The Great Hydropower Heist
How Corporations Colonized Our Watershed Commons

The Historical Context for Understanding Vermont’s Electric Power Industry
Part One of a Two-Part Story

By Dr. Richard Foley
with assistance from Hervey Scudder,
President of NorthEast Center for Social Issues Studies

The Price of Energy Dependence

From its founding as a republic in 1771 until the early 1900s, Vermont proved far more energy independent than it is now. The old-timers traveled and transported goods with an efficient blend of the original horse power and coal-fired steam trains. They heated largely with wood and built hundreds of small hydropower facilities — initially, mechanized mills that utilized raw waterwheel power and were later retrofitted with electric generators and complementary coal-fired steam-powered systems. Hence, the claim: “Hydro — the power that built Vermont.”

Now Vermonter spend roughly $2 billion every year on out-of-state fuels for transportation, heating, industrial applications, and electricity. More than $1 billion pays for imported oil and gas alone. Brattleboro exports $30 million every year in return for just residential and commercial heating fuel.

Where do Americans get their oil? More than 50 percent is imported. With less than 5 percent of the world’s population, we Americans consume 25 percent of the world’s natural resources, including oil and natural gas. But now, countries like China and India demand a greater share to feed their exploding economies. The vast majority of the world’s remaining oil comes from the most unstable countries in the world. A barrel of crude oil today costs six times as much as it did in the late 1990s — it jumped from $10 to $60 per barrel. Vermonter get the message at the gas pump and when paying their heating bills.

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A Word to Our New Readers

By Ian Baldwin, Publisher

We launched Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence two years ago as a monthly journal of opinion considerably briefer than it is now. The journal you hold in your hands reaches thousands of readers four times a year. Many of you are new to us.

Who are we? For the most part we are volunteers committed to starting a discussion of what it means to be independent and self-sustaining here in Vermont. By “independent” we do not mean isolated or disconnected from the world, but self-reliant and sustainable. So that, looking to both the present and the future, we are able to call ourselves, once again, a free people. Not everyone who contributes to these pages is a committed secessionist, or even
Reclaiming Our Commons

In his new book Capitalism 3.0: A Guide to Reclaiming Our Commons, author and entrepreneur Peter Barnes defines the “Commons” as any society’s “set of assets that have two characteristics: they’re all gifts, and they’re all shared.”

As with any other society, Barnes suggests, our 21st century “commons” here in Vermont consists of three main forks: our natural world (our air and our water, our fields and our forests); our communal resources (our streets, town greens and libraries, to name but three); and our collective culture (Joseph Bentley’s science, John Dewey’s philosophy, Robert Frost’s poetry, and Grace Potter’s music all come to mind).

Vermont Commons newspaper turns two years old with this Spring 2007 issue, and we took our name from our abiding interest in the “Commons” here in the Green Mountain State. When we began publishing two Aprils ago, we decided to focus our efforts on answering a two-part question: how can Vermonters work together to make our little state more sustainable and more sovereign in a 21st-century world shaping up to look very little like the 20th?

As the Green Mountains shed their snow and all of us emerge from winter hibernation, we continue with our sustainability/sovereignty focus in this new issue. Long-time energy activist Rick Foley’s in-depth study of the Connecticut River hydro-power situation (our cover story this issue) provides a historical look at Vermont’s ongoing energy debates, highlighting the consequences of our collective decisions about Vermont’s energy “commons” and pointing a way forward. Educational researcher and author Susan Ohanian asks some hard questions about our state’s relationship with the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) program. Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility (VbSR) president and Small Dog Electronics owner Don Mayer provides a window into how VbSR member businesses are moving beyond an exclusive focus on the bottom line to help preserve and protect our shared natural and social capital. In the first installment of a three-part essay, Don Livingston traces New Englanders’ abiding interest in secession, providing some useful historical context for our political conversations. And Abe Collins details how many Vermont farmers are embracing innovative commons-centered ideas to help solve pressing climate change and global peak oil dilemmas.

Vermont Commons newspaper is also proud to be co-sponsoring the first of what we hope will be an annual “Commons Conference” at the Big Picture Theater in central Vermont’s Mad River Valley. The goal is to bring together central Vermont’s citizens, businesses, and nonprofits to spend a day “celebrating our commons” and “imagining our future,” with a three-part conversational focus on land, food, and energy sustainability for this new century. The event, scheduled for Saturday, May 12, will be free and open to the public, with panel discussions, food, music and fun for all. We’ll even have child care for the young ones. For more information, contact the Big Picture theater at 802.496.8994 or www.bigpicturetheater.info.

Come join us and help celebrate Vermont’s commons this spring!

Rob Williams
Editor

Baldwin, continued from page 1

A Vermont, though many of us are. But everyone who writes for this journal is concerned about the meaning of independence, sustainability, and self-reliance in our times.

In the course of publishing this journal for two years, we have realized we have a few overriding convictions that every piece of writing we publish should help our readers— you—examine, mull over, and discuss. Call these our meta-themes. They are:

1. An empire is not a democracy. An empire can pretend to be a democracy, fooling many, but in the end democracy and empire are like oil and water: they don’t mix.

2. Vermonters have the individual, social, and technical resources to be a self-reliant, independent, diverse and tolerant people, able to govern themselves. Vermonters were once described as such a mere half century or so ago. Using contemporary means, they can be so again, in new ways, a unique polity unto themselves, fully and peacefully related to the rest of the wide world.

3. Without the inherent Right of Secession we are not free. We are but prisoners in an enforced and thus illegitimate “union.” Secession is not a racist plot, although a small number of critics perceive racist intentions in some secessionist movements and have imputed them to us. Racism has no place in our future. The Right of Secession was understood to inhere in every state by all the founding members of the United States, most notably by the authors of the Declaration of Independence and the U. S. Constitution. It was repressed as a result of Lincoln’s brutal Civil War. As a basic right the Right to Secede awaits resurrection.

4. Global warming and peak oil are planetary forces set irreversibly loose upon the world. They will challenge centuries-old habits of centralization and power-monogering, and in due course alter present unjust patterns of globalization in favor of interconnected but autonomous local economies.

Enjoy our Spring issue!
Letter to the Editor

SVR, Secession, and the South

To the Editor:

Why might the Second Vermont Republic wish to dialogue with southern racists, fundamentalists, free market ideologues and militarists?

Let’s see...

1. Racism:
The Vermont Constitution banned slavery from the beginning. During the period of slavery in the south, we in Vermont had to use our root cellars on the Underground Railroad to hide escaping slaves making their way to Canada and other destinations in the North. We could have used the space for potatoes.

During the Civil War, Vermon ters were fooled into thinking that the war was to free the slaves, even though GOP co-founder Abraham Lincoln was widely quoted as saying that he would keep the Union together at all costs, whether that involved freeing the slaves or not. Idealistic Vermon ters signed up in large numbers, and more Vermon ters per capita were killed than in any other state. Thanks a lot, Lincoln. You should have let them secede the first time.

2. Fundamentalism:
The South has always been a Christian place, often known as the Bible Belt. Many southerners want to impose fundamentalist Christian values on government and in the schools. I vaguely recall secession from a country that had a government church called "The Church of England." It was such a monumentally bad idea that the founders of the sovereign United States established separation of church and state as a basic constitutional law. I can see why they would want a theocracy now after seeing how the South want to bring back the good old days. Who could be against that?

Vermont realized long ago to balance our ideologues on the left and right. Some people just learn the hard way, I guess.

3. Free market dogma:
The "free market" doesn’t function without government-provided frameworks such as political stability, enforcement of property rights and contracts, and an unbiased judiciary. (Read George Will, Hernando DeSoto, or see "shock therapy" in Russia for reference.)

The "free market" also doesn't provide public goods like clean air, clean water, public parks, water treatment systems, universal education, etc. Try doing without municipal sewage treatment. It might be exciting.

In the good old laissez-faire days of capitalism there were no children’s rights, workers rights, or environmental regulations. Children over the age of 10 went to work in “satanic mills,” the workweek was 12 hours, six or seven days a week, and companies could dump sewage and toxic waste anywhere they wanted to. These guys in the South want to bring back the good old days. Who could be against that?

Vermont realized long ago to balance our ideologues on the left and right. Some people just learn the hard way, I guess.

4. Federal funding:

Thirty-one states get more from the federal government than they pay in taxes, based on an average of 1994 and 2004 figures. Nineteen states pay more. Nine of the 11 former Confederate states get more, two pay more. Try paying your own way, you leeches!

5. War:
The Confederate state of Texas provided us with Presidents Johnson and George W. Bush. Johnson gave us the Vietnam escalation, and Bush gave us Iraq. Vermont has more dead National Guard per capita in Iraq than any other state. We’re tired of your megalomaniacs sending our boys to die, Texas. Start a war with Mexico or something and leave us out of it.

I hope the above list has provided just a few of the reasons why the Second Vermont Republic is chatting with the League of the South. The sooner we can help them secede, the sooner we will get to stop dealing with their problems.

GARY FLOMENHOFT
Burlington

EDITOR'S NOTE: Through the Middlebury Institute, the Second Vermont Republic maintains a conversation with more than 30 separate secession groups around the world. For a complete list, see pages 12-13.
A Call for Slow Schools: Rethinking Education in the Green Mountains

By Susan Ohanian

“Education in Vermont, if it is to move forward, must have a goal toward which to move, a basic philosophy which combines the best which is known about learning, children, development, and human relations with the unique and general needs and desires of Vermont communities.”

Vermont Department of Education, 1968

Reading, Writing and Federalizing “Science”

When federal functionaries sermonize on the “science” of a matter, whether it’s stem cell research, global warming, or how to teach reading, we know we’re in trouble. Although the phrase “scientifically based research” appeared more than 100 times in the No Child Left Behind law (NCLB) enacted in 2001 and now up for reauthorization, recent revelations from the U.S. Education Department’s own Inspector General confirm what plenty of educators have known all along: Federal reading policy has more to do with friends in high places (corporate textbook and standard test publishers) than with actual science (the century-long legacy of a teaching/learning research).

Take the emphasis on DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), which is forced on schools receiving money from the part of NCLB known as Reading First. According to Vermont DOE estimates, Reading First will cost Vermonters $700 to $800 per child, money that goes for mandated curriculum and the required paperwork and bean counting required by Washington. For this investment, DIBELS mania transfers child-friendly Vermont kindergartens into high-pressure skill zones, asking: How many nonsense words like these can a five-year-old can read in one minute?

Under NCLB, children become products to be tested, managed, and sorted, like slabs of meat.

The OIG – Office of the Inspector General) revealed just how corrupt this federal science is. Here’s part of a memo from the Reading First chief describing his agency’s “scientific review” of competing, established reading programs:

“Beat the (expletive deleted) out of them in a way that will stand up to any level of legal and whole language apologist scrutiny. Hit them over and over with definitive evidence that they are not SBRR [the Fed’s version of the science of teaching reading], never have been, and never will be. They are trying to crash our party and we need to beat the (expletive deleted) out of them in front of all the other would-be party crashers who are standing on the front lawn waiting to see how we welcome these dirtbags.”

