge, from pinnacles of decision making...The American political system is not the democratic model of which its glorifiers speak. In actuality it frustrates democracy by confusing the individual citizen, paralyzing policy discussion, and consolidating the irresponsible power of military and business interests."[6]

In popular culture

- In the movie *The Big Lebowski*, the aging, stoner hippie played by Jeff Bridges known as "the Dude" claims that he helped write the Port Huron Statement,[1] not the compromised final draft, however.

See also

- Counterculture of the 1960s
- Occupy movement
- Sharon Statement
- Students for a Democratic Society (1960 organization)

References


External links

- Full text of the statement from H-Net.
- SDS co-founder Alan Haber's copy of the unadulterated draft.