



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on June 15, 2012

Fifty Years After the Port Huron Statement

Fifty years ago, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), a Left wing socialist organization, was the guiding light of the college radicals. It was the most prominent force in the student protests and riots in the 1960s, and most of the professors in today's colleges grew up in that milieu of rage, rebellion, and radicalism. On June 15, 1962, the SDS issued a manifesto of their beliefs called "The Port Huron Statement." How does that Statement fit in with the condition of politics in America today?



Written primarily by the field secretary of the SDS, Tom Hayden (pictured), the Statement condemned corporate capitalism in terms familiar to those who listen to our President today:

The wealthiest one percent of Americans own more than 80 percent of all personal shares of stock. From World War II until the mid-Fifties, the 50 biggest corporations increased their manufacturing production from 17 to 23 percent of the national total, and the share of the largest 200 companies rose from 30 to 37 percent. ...

Corporations must be made publicly responsible. It is not possible to believe that true democracy can exist where a minority utterly controls enormous wealth and power. The influence of corporate elites on foreign policy is neither reliable nor democratic; a way must be found to subordinate private American foreign investment to a democratically-constructed foreign policy. The influence of the same giants on domestic life is intolerable as well; a way must be found to direct our economic resources to genuine human needs, not the private needs of corporations nor the rigged needs of maneuvered citizenry.

The Port Huron Statement also had a familiar-sounding approach to the rest of the world. It applauded foreign aid, and praised the United Nations:

Foreign aid should be given through international agencies, primarily the United Nations. The need is to eliminate political overtones, to the extent possible, from economic development. ...

Internationalization will allow more long-range planning, integrate development plans adjacent countries and regions may have, and eliminate the duplication built into national systems of foreign aid ... the humiliating "hand-out" effect would be replaced by the joint participation of all nations in the general development of the earth's resources and industrial capacities ... improve the possibilities of non-exploitative development, especially in creating "soft-credit" rotating-fund agencies which would not require immediate progress or financial return ... enhance the importance of the United Nations itself, as the disarming process would enhance the UN as a rule-enforcement agency.

In fact, the Statement also suggested the gradual transfer of American national sovereignty to the United Nations when mentioned solutions to foreign policy problems which "... will involve the simultaneous creation of international rulemaking and enforcement machinery beginning under the



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United Nations, and the gradual transfer of sovereignties — such as national armies and national determination of “international” law — to such machinery.”

Even as international government was applauded, local government, particularly local control of schools, was condemned:

Education is too vital a public problem to be completely entrusted to the province of the various states and local units. In fact, there is no good reason why America should not progress now toward internationalizing rather than localizing, its educational system....

The interest in education went beyond local public schools. The Statement recognized that colleges would be a breeding ground for militancy:

A new left must be distributed in significant social roles throughout the country. The universities are distributed in such a manner. ... A new left must start controversy across the land, if national policies and national apathy are to be reversed. The ideal university is a community of controversy, within itself and in its effects on communities beyond.

Throughout the document, the role of state governments is portrayed in a negative light and nowhere is federalism, as intended by our Founding Fathers, viewed positively. Further, it calls for issues such as civil rights to be solved by the federal government.

The Port Huron Statement also utterly ignores the most salient feature of American life, as visitors as early as Alexis de Tocqueville noted: American religious faith. Indeed, there is no mention of God, the Bible, Christianity, Judaism or churches at all — even in an adverse light. Instead the SDS radicals, while rightly noting that modern life has lost much meaning, insist that Americans should turn to political solutions to cure the unhappiness in their own lives:

A new left must transform modern complexity into issues that can be understood and felt close-up by every human being. It must give form to the feelings of helplessness and indifference, so that people may see the political, social and economic sources of their private troubles and organize to change society.

Communism, predictably, was considered just another system of government and not something which Americans should fear:

An unreasoning anti-communism has become a major social problem for those who want to construct a more democratic America. McCarthyism and other forms of exaggerated and conservative anti-communism seriously weaken democratic institutions and spawn movements contrary to the interests of basic freedoms and peace.

Senator Joseph McCarthy has been proven largely correct, thanks to the revelations in the Venona decryptations (“cryptanalysis” of messages from Soviet intelligence agencies) decades after his death, and to M. Stanton Evans’ book — *Blacklisted: The Untold Story of Senator Joe McCarthy and His Fight Against America’s Enemies* — which shows a man much nobler than SDS radicals could have ever conceived.

What of America? The Port Huron Statement made it clear that American culture and values were greatly lacking:

White American ethnocentrism at home and abroad reflect most sharply the self-deprivation suffered by the majority of our country which effectively makes it an isolated minority in the world community of culture and fellowship. The awe inspired by the pervasiveness of racism in American



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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' 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.

What the New Left proposed 50 years ago — anti-capitalism, a more equal distribution of wealth, surrender of national sovereignty (especially to the United Nations), federal control of education, the radicalization of colleges, opposition to anti-communism, looking to the federal government for solutions to our problems, and the consignment of God to irrelevance — sounds a lot like the atheistic statist collectivism of today.

Photo: Thomas Hayden 28-year-old organizer of the demonstrations at the Democratic National Convention, sits at the witness table Dec. 3, 1968 during a hearing held by the House

Committee on Un-American Activities.: AP Images



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