McFaculty Perfecting the Passive Worker

In our “fast food” nation, NCLB pushes a Fast Skills Curriculum. Pre-schoolers are now given skill workups so they’ll be ready for the rigors of kindergarten. Children in grades K-3 who fail the speed tests are pulled out of the classroom—away from real literature and language experiences – for DIBELS “interventions,” skill drills to boost their scores on future DIBELS assessments. This assault on childhood occurs at schools with a high percentage of children receiving subsidized lunches. Children in more affluent schools, untouched by NCLB, still listen to stories read aloud, sing songs, and paint pictures. Children in NCLB schools get DIBELS homework.

Worse, NCLB destroys something fundamental about childhood, which should be a time of curiosity, discovery, and optimism, joy, and grace. Under NCLB, children become products to be tested, managed, and sorted—like slabs of meat. Under NCLB, answers are much more important than questions. Under NCLB, in the name of rigor and raising the bar, young children are made to feel inadequate. Telling primary graders that they’re failing, that they’re not good enough, is part of the corporate-politico plan to create a scared and compliant workforce for the Global Economy. Tell kids often enough that it’s a dog-eat-dog world out there and that they don’t measure up, and they will start to believe it. Pounding this message home and our children will grow up to be adults who never knew about education for the common good, education for democracy. Such institutional abuse casts a long, dark shadow over a child’s lifetime.

The Feds’ Friends and Foes in Vermont

Despite the fact that Vermont’s three elected Congressional representatives voted against NCLB in 2001, the law passed, and in April 2003 the Vermont Department of Education applied for federal dollars to spread Reading First across the state. The defining commitment of Vermont’s 195-page grant application appears in the second paragraph: “Only programs fully aligned with scientifically based research will be eligible for funding through Reading First.”

With that, Vermont joined subservient states in parroting the language, methods, and procedures demanded by the U.S. Department of Education.

Meanwhile, teacher unions and many professional organizations remain strangely silent on the NCLB two-pronged assault on teacher professionalism and on childhood. The National Education Association, for one, insists that, with more money, NCLB can be fixed. Rep. George Miller, chair of the House Committee on Education and Labor, and Sen. Edward Kennedy, chair of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, echo this view. Both joined hands with George Bush to pass NCLB; both are committed to renewing it. NCLB shows us that when Republicans and Democrats agree, children will be hurt. And teacher professionalism destroyed.

In contrast, at the national forefront in fighting unilateral imposition of DIBELS assessments, the Vermont Society for the Study of Education (VSSE) has established an Internet national clearinghouse on DIBELS, offering research, case studies, parent and teacher anecdotes. VSSE takes the position that pouring more money into a law that harms teachers and children is worse than foolish; it’s wrong. No amount of money can fix NCLB.

In January 2007, VSSE affiliated with Educator Roundtable, whose petition to dismantle NCLB refutes the money argument and offers instead a 16-point rationale for ending a bad law. (www/educatorroundtable.org)

A Truly Vermont Plan

With a state education budget of $1.3 billion (for 93,000 students attending 311 schools), one might wonder why we’re worrying about $800/child for NCLB, but the question is critical. In an independent Vermont, local communities, not Washington politicians, would choose how to spend such money. They might opt for an increase in
Educational Agriculture

By Eliot Coleman

“Soil is the tablecloth under the banquet of civilization.”

Steven Stoll

Someday in the future, when advances in understanding have made small-scale agriculture truly financially viable, I want to recreate that famous scene in The Graduate. I want to walk up to some well-educated young person and tell them I have only one word to say – farming. But I am afraid that the ability to make a good living from farming will not be a sufficient inducement. There is another barrier. Today it is considered somehow unworthy of educated people to involve themselves in food production – to work with their hands in the soil like lesser mortals.

Modern education has been too easily swayed by the spectacular and the industrial while ignoring the fundamental and the biological. Schools and colleges spend millions to familiarize students with Internet systems in the ether above their heads, while nothing is spent to introduce them to the vital systems in the earth beneath their feet. We impress students with the spectacle of millions of stars in the heavens, but neglect to awe them with the miracle of millions of living organisms in a single teaspoon of fertile soil.

We impress students with the spectacle of millions of stars in the heavens, but neglect to awe them with the miracle of millions of living organisms in a single teaspoon of fertile soil.

The miracles of millions of living organisms in a single teaspoon of fertile soil. We introduce them to the chemical table of elements but leave them unaware of the susceptibility of the creatures in that teaspoon to the daily chemical residues of our industrial production. How can we hope to train students to care for the planet when they are unfamiliar with the irreplaceable role of the skin of that planet in the miracle of their life?

Our educators are doing a reasonable job at explaining the intricacies of human society to students in lab and classroom, but they are neglecting to make them aware of the web of life in field and garden. If we wish to teach reverence for the earth, we need to insist that practical time spent on the soils of a farm is just as valuable in training citizens for an informed life in the 21st century as time spent studying chalk-filled blackboards in the academy’s lecture halls.

Education’s dismissal of agriculture’s ability to teach us about life has historical background. For much of the past, for many people, farming was devoid of anything but incessant toil and illiterate neighbors. That impression of farming has persisted to the present day. But advances in biology since the 1850s (which unfortunately in the public mind have been overshadowed by the propaganda of the chemical bandwagon) have unlocked mysteries that make today’s organic farming as intellectually stimulating as any other profession. The interrelated activities described by soil microbiology, nitrogen fixation, symbiotic relationships, mycorrhizal associations, allelopathy, weed ecology, and systemic acquired resistance have helped contemporary farmers appreciate the intuitive brilliance of age-old practices like crop rotations, green manures, mixed stocking, and compost making.

When food production is considered a lowly activity, something for the unschooled, the result is forfeit for all – the forfeit of humanity’s essential connection to the source of life. By choosing not to educate our children about soil and agriculture and food, our society in general, and more important, our institutions of higher learning, deprive today’s young people of a truly valuable education. The generations to come will remain ignorant of that thin layer of fertile soil upon which their survival depends.

What better medium than a compost heap for students to come face-to-face with life, death, and the processes that keep our planet alive? If we expect today’s students to find solutions to ensure the future of their world, which they will need to do, what could be better than the direct knowledge that compost – the world’s best fertilizer, made for free in your back yard from kitchen and farm animal waste products – is a model for other simple and inexpensive solutions? We have a belief on our farm that if what we are doing is in any way complicated it is probably wrong, and we modify our practices accordingly. Biologically based agriculture is not only a subject. It is a teacher.

In 1800, Erasmus Darwin, Charles Darwin’s grandfather, wrote that although chemistry and physics could be considered as having achieved the status of sciences, agriculture remained an art. I think that is still true today. This art involves subtleties and judgment calls such as adding just enough limestone but not too much (and whether calcitic or dolomitic), finding the proper depth of tillage (if you till at all), figuring out the ideal balance of ingredients (fungal or bacterial) in the compost, knowing the optimum humification of compost for each use, managing green manures as either surface or incorporated amendments, maximizing the use of “inputs” that spring from natural processes on the farm itself, involving one’s mind in all aspects of the biological world of the soil.

None of the above is dull or unskilled. Balancing these factors is fascinating, challenging, and inspiring, since skill grows with practice.

The results of an intimate, caring, and alert involvement with soil and food-growing are vigorous, healthy plants and animals, a clean environment, and the inward satisfaction of participating in a truly sustainable agriculture that can feed the human population in perpetuity.

Such work cannot continue to be considered beneath the dignity of the educated.
Tell us about your farm operation in St. Albans.
I farm with my family here in St. Albans. We share-milk on Teddy Yandow’s farm. We are an all-grass, organic dairy – one of a growing handful of dairies in the United States doing no-grain dairying. We have created a new company, Carbon Farmers of America, to advance the idea that soil building can reverse climate change, and that the planned grazing of livestock on perennial grasslands is the single most effective way to rapidly create new topsoil. On our dairy farm, we are using a number of methods in addition to planned grazing that allow us to build topsoil even faster by pulling carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and putting it back into the soil as various forms of organic matter.

How does this connect to global warming?
The quickest way to explain what we are proposing is this: If society chooses to pay farmers $25 dollars per ton of carbon dioxide transformed into soil organic matter, then we humans can reduce atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases to pre-industrial levels within a decade. We will also eliminate most water-quality problems and biosecurity issues, we will restore economic prosperity to our rural communities, and we will not have a farm-viability crisis on our hands any more.

Since Al Gore’s film has come out, the literacy rate on climate change has gone up a few clicks. We have too much carbon dioxide in the atmosphere – the number-one greenhouse gas. People tend to assume that the problem of global warming began when we started burning fossil fuels, and there is no doubt that the burning of fossilized carbon and putting it into the atmosphere is a tremendous contributor to increasing the greenhouse effect to dangerous levels.

In addition, we have to remember that photosynthesis by plants and the decay of biomass into soil organic matter is the primary link in the functioning of the global carbon cycle. To the extent that land is desertified, or agricultural lands have bare soil not covered by living and decaying plants, then the carbon cycle is broken, and annual emissions of carbon dioxide from decaying biomass and burning of fossil fuels can’t help but be in excess of the normal fixing of carbon in soils through photosynthesis and decay.

So climate change must be understood primarily as a symptom of biodiversity loss and desertification – the carbon cycle is broken, and climate change can’t be truly addressed until we cover bare ground with plants and “fix” the carbon cycle. Again, the planned grazing of livestock on grasslands is the single most effective way to do this, and without the massive inputs of machinery, fuels, and chemicals.

The carbon cycle, which is really the cycle of life, describes the conversion of carbon dioxide through photosynthesis into plants and then on through the food web, into the soil or geological storage, and back into the atmosphere. The question that comes up is: had the carbon cycle been disrupted even before the industrial revolution?

If we look at the work of Allan Savory, the African scientist who developed Holistic Management, he has shown very clearly that the carbon cycle was disrupted many thousands of years ago when the large herds of hoofed animals that roamed the world’s grasslands were killed off or reduced, and their role in cycling carbon was replaced by burning. These large herds of animals played a crucial role in maintaining the carbon cycle through these grasslands, which comprise about two-thirds of the earth’s land area. At that point, the carbon cycle ceased to function and global warming began.

In sum, the problem of Global Warming needs to be looked at in a larger ecological context. That bigger picture relates to what is going on with the carbon cycle and the ecological cycles and flows of energy on earth. And these are all tied together: The water cycle, and the mineral cycle which includes the carbon cycle, biological community dynamics, and the flow of sunlight and energy through photosynthesis into the rest of the food chain. In a nutshell, climate change, biodiversity loss and desertification are all one issue, and need to be addressed as such to realize success in any area. The planned grazing of livestock on perennial grasslands is the single most powerful tool we have to restore ecosystem health and functioning to our agricultural lands.

So you are talking about this idea of Gaia and this very complex web of life and the relationships that compose this bigger picture.

I am a big fan of James Lovelock’s work and the Gaia theory that says the earth is a single homeostatic self-regulating organism where life essentially manufactures, on a daily basis, the atmosphere...the marriage of earth and sky. Interestingly, Lovelock doesn’t seem to understand yet this critical issue of soil building. There is this prevailing idea that soil can only form very slowly, taking a thousand years to build an inch of topsoil. Through Keyline soil building, developed by P.A. Yeomans in Australia, and other methods that we are currently using, we can build topsoil very quickly. And soil fertility is the key to everything. Essentially, human agriculture has destroyed an enormous quantity of organic matter over the last thousands of years and especially industrialized agriculture in the last 50 years at an accelerated rate. The soil organic matter lost and its conversion into carbon dioxide is perhaps an equal contributor to the burning of fossil fuels to climate change.

What can the average citizen do to effect the kind of soil building that you are talking about?
Everyday people can have a tremendous impact on carbon emissions and carbon sequestration in soil. The key to doing this on any sort of meaningful scale is the planned grazing of livestock on perennial grasslands. So the first thing that we can do is to start eating the food grown by grass farmers. We can support these farmers by buying their products, which in turn stimulates the local economies. We can support them through our purchase of “Carbon Sinks,” the Carbon Farmers of America-version of carbon credits, to offset our personal, family, or business carbon dioxide emissions.

Your organization is also developing a new food label to certify foods produced by Carbon Farmers of America.
We are offering our farmers an opportunity to market their product through the Carbon Farmers of America website and in our publications. When people buy a food product that is affixed with a label indicating Carbon Farmers of America Certified, this ensures people that the food they are eating is not only perfectly nutritious, but is also reversing global warming by fixing carbon dioxide in stable soil organic matter.

Tell us about carbon offsets and Carbon Sinks and how what you are proposing to do is different from what people may have heard about these.
The global carbon trading market and carbon credits began with the Kyoto treaty. The U.S. and Australia are the only large rich countries that are not signatories. So when that treaty was signed a number of countries agreed to start imposing regulations that would incrementally cap carbon emissions at lower and lower levels. And if a certain company emits more than that, they are forced to buy carbon credits from another entity that has emitted less than the new cap – that, or they purchase offsets from a renewable energy project, or some form of land management that captures carbon in biomass.

The challenge with carbon credits, as they stand now is that the caps set under the Kyoto treaty bear little relation to the ecological imperatives in front of us. Right now we are at 390 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. We really should be at around 275 ppm to be safe. Under Kyoto, aiming for reductions in emissions of 10 percent below 1990 levels and variations continued on following page
Vox Populi continued from previous page

on that, has nothing to do with real ecology. So in a sense, polluting entities are given a very slight disincentive, or are financially rewarded for polluting slightly less. This amounts to a permit to pollute.

It is likely that carbon tax schemes will be much more effective than carbon credits. That is, all fossil fuels, industrial emissions and land management that results in emissions of greenhouse gases are taxed. These taxes would disincentivize fossil fuel use. The revenue stream would be used to replace taxes on selected income, property and sales taxes, and also to reward land management that captures carbon in topsoil and biomass.

A “Carbon Sink” is our version of a carbon offset that represents one ton of carbon dioxide that has been converted into just over half a ton of organic matter in the soil by a farmer. What we are talking about with Carbon Sinks is that we need to look at the whole picture. What would be the best fulcrum we could choose that will have the largest effect, not just in terms of climate, but in terms of the overall health of the earth and ecological cycles? Well, that is topsoil. And topsoil is defined by organic matter. Sub soil is pretty much biologically inert mineral matter. As soon as you add life and resulting organic matter to subsoil, then subsoil becomes topsoil and everything falls into place. Your water cycle starts functioning because organic matter, and especially humus in the soil, cleans and purifies the water where it falls, and holds it. So the water cycle falls into place. Food security falls into place because humus-rich soil produces incredibly nutritious food with all the micronutrients available. And economic prosperity falls into place because economics has to be understood, in my view, as entirely based on photosynthesis. Photosynthesis is where all the energy comes from that fuels everything.

Creating new topsoil means that where there used to be bare land, eroding farmland or deserts, now there is topsoil, and green grass grows, streams and rivers flow, and biodiversity in general is doing its work of cycling minerals and water and harvesting solar energy. I believe that biodiversity is the foundation for prosperity and security in human society. When we talk about biodiversity, we are talking about diversity between species, within species, in age structure, and total biomass present. That biodiversity is really what captures sunlight and puts it into the food chain. We are talking about creating true biological capital here. The Carbon Sinks that we are marketing represent not just offsetting carbon emissions, but realigning our lives, our agriculture and our economics in a holistic way that fits into the economy of nature.

When someone goes to your web site and they purchase soil carbon futures, tell us where the money from that purchase is going.

We are marketing Carbon Sinks to businesses and to the public, priced at $25 per ton. For every ton of carbon dioxide that a farmer transforms into just over half a ton of organic matter, which can be measured accurately in their fields, the farmer will be paid $19. One dollar is going to go for administration for the company. The other $5 will go toward equipping and training new carbon farmers. A priority for us is to create what in effect will be both a training program and a bank for new young grass farmers to get started. We want to build an army of young graziers who are going to create this topsoil we need so desperately. This will give an enormous opportunity for young people to get into a really meaningful livelihood and do a lot of good, and be able to make money doing it.

We are offering soil carbon future packages, the size of which will depend on the amount of carbon dioxide emissions from an individual or a company. The average American is responsible every year for almost 24 tons of carbon dioxide emission. Your car can emit from three to 10 tons, and even more from an SUV.

So any environmentally awake person or business can look at their greenhouse gas emissions, figure out how to absolutely minimize those emissions through conserva-

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We have to remove the extra carbon dioxide we have loaded into the atmosphere, and topsoil formation represents the only viable, fast way to do that.

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Visit www.carbonfarmersofamerica.com to read more about how Vermont’s family farms can combat climate change and become more productive. CREDIT RICHARD FOLEY

You have spoken before about making farms the center of our communities again. Is part of the idea to get people out on the farms?

If we start thinking about food as sort of a doorway back to living in a more cooperative way on earth, we need to think about getting involved with our food and knowing where it came from – probably even helping out on the farms every now and then. We are buying our food from another example of people getting involved is the raw milk movement. Food buying clubs are another way that people in towns and cities organize themselves into 10 or 20 or more families, and make very large purchases from farms. It frees the farmers up from doing so much marketing and really builds on this relationship. That can tie people back to the food and the land and give farmers a sense of community and self-worth, which is pretty important these days when they are such a small and even forgotten portion of the population. For the most part, farmers tend to be not very well off these days. It can be lonely too, because there is not a lot of gratitude for farmers because people think the economy floats on air, and dot.com bubbles are what make the world go round.

So I think there are a lot of positive developments in these areas that are happening to make a sane and secure food system. Carbon Farming opens a door to environmental and climatic renewal, where every meal becomes a sacrament and our primary environmental activism.

For further information go to our web site: www.carbonfarmersofamerica.com. Or call CFA at 802-524-0707.
The New England Secession Tradition Part One of a Three-Part Series

By Donald W. Livingston

The Vermont independence effort is guided by a peace-ful group of thoughtful citizens who believe that Ver-mont would be better off as a small independent country like Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Luxembourg, or Switzerland than to remain under the domination of an overly centralized and increasingly out-of-control central federal government. To some, the idea of an independent Vermont is preposterous but harmless, more theater than serious policy. To others it smacks of treason. Did not the Civil War settle forever the question of whether a state within the United States can secede?

It did not. Timeless moral and constitutional questions cannot be settled by the contingencies of war.

That secession is a policy option available to any state within the United States today is admittedly unfashionable, but it is neither sily nor treasonous. It is an option rooted in the origin and foundations of the U.S. political tradition. George Washington and John Adams proved secessionists. The 1776 Declaration of Independence is a legal brief in international law justifying the secession of 13 self-proclaimed states from the British Empire. Vermont was not one of these states, but seceded from Britain on her own in 1777, and remained an independent republic before joining the Union in 1791. Vermont and Texas came into the Union as independent states from prior secessions.

Secession is an ever-present possibility in any large political union created out of formerly independent political societies such as the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, the European Union, or the United States. Since each political society pre-existed the union, the political society is primary (an end in itself), while the union is secondary (an instrument). When an instrument (like the union) no longer serves its purpose, it should be discarded for a better one.

Of course, every large scale union will try to make itself the end, and the political units that are its constituent parts the means. Great Britain did this during its imperial period. But a recent poll shows that 52 percent of Scots want to secede and restore their own country, and 58 percent of the English approve of their leaving! The Soviet Union claimed to be a revolutionary end in itself, and the republics instruments for a global Marxist revolution. But this most centralized Union in history dissolved after only 70 years when 15 states peacefully seceded.

To view the notion of an independent Vermont republic in the proper light, we need to keep in mind the great political changes that have occurred internationally since World War II. For 350 years, the disposition of European states (and those created by their empires, including the United States) has been centralization of power. Thousands of independent and quasi-independent political societies were crushed into larger and fewer states through wars of unification and nation-building. Eighteenth century absolute Monarchists, 19th century Liberals and Socialists, 20th century Communists, Nazis, and Fascists all agreed at least on one thing: smaller polities had to give way to vast, centralized, modern states ruling over millions. It was thought that prosperity and moral progress (however defined), depended on such Leviathans.

But experience has shown this to be an illusion. From the French Revolution of 1789 through the Napoleonic wars, World Wars I and II, and the Cold War, the massive power concentrated in modern states has issued in wars of unprecedented scale and intensity. And wars have not been the worst. R. J. Rummel in Death by Government has argued that modern states have killed nearly four times as many of their own people as have been killed in all the wars, foreign and domestic, fought around the globe in the 20th century. The modern unitary state has proven itself to be a weapon of mass destruction. What prosperity and progress we have appears to have gone on in spite of the Leviathan, and not because of it.

Historical tension
Smallness is no barrier to prosperity. Most of the 10 states in the world having the highest per-capita income are small. One of them, Iceland, has a population under 300,000. More than half the countries in the world today are under 5 million, and the number is growing. Vermont’s population is around 600,000. If it were independent, it would join 66 other countries with populations of 600,000 or less.

Everywhere the vast nation-states created since the French Revolution are fracturing. Aligiances are shifting to supranational or sub-national organizations. An inde-pendent Vermont republic is possible because we live in interesting times. George Kennan, one of the 20th century’s great geopolitical strategists and architect of the United States’ Cold War containment policy, argued in his autobiography, Around the Cragged Hill, that the public corporation known as the United States has become simply too large for the purposes of self government. When any corporation becomes so large that it is on the verge of collapsing under its own unwieldy bulk, the only remedy, Kennan concluded, is to downsize it. And he suggested that we begin a public debate on how to divide the U.S. empire into a number of independent unions of states associated under a commonwealth model. George Kennan, who ended his career at Princeton’s Institute for Advanced Studies, endorsed the idea of an independent Vermont republic a few years before his death as a worthy effort to begin a debate about how such division should proceed.

Yet for many, secession still appears alien – outside the boundaries of the U.S. political tradition. But this view springs from attending to only one part of our political tradition. From the formation of the United States, with the Articles of Confederation, on down to 1860, secession proved a policy option considered in every section of the federation by major political leaders. It was only after the so-called “Civil War” that Americans began to adopt the language of the French Revolution, language that absolutely prohibits secession. The French Republic was the first to declare itself a republic – one and indivisible – creating the paradigm of all modern states.

But this language of indivisibility was entirely alien to the republican principles of the American Revolution under which the United States created a voluntary federation of states, not an aggregate of individuals ruled from the center. It was not until the 1920s (at the high noon of the Western obsession with centralization) that the U.S. Congress approved the Pledge of Allegiance, verbally transforming a federation of states into the French Revolutionary slogan: “one nation indivisible.”

The result is that Americans have inherited a deeply fractured political tradition. On one side of the fracture is what we may call a Jeffersonian Americanism, beginning with the Declaration of Independence (a secession document) and running down to 1860. On the other side is a post-Lincolnian Americanism. The former is rooted in state sovereignty, privileges small polities, and is open to secession. The latter is rooted in national sovereignty, views the individual states (like Vermont) mainly as administrative units of the center, and absolutely prohibits secession. Every American has inherited both these contrary Americanisms, and no citizen who understands both can fail to feel the tension they generate.

Yet they are incommensurable. Post-Lincolnian historiography has pushed Jeffersonian Americanism to the margin by either ignoring it or by presenting it as an outdated political engagement. But no part of a tradition is ever lost. Indeed, what we call a reformation or a renaissance is usually a swerving back to recover and make topical again a part of tradition that had been neglected or misunder-stood. At a time when the 350-year adventure of the large unitary state has turned sour and the resources of post-Lincolnian centralization seem to be exhausted, it is perhaps time to recover and explore the Jeffersonian inheritance.

A New England tradition
The first thing to appreciate is that it was not until the post-Lincolnian era that the U.S. Constitution began to be seen as the sacred document of an organic American civil religion. In the Jeffersonian era, the Constitution was thought of as a secular compact between sovereign states. It was also a compromise that few were happy with. Alexander Hamilton, who wanted a British style unitary state, called it a “worthless fabric.”

The region of the United States that first tested the Union for its viability was New England. Its leaders seriously considered secession in 1804 over President Jefferson’s Louisiana Purchase; in 1808 over Jefferson’s Embargo of their trade; and most seriously in 1814, over issues surrounding “Mr. Madison’s War of 1812.” Secession was advocated by New England abolitionists from the 1830s on to 1860; and by John Quincy Adams and other New England leaders over the Mexican war and the annexation of Texas. In this essay (and the next installments), an effort will be made to make this New England secession tradition better known and to explore its intimations for our time. continued on following page
Livingston continued from previous page

The Union created by the Constitution of 1789 was hotly debated and passed only by a small margin. As early as 1794, Senators Rufus King of New York (formerly from Massachusetts) and Oliver Ellsworth of Connecticut told Senator John Taylor of Virginia that “it was utterly impossible for the union to continue,” that North and South would never agree on public policy, and that it would be better to renegotiate the Union than to have a forced separation later. Both King and Ellsworth were Founding Fathers who had helped draft the U.S. Constitution, and both were political allies of Federalist leaders who would later lead serious secession movements in New England.

Nothing came of this move. But 10 years later a more serious effort at secession arose in response to the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, which more than doubled the size of the United States. Since the Constitution had no provision for acquiring new territory, Jefferson’s acquisition was thought to be unconstitutional. Moreover, New England had a commercial and maritime economy; consequently, its face was set to the East. The agricultural South meanwhile, looked to cultivate land in the West. Acquiring the Louisiana Territory meant more states in the West, greatly expanding the power of the Southern agrarian interest at the expense of New England’s commercial interests.

Further, the new states would contain Spanish and French populations that had no feel for the American inheritance of British liberty which New Englanders thought was best exemplified in their own region of the nation. As one cleric put it: “we derive all that is valuable in religion and morals, the common law, the habeas corpus, the trial by jury, and that spirit and those principles of freedom, which led to our independence. Had we been the sons of Frenchmen, we could have inherited none of these blessings.”

These ethnic, cultural, commercial and other dislocations anticipated by the Louisiana Purchase gave rise, in 1804, to a secession movement led by New England Federalists in Congress of whom Timothy Pickering, Uriah Tracy, and Roger Griswold were leaders. Their vision was of “a new confederacy, exempt from the corrupt and corrupting influence and oppression of the aristocratic Democrats of the South.” Its nucleus would be New England, “to which New York would be added later,” and with a hand of friendship extended to the British provinces in Canada. Aaron Burr supported the vision, and it was hoped that, upon being elected governor of New York, he would lead a secession movement in that state. Though secession was considered desirable by many Federalist leaders in New England, they did not think there was sufficient popular support to hazard their careers. Burr’s electoral defeat and the scandal over killing Hamilton in a duel ended, for the moment, the project of a New England federation.

This first secession movement, which counted among its leaders Founding Fathers who had drafted the U.S. Constitution, may seem surprising only because of the dominance of post-Lincolnian historiography which views U.S. history as the story of the inevitable unfolding of a unitary American State, one and indivisible. But in the Jeffersonian era, the Union was not considered organic and indivisible but an experiment, as Washington famously called it in his 1796 Farewell Address.

An experiment that fails should be called off. And in the case of a federal union of states, each of which could be a viable country in the world, that can only mean secession. A distinguished historian of this period writes: “secession, even in 1804 was no new and unheard-of remedy for oppressed sectional minorities...most political thinkers of the first half-century of constitutional government had very little faith in the duration of the Union, and the statement that such-and-such a measure would ‘inexorably produce a dissolution of the Union’ was a familiar figure of speech in politics.”

It is not familiar now. But what fate can we rationally have in an over-centralized, post-Lincolnian empire that no longer knows how to stop growing? What fate did George Kennan have in it? Would it really have been so
Beyond the Bottom Line
Vermont Businesses Set the Pace for Social Responsibility

By Don Mayer

Dual, triple or multiple bottom lines, Vermont entrepreneurs have long been in the forefront of changing the way businesses measure their success. More than 16 years ago, a small group of these entrepreneurs formed Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility. VBSR is now the largest SR business group in the United States (not per capita, but with the most member businesses of any state). VBSR now has more than 670 member businesses that employ about 35,000 Vermonters and account for over $4.5 billion in annual revenue in the state.

When Business Ethics magazine ranks the 100 Best Corporate Citizens you will find Vermont businesses at the top of that list. When the Key Bank and Vermont Business Magazine select recipients for the S X S X S awards (given to the five companies, in each of five categories, that demonstrate the strongest growth over a five-year period), as many as two-thirds of the winners are members of VBSR. More important, these businesses demonstrate every day that “doing right” and “doing well” go hand in hand.

When a company forms or “incorporates,” it “forms a body” in society. That body has a larger footprint upon our society than any individual. Any company has a greater impact upon the environment, a greater impact upon people (employees, customers, vendors), and it takes advantage of our common resources such as natural materials, limited liability, commerce, etc. With that greater impact comes a greater responsibility, a greater obligation.

Any company has a greater impact upon the environment and upon people, and takes greater advantage of our common resources. With that greater impact comes a greater responsibility, a greater obligation.

upon people (employees, customers, vendors), and it takes advantage of our common resources such as natural materials, limited liability, commerce, etc. With that greater impact comes a greater responsibility, a greater obligation.

It really boils down to how you measure commercial success. If you are McDonalds, you might measure success as the least-expensive hamburger. Unfortunately, you end up with results such as those gruesomely outlined in Eric Schlosser’s Fast Food Nation. If you are Wal-Mart you measure success by having the lowest prices, with the negative impact of low wages, shoddy products, and the transfer of local production and jobs to foreign markets. When profit and shareholder returns are the only measures of success, then people, the planet and the common good suffer.

Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility differs from other similar groups because of the organization’s commitment to foster a business climate that measures success by commitment to, and involvement in, their communities, the environment, and their people. VBSR does this through education, networking, and public influence. The latter, public influence, has made VBSR a voice for sane workplace quality, livable jobs, protection of the environment, health care reform, and a long-term approach to energy, transportation, and conservation.

A prime example of this influence came two years ago, when the Vermont Legislature passed a comprehensive health care reform package. When the legislation was passed, panicky e-mails and letters were sent out by the Vermont Chamber of Commerce and other “traditional” business groups in an attempt to stop this reform. VBSR and our member organizations, on the other hand, stood with the legislators, the unions, AARP, VPRIG, and other groups to praise and support this bill. Unfortunately, the governor ultimately vetoed the bill.

One of the things that make VBSR different and so attractive to membership is this front-line commitment to community involvement through public-policy advocacy. While often at odds with “traditional” business voices, VBSR is rapidly becoming a strong and effective voice for business in our state. It is our goal to make the voice of business a voice that talks effectively about a work environment and economic climate that will enable every worker to earn a fair income safely, to contribute his or her labor to a high-quality product or service, and to work and live with dignity and respect.

Social responsibility has gone mainstream and the need to define and re-define corporate responsibility has never been greater. Wal-Mart runs TV commercials touting its health insurance program for employees, yet it continues to hire predominately part-time workers, have the greatest percentage of workers on publicly financed health care programs and, in the rush to dominate the retail market, reduce quality, export jobs and make it difficult for local businesses to compete. You probably have seen advertisements from oil companies, chemical companies and others attempting to portray themselves as environmentally friendly. While we applaud even the most minor action to protect the environment or improvement in workplace quality, this “green washing” threatens to reduce the vital importance of “social responsibility” to a 30-second sound bite.

Perhaps we should be Vermont Businesses for Social “Obligation,” because a business that does not protect the environment, does not provide livable jobs, and is not a responsible member of its community is basically stealing from us all.

Let me give you an example from my own business.

When Small Dog Electronics got started, we would buy large quantities of used computers and refurbish them by taking parts from one and adding them to another to make a working computer. We were left with large quantities of defective parts. We disposed of them at the local landfill from time to time. We later started looking at our “waste stream” and found that these materials we were throwing away contained dangerous metals and compounds (lead, mercury, cadmium, etc.). Once we discovered this problem, we located a company called Envirocycle, in Massachusetts, that specializes in environmentally sound electronics recycling.

We stopped filling our local landfill, and now pay to have our waste recycled.

And we too this process further when we launched an “e-waste initiative” that allows anyone to bring us their old electronic materials; we then take the e-waste and make sure it is properly recycled. This took us one step beyond just dealing responsibly with our waste to providing an easy way for our community to assure that their e-waste was also handled without harm to the environment. It is our “obligation” to prevent our wastes from entering the landfills; it is our responsibility to go even further.

Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility has much influence in Vermont. It is made up of some of the most successful businesses in our state, some of them large,
LIVE PERFORMANCE

THE GODS OF THE HILLS

Written by Ethan Allen
Adapted and Performed by Jim Hogue

Also available
A two-CD dramatic reading, with forward and glossary, of A Narrative of Colonel Ethan Allen’s Captivity

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Upcoming appearances:
• Langdon Street Cafe in Montpelier, April 21, 7:00 (reservations required at 456 1123);
• The Inn at Baldwin Creek in Bristol, April 27 and 28;
• Adamant Community Center, May 20.
• History Expo, June 23 and 24.
# FROM THE MIDDLEBURY INSTITUTE

## REGISTRY OF NORTH AMERICAN SEPARATIST ORGANIZATIONS

Compiled by the Middlebury Institute. See MiddleburyInstitute.org.

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<th>General</th>
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| __American Secession Project__  
Secessions.us  
American Secessionist Blog: Secessions.us/sp.html  
Active 2007.  
“The charter of the American Secession Project is simple. We desire to place the concept of secession in the mainstream of political thought. Our intent is to proclaim that secession is a viable and legal right and a practical solution to contemporary problems.” |

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<tr>
<th>Middlebury Institute</th>
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| MiddleburyInstitute.org  
127 E. Mountain Rd. S.  
Cold Spring, NY 10516  
Director@MiddleburyInstitute.org  
“In answer to a growing swell of interest in realistic responses to the excesses of the present American empire, The Middlebury Institute has been launched by a group of activists and professionals to promote the serious study of separatism, secession, self-determination and similar devolutionary trends and developments.” |

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<tr>
<th>Secessio.Net</th>
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“Promotes radical political decentralization and community-based secession. Goals include: Legitimize Secession of Small Political Entities; Promote Nonviolent, Libertarian and Decentralist Political Visions; Influence Existing Secessionist Movements; Promote New Secession Movements; Network among these Movements.” |

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<tr>
<th>Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization</th>
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| Unpo.org  
Parljoenschracht 76  
2512 BR The Hague  
Netherlands  
UNPo@unpo.org  
“UNPO is a democratic, international membership organization. Its members are indigenous peoples, occupied nations, minorities and independent states or territories...UNPO...assists its members in effective participation at an international level.” |

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<tr>
<th>Alaska</th>
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| __Alaska Independence Party__  
Akip.org  
POB 58462  
Fairbanks, AK 99711  
“The Alaskan Independence Party’s goal is the vote we were entitled to in 1958, one choice from among the following four alternatives: 1) Remain a Territory. 2) Become a separate and Independent Nation. 3) Accept Commonwealth status. 4) Become a State.” |

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<tr>
<th>Alberta</th>
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| __Alberta Republicans__  
AlbertaRepublicans.org  
admin@albertarepublicans.org  
FreeAlberta.com  
9600 Southland Circle SW #2804  
Calgary, Alberta T2V1A1  
contact@g/freealberta.com  
“FreeAlberta.com is a website whose main purpose is to accurately document and measure the costs of Alberta remaining in Canada. We believe that these costs are unacceptable. We demonstrate how peaceful and legal secession can be achieved....” |

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<th>California</th>
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| __Republic of California__  
IndependentCalifornia.com  
Active 2007.  
“An independent California will be a progressive state, which is to say that we place education and health care above fear and war. We value our environment and consider it our role to preserve nature for our children and grandchildren.” |

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<tr>
<th>Cascadia</th>
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| __Cascadia Independence Project__  
Cascadianow.org  
4128 Interlake Avenue NW  
Seattle, WA 98103  
Cascadianow@gmail.com  
Republic of Cascadia  
Zapatopi.net/cascadia/ |

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<tr>
<th>Hawai’i</th>
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| __Free Hawai’i__  
FreeHawaii.org  
(Scott Crawford)  
Hawaii Kingdom  
HawaiianKingdom.org  
POB 2194  
Honolulu, HI 96805  
(David Keanu Sai)  
Hawai’i Nation  
Hawaii-Nation.org  
exec@hawaii-nation.org.  
(Bumpy Kanahele)  
Institute for the Advancement of Hawaiian Affairs  
http://www.ophi.com/  
(Poka Laenui)  
plaeno@pisi.com  
Ka Lahui Hawai’i  
http://www.hawaii-nation.org/turningthetide-6-4.html  
(Haunani-Kay Trask; Mililani Trask)  
Est’d 1987.  
“Ka Lahui Hawaii is the evolutionary product of three generations of Hawaiians who have sought to regain their Native lands and to re-establish themselves as a self-governing people.” |

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<th>Ka Pakaukau</th>
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| (Richard Kekuni Akana Blaisdell)  
The Living Nation  
LivingNation.org  
MelKalakhi@gmail.com  
“We intend to show Hawai’i, the United States and the world that we are a living nation indeed and we will accept nothing less than our full independence returned.” |

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<tr>
<th>Maine</th>
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| __The Second Maine Militia__  
Vermontpublic.org/the_second_maine_militia  
Carolyn Chute  
POB 99  
Porter, ME 04068  
“The militia includes Democrats, Republics, Greens, lefties, libertarians, feminists, patriots and anarchists.” |

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<tr>
<th>New Hampshire</th>
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| __Free State Project__  
Freestateproject.org  
NHliberty.org  
NHfree.com  
aphillips@freestateproject.org  
“The Free State Project is an effort to recruit 20,000 liberty-loving people to move to New Hampshire. We are looking for neighborly, productive, tolerant folks from all walks of life, of all ages, creeds, and colors who agree to the political philosophy...that government exists at most to protect people’s rights, and should neither provide for people nor punish them for activities that interfere with no one else.” |

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<tr>
<th>Republic of New Hampshire</th>
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| RepublicOfNH.org  
“We thus hereby request that the legislature of New Hampshire make the following resolution: That the State of New Hampshire is, and of right ought to be, a free and independent state.” |

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<tr>
<th>Puerto Rico</th>
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| __Puerto Rico Independence Party__  
Independencia.net  
963 Ave. Roosevelt  
San Juan, PR 00920  
pippnacional@independencia.net  
“The Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP) was founded in 1946 with the purpose of seeking and obtaining independence by every pacific mean available.” |

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<tr>
<th>Quebec</th>
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| __Parti Quebecois__  
Pq.org  
1200 Av. Papineau  
Montreal, Quebec  
H2K4R5 |

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<th>South</th>
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</table>
| __Confederate Legion__  
Confederatelegion.com  
270-705-6225 / 270-705-7227  
chief-of-staff@confederatelegion.com  
Active 2007.  
“We propose that every lawful, peaceful and honorable means be used to forge a modern professional Confederate Military Ceremonial Honor Guard...The Confederate Legion would be forewarned to uphold the highest traditions of our history, heritage, culture and nationhood.” |

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<tr>
<th>League of the South</th>
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| Leagueofthesouth.net  
POB 760  
Killen, AL 35645  
mtyggle@crselect.com  
Chapters in Alabama, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Northwest Region, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.  
“The League of the South is a Southern Nationalist organization whose ultimate goal is a free and independent Southern republic. To reach this goal, we intend to create the climate for a free South among our people by 1) de-legitimizing the American Empire at every opportunity; 2) by proving our willingness to be servant-leaders to the Southern people; and 3) by making The League of the South a strong, viable organization that will lead us to Southern independence.” |
Free Vermont!
200 Towns Campaign

Be it resolved that the state of Vermont peacefully and democratically free itself from the United States of America and return to its status as an independent republic as it was between January 15, 1777 and March 4, 1791.

Vermont
Second Vermont Republic
VermontRepublic.org
Vtcommons.org
202 Stockbridge Road
Charlotte, VT 05445
802-425-4133
info@vermontrepublic.org
“The Second Vermont Republic is a peaceful, decentralist, voluntary association opposed to the tyranny of multinational corporations and the U.S. government, and committed to the return of Vermont to its status as an independent republic.”
I n the television series Lost, a motley bunch of air crash survivors wash up on a desert island, where they find a secret underground bunker with a countdown button that a dusty instruction film says must be reset every 108 minutes, or else. What “or else” means is not clear, but it’s scary enough to convince them. And so they burrow underground, betray, and bump each other off so they can keep pushing the button.

The show plays like an updated old Saturday matinee serial, with cliffhangers at the end of every episode to keep you – you guessed it – pushing the button for more! I hear there are web sites full of Lost fans all over the Internet, exchanging notions of what’s really going on, and even making script suggestions about where the plot should go, which the writers sometimes follow.

I’ve been watching the show on delayed DVD to avoid the commercials, but over in “real TV time” I heard that one of the characters did in fact quit pushing the button, and coincidentally the ratings themselves crashed. Now that is scary, especially for the sponsors. Anyway, as millions of people (including the screenwriters) scratch their heads trying to guess what’s behind the button, let me suggest that what we have here is an archetype manifesting the meaningless activity of modern man. Wake up, eat, work, buy something, empty the garbage, sleep, press restart. Remember your instructions post 9-11: Keep Shopping!

Of course there are better ways to keep the faith. Hopelessness postponed is the feeling I get after reading Curtis White’s new book The Spirit of Disobedience: Resisting the Charms of Fake Politics, Mindless Consumption, and the Culture of Total Work (Polipoint Press). This is a sophisticated cultural, political, and spiritual odyssey through the highways and byways of social dissent, and in general, a bulls-eye critique of modern capitalist society, and it absolutely floored me.

Mixed metaphor there for a mixed-up world, sorry.

What’s especially surprising is that with bookstore shelves spilling over with me-too critiques of Bush and Company, somebody could articulate something that feels so fresh and new about such a sorry-ass old situation.

Like a righteous solicitor building a case against a wily defendant, White ratchets up his indictment against what passes for civilization patiently, with style and depth and humor, until the devastating conclusion is inescapable: We’re servile suckers. And the reason is simple. Argues White: secular liberal Democrats can’t beat conservative money-grubbing Republicans because their ethical foundation is based on a “faith” just as spurious as modern Christianity. It’s called reason, or rationalism, or enlightenment. And there’s no more factual basis for rationalism than there is for the virgin birth.

So, according to White, reason is a religion, too! Liberals say we shouldn’t torture and kill our enemies here and abroad because it’s unenlightened, it’s not reasonable. Oh, says White, well show me the scientific proof that says we shouldn’t plunder the world. In the long run, we might ruin the planet, but so what? Some folks are having a ball, and will continue to rake it in for as long as the party lasts. It’s a Mexican standoff, both sides standing in bullshit. Did Jesus really tell everybody to grub for money? On the other hand, if you forget religion and decide to play fair and square based on reason, well, where did reason come from? Isn’t reason just another “faith”?

What’s missing on both sides, according to White, is that conservatives and liberals have totally lost sight of the one basic spiritual truth: The Golden Rule. Until both sides admit that a totally unreasonable and faith-based belief in “do unto others as you’d have them do unto you” is the only foundation for a sane world, we are doomed.

But this insight is only part of White’s tale. Also woven into this smart and intriguing book is White’s casting of a new and timely light on two masterworks of disobedience: Hamlet and Walden; his dismantling of clever but ultimately shallow cultural naughties like Office Space and DaVinci Code; the suggestion of a surprisingly upbeat aesthetic operating behind the film Brokeback Mountain; and a renewed appreciation for the “outsider” artistic ethic of Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

Norman Mailer once said something like, “you used to be able to live on the shoulder of the road. Today the shoulder’s gone.” White’s book is about finding the shoulder again.

The problem with books that offer brilliant critiques of our decadent country is that the reader is often left feeling enlightened but powerless to change things. As White admits, we are all servile inhabitants of a consumerist hell, stuck with the dead-end alternatives of deluded liberalism on one hand and business worship on the other.

What to do?

No doubt it would have been a thematic misstep for White to start talking about secession in a political/cultural treatise like this, but, in fact, toward the end of the book he sure hints at it. “There is not now nor has there ever been anything united about the United States of America. We are not one. The idea of a unified American character is not so much a myth as a bad joke that won’t go away.”

Sound familiar?

Like a good Q & A at the end of a talk, the book then opens up to interviews with cultural critics Michael Abelman, Jan de Graff, and James Howard Kunstler. (I know Kunstler’s hard-hitting speech at the Vermont secession convention in 2005 rubbed some folks the wrong way, but I liked his no-bullshit approach, and for Kunstler fans this interview will not disappoint.) The interviews confirm and amplify White’s concerns, and offer possible solutions in areas such as agriculture, community planning, and better use of our personal time. The interviews are so compelling that I gave a copy of the book to my 20-year-old undergrad daughter, who’s wondering which way to steer, and I told her to begin with the Q & As because of their energetic enthusiasm for creating positive alternatives to the current culture.

White concludes the book with this advice: “Misbehave. Make something beautiful. Try to win.” Sounds like a plan.

Screenings

I thought the highlight of Rob Williams’ January 2007 appearance on VPR’s “Switchboard” was his answer to a caller who voiced concern about what would happen to an independent Vermont facing some god-awful natural disaster without federal help. “I have a two word answer for you,” Williams said. “Hurricane Katrina.”

The Feds’ failure to help Gulf Coast residents in the wake of Katrina gets devastating documentary treatment in Spike Lee’s When the Levees Broke. This is a must-see DVD that you should watch twice: first in the theatrical format, then once again with the filmmaker’s acid commentary. People can argue about whether or not the Greenhouse Effect had anything to do with the storms (don’t forget Rita, which hit soon after), but there’s no question about the White House Effect. Don’t forget, in Vermont we’ve got a decrepit nuclear power plant running at pedal-to-the-metal levels, but if you think the cavalry’s coming in case of trouble, remember Katrina.


And if you haven’t seen Dylan’s Masked and Anonymous, check out this 2003 release. It’s a dystopian vision of the future – of is it the now? Amazing cast, including Penelope Cruz, Jeff Bridges, and Dylan and his band. Consider the release date, and tell me that isn’t spookyly prophetic.

Bush Bashing may be cathartic, but it’s the U.S. Empire that needs dis-assembling.
library funds or concert tickets; they might put dental clinics in the schools and eliminate lead dust exposure. They might decide families needed that money to buy winter fuel.

Instead of grinding our very future down into passive submission, Vermonters can shun federal money and return to our roots. A good place to start is the Vermont Design for Education,2 issued by the Office of the Commissioner, Department of Education in 1968. Rooted in community conversations about local schools, the Design offers an optimistic, student-centered vision of what education is and who it’s for: "Education in Vermont, if it is to move forward, must have a goal toward which to move, a basic philosophy which combines the best which is known about learning, children, development, and human relations with the unique and general needs and desires of Vermont communities.”

Take a look at the contrast in language and expectation between a Vermont Department of Education answerable to the citizens of Vermont, and one following federal dictates (see table).3

After the Vermont Design was made public, 30,000 teachers from around the world applied for jobs. In contrast, when VSSE Senior Fellow Dana Rapp conducted a survey of Vermont teachers’ attitudes, 83 percent replied that NCLB has a negative effect on learning.

As recess and naptime in Vermont are consigned to the dustbin so kids will have more time for federalized reading, we should consider small, sovereign Finland. The Finns maintain that young children learn to love learning through play. Their children don’t start school until they are seven, and even then, every 45 minutes of instructional time is followed by 15 minutes of play. The Finnish government imposes no curriculum or methodology on teachers; curriculum and methodology are localized to each school. The international test is the only standardized test Finnish schoolchildren take. The Finnish children score highest in the world on literacy and science tests.

Vermonters have a clear choice. In an independent Vermont republic, we can take back our schools, making sure they are rooted in community values and focused on individual needs, rather than watching our children be digested by a fast-food uniformity. We can choose to give our kindergartners time to smell spring flowers and watch caterpillars.

In his ruling of the 2002 case of Detroit Free Press v. Ashcroft, Judge Damon J. Keth, Senior Judge for the United States Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit, stated, "Democracies die behind closed doors." It is time to open the doors on the Vermont Education Department’s dealings with the federal government and demand a return to the heritage we value. Taking back our local schools from the federal government is an important first step in creating an independent Vermont Republic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1968 Vermont Design for Education</th>
<th>2003 Reading First Application</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Combines the best of what is known about learning, citing educational philosophy from Plato and Aristotle to Dewey and Piaget</td>
<td>Requires use of “proven methods” promulgated by boosters of “scientifically based reading research”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasizes each child’s unique way of learning</td>
<td>Emphasizes “required procedures” for “all children”</td>
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<tr>
<td>De-emphasizes rote learning</td>
<td>Emphasizes “close monitoring” of “scripted, systematic, explicit instruction”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emphasizes flexibility</td>
<td>Demands “rigorous expectations”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calls for learning experiences geared to individual needs rather than group norms</td>
<td>Insists on “data based decision making”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involves entire local community</td>
<td>Uses “experts” identified in setting standards by the U. S. Department of Education</td>
</tr>
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1Research by William Mathis, Superintendent of Schools for the Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union Superintendent, VSSE Senior Fellow, and consultant for the Rural School and Community Trust, shows that school data processing staff has increased 126% since 2003.
2http://susanohanian.org/show_yahoo.html?id=163
3Susan Ohanian. A Roadblock in Vermont’s Design for Education. Vermont Society for the Study of Education. 200
The Bush Administration’s reaction to 9/11 in the form of a more corporate-friendly, business-as-usual National Energy Plan (closed-door consultations chaired by VP Cheney) and the subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq opened the proverbial “Pandora’s Box” and triggered a strong reaction from Vermont’s culture of active grassroots organizations.

- In the spring of 2003, 81 of 83 towns passed a “Vermont Energy Independence” resolution urging our state government and congressional delegation to encourage all sectors of the Vermont economy toward a sustainable energy future.
- In 2005, 48 of 53 towns across Vermont voted in favor of resolutions requesting that their state representatives use their executive and legislative powers to investigate the deployment of the Vermont National Guard to Iraq.
- In 2006, more than a dozen towns passed impeachment resolutions to urge formal inquiry into President Bush’s promotion of the WMD rationale for invading Iraq, his executive decisions through hundreds of “signing statements,” and his overall leadership of the “War on Terror” – executive decisions permitting surveillance and detainment of U.S. citizens, as well as torture and rendition of suspected “terrorists.” The impeachment movement sought to add another 30-40 towns to the list during the 2007 town meetings.
- On February 13, 2007, the Vermont House and Senate voted to press Congress and the president “to commence immediately the orderly withdrawal of American military forces from Iraq.” Another first for the Vermont Legislature.

All these resolutions – energy independence, limiting deployment of the Vermont National Guard, impeachment, and bring-the-troops-home – had roots in loose coalitions of civic-minded individuals and their dozens of peace-and-justice, church-affiliated, environmental and renewable-energy groups. More and more Vermonters have been equating their dependence on imported energy with the U.S. government’s aggressive military policies.

There’s been a buzz – at times some downright tension – in the past few years in our Windham County communities about three interwoven energy issues that reinforce the worries generated by the soaring prices of gasoline and home heating fuel and the human, moral, and monetary costs of the “War on Terror,” especially the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Many of us question:

- the state government’s belated, convoluted response to the huge question of where Vermonters will get their electricity in the near future;
- the state’s recent failure (2002-2004) to purchase the dams on the Connecticut and Deerfield Rivers;
- the successive failures of the state government to contest the sale of the atomic power plant Vermont Yankee to an out-of-state energy conglomerate, and then to confront Entergy’s subsequent strategy to supercharge the plant, expand the on-site storage of radioactive waste, and extend the operating license from 2012 to 2032.

Along with this short list, more Vermonters have been grasping the potentially devastating social and environ-

mental repercussions of Peak Oil and Climate Change. Our preoccupations – with prices at the gas pump, prepay versus pay-as-you-go heating oil, our proximity to a radioactive waste dump and prime terrorist target, and questions about where our electricity will come – have jolted us into outpourings of collective action.

Take the spontaneous outbreak of self-selecting groups that are initiating a wide array of direct action on the local level. “Down south” we can point to Brattleboro-based Post-Oil Solutions, Windham Energy Coalition, Windham Environmental Coalition, District Heating Group, Vermonters for a Fair Economy and Environmental Protection, Brattleboro Climate Protection; Putney’s Energy Committee; Springfield’s Sustainable Valley Group; Norwich’s Sustainable Energy Resource Group. Most of these groups have been exploring the relationship between indigenous renewable-energy sources (wind power, small hydropower, wood-chips, “cow power,” basic energy efficiency, biodiesel) and the health of our local economies, especially around locally grown food.

Our little piece of God’s Country (Vermont) turned into just another prize in that ancient conflict between the rich and the rest of us.

In short, Vermonters are stepping up their collective efforts to take responsibility for their dependence on the global fossil fuel-driven economy and its enormous environmental and social costs.

Preface to The Great Hydropower Heist

How did we Vermonters get here? How did we lose our energy independence? Why haven’t we converted more of our potential “Energy Commons” – our sunlight, our wind, our forests, our rivers, our economy’s waste products – into sustainable power sources?

Why are our politicians “courageously” arguing for 20 percent energy independence (electricity only) by 2020 in 2007? Especially when Vermont, as New England’s largest exporter of “green power,” has been shipping to its southern neighbors the renewable hydroelectric power generated by the dams on the Connecticut and Deerfield rivers for the past half century?

Back in 2002-2004, our Brattleboro-based group NECTIS, the NorthEast Center for Social Issues Studies, put together a team of professionals who volunteered their time and talents to convince the state to purchase these “green” power sources, the dams on the Connecticut and Deerfield rivers – 535 megawatts of combined capacity, or more than 80 percent of what Vermont Yankee supplies Vermont. A purchase that in one fell swoop would answer the Pro-Nukes’ perennial rejoinder to the Shutdown VY crowd: “And how do you propose to replace all that reliable, low-cost power?”

Simple. With safer, more reliable, lower-cost and infinitely more green and greenhouse-friendly hydropower.

Our lobbying efforts paid off when the Legislature invested $750,000 in an attempt to buy the dams outright. But Governor Douglas sold the deal down the river while the Legislature washed its hands of affair and went looking for other ways to “diversify the state’s energy portfolio.” Bizarre stuff.

Here’s one story that may serve as a lesson, a diagnostic template that illuminates the corporatization of our Commons. Our peek behind the headlines and the political podiums from a Windham County and Brattleboro perspective travels back more than 100 years. What NECTIS discovered in the original “dam deals” was a perspective, grounded in history and re-affirmed by recent events, that illuminates the energy-crises knocking on our doors – from war in Iraq to flipping on the light switch.

It started as a local story that in many ways pitted our business and farming communities against one another, over the relatively simple issue of how best to use our Commons – in this case, the rivers and watersheds of the Connecticut and Deerfield Rivers.

It is the old story of corporate bait-and-switch and divide-and-conquer. Corporate strategic planners, working the halls of power in Montpelier and Washington and the boardrooms of some of the most powerful financial institutions this world has ever seen, exploited the creative tensions among our business leaders, farmers and general public, the loss of local control and the less-than-democratic decision-making processes of our state and federal governments.

Our little piece of God’s Country turned into just another prize – control of the Commons – in that ancient conflict between the rich and the rest of us.

The Commons: Public Use and Stewardship

The concept of “The Commons” goes back to medieval Europe where the law of the realm recognized that certain natural resources or “real estate” belonged to all the people, and that its ownership and access resided in the public domain for “the public good.” English colonists carried this concept to the New World and built their villages around the “town commons” where they corralled their animals for safe-keeping each night, and around which they built their meetinghouses, churches, homes, and businesses. The Commons then functioned in colonial America both as the physical epicenter and philosophical cornerstone of the “public good.”

The physical Commons has morphed into some “set aside” of natural resources that belong to the public, some more than others, at least theoretically. We’re all familiar with state/national parks; internationally recognized offshore limits; public access to seashore, lakes, rivers; regulated access to aquifers, mineral rights, airways, and electronic bandwidths. The more prosaic forms of “public good” – like recognizing the value in keeping the village green for grazing animals — have evolved into a complex web of local, state, and federal government-spon-

sored “public works” or “public services” that range from town water-and-sewer to transportation systems, to health care, public assistance, and municipal electric utilities.

Stewardship, this conversation, simply means the public’s responsibility to maintain the health of the Com-

mons for future generations. And the public’s track record reflects the full range of the human condition – from inspired care of sacred sites (e.g., declared wilderness areas) to utter neglect and abuse (most rivers in the United States at one time or the other).

Vermonters’ care of the Connecticut River watershed devoted from most respectful to shameful, before earning its current reputation as a “green” or environment-friendly, state. One has only to read Charles Mann’s 1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus and
reflect on the healthy, sustainable lifestyles of the original stewards of Vermont – Abenaki and other indigenous tribes – to discred
ight ignorance savages. More recent mining of historical facts has painted another picture: of a healthy, high-minded and outright handsome indigenous people living in sus-
tainable harmony with Mother Nature and their neighbors. It was the Indians, according to Mann, who regarded the European tourists as inferior stock – “phys-
ically weak, sexually untrustworthy, atrociously ugly and just plain smelly.”

But aside from some limited forms of advanced technology (predominantly iron wares and weapons – loud, but inaccurate, muskets), what guaranteed Europeans' supremacy lay in their immune systems. It was only after European-introduced diseases (starting with viral hepatitis that erased 90 percent of the tribal populations along the New England coastline during a three-year window from 1616 to 1619) had so decimated the indigenous tribes that the beleaguered survivors could be stereotyped as something akin to the shadows of their former selves. Colonists then pushed their way inland against the uneven resistance of the survivors, sending new waves of disease (measles, smallpox, typhus, diphtheria) ahead like shock troops. By the mid-1700s the relentless pressure of colonization, marked by a dark, slow-motion dance of peaceful co-habitation, raids, outright battles and the Europeans’ innovative, unilateral strategy of massacring entire villages, had worked its way up the Hudson and Connecticut river and down the Champlain Valley and spilled over the spine of the Green Mountains.

In a geological instant, by the mid-1800s the new Vermonters had over-logged and then over-grazed by sheep farming the Connecticut watershed to the point where the land had lost its natural sponge-like ability to absorb rainfall and release the water over time. As a result, unchecked run-off made the Connecticut River and its tributaries run wild after storms and in the spring, the floods repeatedly destroying railroad lines and inundating towns and farm lands. Damning many of the rivers for hydropower was not an option in the 1800s.

So not until Vermonters reluctantly allowed the woodlands to grow back and made the transition to dairy farming in the second half of the 1800’s did the watershed recover its ability to store run-off. Experts agree that 60 percent to 70 percent of the Connecticut River’s daily flow comes from the watershed’s slow release of groundwater.

Indeed, it has been Vermonters’ responsible stewardship of the watershed – displayed in the popular images of pastoral Vermont’s rolling mix of woodlands, farms and small villages – that produces the “white coal,” the hydropower potential of the Connecticut and Deerfield rivers.

Corporations in Check: the Original Charters of Incorporation

Commercial interests also access the Commons to extract natural resources, be it farming, logging, mining and so on. The inherent questions of extraction versus exploitation did not escape the settlers in North America. It can be argued that the abuses of the English-chartered corpo-

rations such as the East India Company and the Hudson’s Bay Company triggered the American Revolution. The American colonists of all socio-economic ranks – from laborers, small farmers, traders and artisans, to the landed gentry – opposed these “multi-territorial” corporations which King George and Parliament used to exploit natural resources and human labor to extend their control over the British colonies.

The Boston Tea Party, after all, was not a minor act of civil disobedience. The activists destroyed $2 million worth of that precious commodity. They were protesting the punitive taxes on the colony’s businesses that were designed to give the East India Company a monopoly control of trade on tea and other necessities. Here was born the rallying cry of “no taxation without representation!”

Having defeated English corporate imperialism, the revolutionaries did not grant executive, judicial, or mili-
tary sectors the authority to charter corporations. Instead, they made certain that their elected representatives issued charters, one at a time, for a specific public purpose (building a bridge or dam), for a limited span of time (10-20 years), with the requirement that the project be turned over to the state or town at the expiration of the charter.

A charter of incorporation was regarded as a privilege – and with that privilege came the corporate obligation to serve the public interest. Vermont, like other states, issued explicit rules governing legal relationships between stockholders, managers, and directors, held directors, and stockholders liable for the harmful repercussions of their corporate decisions, and in general defined and subordinated the corporate entity.

The question of what entity – public or private – would do the best job of delivering reliable, affordable electricity to Vermonters lands smack in the middle of this debate. It’s a rhetorical question; the reality is that the private sector has basically controlled Vermont’s electric power system over the past 100 years.

First, there’s a lesson in looking at who has been mind-
ing the store for the past century while Vermont consumers deal with some of the nation’s most volatile ele-
tric rates. Central Vermont Public Service (CVPS) and
Green Mountain Power (GMP) are the big boys. They service six out of seven of our electric customers, residential and industrial, as regulated monopolies owned by shareholders. They’re really IOUs (investor-owned utilities). IOUs are large corporations guaranteed a 10-percent or higher return-on-investment for their shareholders above and beyond the costs of doing business, within the American corporate culture of generous management salaries and perks.

Storming the Commons: The IOU’s Trojan Horse at the Gate

By the turn of the century, Vermont’s Brattleboro and Windham County had achieved a high level of prosperity based on the small business model and a balance between economic activity – agricultural, transportation, retail services, and manufacturing – and the prudent utilization of the Commons – properly stewarded grazing lands, woodlands, mineral springs, and the two major watersheds.

All along the Connecticut and Deerfield rivers’ numerous tributaries, several hundred water-powered mills, many with complementary steam plants, employed thousands and produced flour, textiles, and hundreds of different wood products from matches to chairs, as well as powering metal manufacturing machinery. Mirroring the Age of Water Power in New England, a high point in decentralized, indigenous renewable-energy production, Brattleboro prospered, its practically self-sufficient economy exporting a wide range of manufactured goods to markets throughout the region. By 1900, Brattleboro was the healthy and “happening” gateway to Vermont.

It was natural then for people living along the recently named Connecticut to dream about harnessing its awesome power. Back in 1883, Governor Fuller had commissioned a survey of the feasibility of constructing a dam and canals on the Great River itself at Brattleboro to provide waterpower for manufacturing based on the extensive, efficient public-utility model down in Holyoke, Massachusetts. This was before the transmission of electricity was practical and the power of falling water had to be converted to mechanical motion through a complex system of rotating shafts, overhead pulleys and belts. The uncertainty of securing enough industries to use all this mechanical power on a profitable basis short-circuited the governor’s initiative.

Twenty years later when the alternating current (AC) technology for transmitting electricity over long distances had been developed, several forward-looking local businessmen promoted the idea of a hydroelectric station down-river on the Connecticut bounded by Vernon, Vermont, and Hinsdale, New Hampshire. In 1902, they circulated a subscription paper and raised $1,700 for a preliminary survey of the river. Practically all of the businessmen in the “village” contributed about $50 apiece.

Next, a citizens meeting was held to choose a committee of incorporators to take charge of the lobbying effort – W.H. Vinton, C.W. Dunham, C.A. Harris, Chas. Crosby, W.H. Backett, J. Cray Estey, James Conland and C.C. Fitts. Dr. James Conland, Brattleboro’s representative in the state legislature, introduced a bill for the charter of the Connecticut River Power Company – CRPC, or what we’ll call the “Power Company.” Despite some opposition, provisions were made that satisfied the adversaries. The Legislature passed the Power Company charter in 1902.

To represent the towns across the river, E.C. Roberston of Hinsdale, Willard Bill Jr., of Westmoreland, T. Nelson Hastings of Walpole, Fred Harris and O.E. Randall of Chesterfield, W. H. Goodnow of Keene, and J.H. Kimball of Marlboro were named as Power Company incorporators. During hearings reflecting Vermont’s experience, this group successfully lobbied for a similar charter. The New Hampshire Legislature gave its approval in 1903.

Either knowingly or unknowingly, the 1902 Power Company incorporators had created an IOU Trojan Horse.

Armed with the authority of the two state charters and backed by out-of-state investors, the Power Company incorporators, readily acknowledged as “town fathers,” sold the proposed enterprise (a complex and ambitious enterprise) to the general public. Their promotions for a dam and its 12,000-horsepower generating plant proclaimed theirs a “Great Industrial Development Sure to Take Place in Brattleboro, Hinsdale and Vernon in the Near Future.” The state charters specified that towns adjoining the flowage had the right to take power for street lighting and other municipal uses. In fact, 3,000 of the 12,000-horsepower total output was to be reserved for the benefit of existing and future manufacturing in Brattleboro.

According to a March 1907 Vermont Phoenix newspaper article, “The Brattleboro men and other local men who have actively promoted this enterprise have taken every possible care to protect all local interests, especially those of Brattleboro and Hinsdale, with reference to the development of future industrial undertakings.”

Finally, the incorporators and outside investors themselves expressed a “wish to dispose of all the power possible in Brattleboro, Hinsdale and Vernon.” No doubt these kinds of assurances of “public use” ushered the Trojan Horse into the place of public acceptance.

Bait and Switch, Buy-in and Eminent Domain

The “public use” carrot had earlier convinced the state legislatures to grant the power of eminent domain to the Power Company. There are always tradeoffs when natural resources are put to use. Damming a major river is no exception. The Vernon dam would create a lake eight miles long, flooding hundreds of acres and dislocating homes, roads, railroads and valuable farmland. Initial estimates were that the project would require an investment of $1 million, due in part to high compensation expenses. The respective state charters empowered the Power Company in these words: “Said corporation shall be capable of taking and holding any estate, real and personal, necessary for the purposes of said corporation.” According to a newspaper account in the Vermont Phoenix, condemnation – or taking – proceeding were used to secure necessary property.

Since eminent domain is sometimes regarded as a radi-

continued on following page
The Power Company’s next major project, the Deerfield River System, was a monster technically and a monster ethically. The Whitingham dam dwarfed any existing New England dam. The Power Company drained much of southeastern Vermont and submerged thousands of acres of farmland, entire villages and miles of roads and railways—all of which required expensive relocation. The Power Company augmented the dam work with additional transmission lines that linked the Deerfield dams with the Vernon dam, to further the goal of exporting the power south.

One sidebar to the Power Company’s invasion is that they maximized their initial bait-and-switch scam with an aggressive flurry of another form of white-collar extortion, the IOU special version of the old carrot-and-stick combination. The Power Company promised a stable, affordable electricity supply while threatening potential customers with their financial and legal clout—to buy up water rights and dams from the mills on the Connecticut and Deerfield tributaries. In a final coup-de-gras to independent power producers, the Power Company refused to sign power supply contracts with local mills unless they agreed to sign over and/or destroy their dams and hydroelectric generators. Power Company crews went in and destroyed water wheels and electrics with sledge hammers and crowbars.

The net result was that hundreds of Windham County’s water/steam mills lost access to their own inexpensive, local power—which we now call decentralized or “distributed” power. Our small businesses and towns fell victim to the 100-year history of IOU centralized power and inflated rates. Therefore, in their first interactions with a major IOU, southern Vermonters learned that local industry declined in the areas of large hydroelectric development—not to mention their loss of prime river bottomland and the expense of relocating towns, homes, businesses and roads.

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The Blood-Letting Continues
A hundred years ago, Brattleboro’s industrial development and prosperity hummed along the Whetstone Brook with the sounds of waterwheels and steam engines. Back then, local ownership of renewable resources gave Brattleboro the “comparative economic advantage” that promised a secure future.

But the Trojan Horse, incorporated as the Connecticut River Power Company, gained entrance into our thriving community with the promise of an endless supply of cheap hydropower. The newspapers confidently boasted, “Brattleboro’s offering to new industries . . . is unlimited power at nominal price.” Today, the relative silence at our town’s crown jewels – the Book Press, Boise Cascade, Dunham Shoe Factory, Fullflex – and their prosperous setting – the numerous small manufacturing sites along the Whetstone Brook – have migrated into the River Garden, a once-promising glass-roofed arcade billed as the heart of downtown, which lies vacant as the local merchant association and select board argue over who’s going to pay to keep the pipes from freezing.

Some might argue that Windham County and the Deerfield Valley never recovered from the invasion of the Power Company. Southern Vermonters experienced early on the “resource curse” that currently bankrupts developing countries that witness outside interests exploiting their resources to the detriment of the environment and indigenous people. As some humorists have pointed out, “Vermont is a Third-World country, but the natives don’t realize it.” In any case, the die was cast for a century-long struggle between Vermonters and IOUs.

What happened to all that cheap hydropower from the Vernon and Deerfield river dams? The IOU owners shipped the vast majority of the power down “South” – via the transmission line connecting the dam to the NE grid. South. A classic example of “you can’t get there from here.”

To add insult to injury, when Vermonters go looking for electrical power sources to replace the projected losses of Hydro Quebec and Vermont Yankee, the Connecticut/Deerfield system lies outside the immediate solution set. TransCanada holds the ownership cards and the ghosts of Power Company hold the hook-up card. Remember, the original IOU built the transmission system, the high-voltage power lines, expressly for export. Since the current transmission infrastructure is not designed to connect the Connecticut/Deerfield dam systems directly to Vermont’s consumers, rerouting the power will no doubt require negotiations with ISO-NE, the “keepers” of the New England grid.

Take a quick glance at the map of transmission lines. It clearly shows the six major lines “bleeding” Vermont – like a mad medieval physician “bleeding” the state for its own good (promise of cheap power, jobs, prosperity) and then selling the precious fluid to desperate vampires (the New England grid’s southern mercantile customers). And it gets worse. For instance, the current power brokers – CVPS, VELCO and ISO-NE – have just completed a year-long process to plan for a $150-$180 million investment in the “Southern Loop” – that section of the grid that supplies Windham and Bennington counties. The money will go primarily to improve the reliability of the current transmission/distribution system that will be called upon to carry projected increased loads. Some limited funding will also be targeted for load-reduction (energy conservation/efficiency) and power generation, preferably local sites along the Southern Loop.

Meanwhile, TransCanada is currently “uprating” the Vernon Dam from its 28-MW capacity to something closer to its FERC-licensed 44-MW limit. A prime candidate for pumping more juice into Vermont’s Southern Loop, right? Wrong. Although the Vernon Dam lies less than 10 miles from Brattleboro, less than five miles from the major Southern Loop substation at Vermont Yankee, the transmission line connecting the dam to the NE grid travels in the opposite direction. South. A classic example of “you can’t get there from here.”
Designs for Bart Mele-Smith's Hot Tub Emporium 2 in Burlington Vermont.
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Such as "Krypton, Superman's birth planet"

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SURELY they’ve got to be kidding, if we are supposed to believe that on September 11, 2001, nineteen Muslim fanatics armed only with box cutters pulled off the greatest act of terrorism in history under the command of a charismatic, sinister-looking, wealthy, CIA-trained, Muslim fundamentalist Saudi named Osama bin Laden from his high-tech cave in the rugged mountains of Afghanistan. Without one shred of evidence, the U.S. government claims that these Arab terrorists commandeered four jetliners, brought down the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, severely damaged the Pentagon, and almost succeeded in destroying the White House and the Capitol. And they did all of this because they “hated freedom.”

Anyone questioning the details of this incredible tale is said to be a “conspiracy theorist” and is not be taken seriously.

If 9/11 were the work of Muslim terrorists, how is it possible that over five years later not a single Muslim suicide bomber has managed to surface anywhere in the United States? If “Islamofascism” is the threat we are told it is by the federal government, surely a random suicide bomber would have found his way into the Super Bowl, Madison Square Garden, or Times Square on New Year’s Eve and killed a few hundred people. But there has been no such event. Absolutely nothing!

Yet within a matter of days after 9/11, Mr. Bush declared war on “terrorism” (a euphemism for Islam), and called for the invasion of Afghanistan to take out Osama bin Laden and other key operatives of his Al Qaeda network. Then in March 2003, he invaded Iraq, claiming that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and that there was a direct link between Al Qaeda and Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, neither of which happened to be true. We now know that Team Bush had been planning the invasion of Iraq long before 9/11.

If 9/11 were orchestrated by bin Laden, then who provided the intelligence, the logistical support, the organizational skills, and the financial support to achieve this remarkable feat? Who stood to benefit from this act of terror? The Pentagon, the CIA, Israel, the White House, defense contractors, security firms, and multinational oil companies.

Is Osama bin Laden a real person or merely a creation of Bill Clinton and enhanced by George W. Bush? Few Americans had ever heard of him until President Clinton first introduced us to him in the midst of the Monica Lewinsky affair in 1998. Osama took the rap for the bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, thus providing the justification for Clinton’s pre-emptive missile strikes against alleged terrorist bases in Afghanistan and a Sudanese chemical plant – all of which deflected public opinion away from Monica. Could it be that Osama is much more useful to Team Bush as an elusive demon rather than as a dead martyr like Saddam Hussein?

Is it possible that the real purpose of 9/11 was to demonize Islam so as to justify transforming the United States into a technofascist state and hegemonizing the supply of oil in the Middle East? When Vice President Dick Cheney convened a secret meeting of energy industry executives and government officials in early 2001, it’s quite likely that the problem of Peak Oil was at the top of the agenda. To deal with the problem, he apparently only seriously considered one strategy – taking control of the Middle Eastern supply of oil. His challenge lay in finding a politically correct way to present the idea to the American people and our allies. The 9/11 attacks provided the perfect solution. By placing all of the blame for 9/11 on Muslim fanatics and trading heavily on Americans’ fear of terrorism, Team Bush paved the way for a global war with Islam – a war against “Islamofascists.” The real target was not Muslims, but rather their oil.

America’s foremost technofascist ally, Israel, could hardly contain its enthusiasm for the war on terror. With a little luck, America might take out both of Israel’s archenemies, Iraq and Iran. Britain’s Tony Blair and Australia’s John Howard were quick to join the techno-fascist alliance against terror. More recently Canada’s Stephen Harper, Germany’s Angela Merkel, and Pope Benedict XVI have signed on as well.

Seen this way, President Bush’s so-called “war on terror” is an insidious campaign to create fear and hatred among Americans and Europeans toward Muslims, so as to rationalize an imperial foreign policy of full-spectrum dominance aimed at doing whatever is necessary to control their oil in the Middle East.
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As the second half of the Great Hydropower Heist story will show, for the balance of the 20th century and into the 21st, the IOU raiders relentlessly continued their invasion of our state and solidified their exploitive schemes and structures. Turns out that all Vermonters, not just the folks in Windham County, have been sold down any number of “rivers.”

But the final chapter on “The Damn Dam Story” has not yet been written. The Dam Deal is still alive. Next issue we’ll set the stage for the future. Who will play the villain? The hero? The Legislature, a governor, municipal utility, reformed IOU, Decommission-VY-Starting-in-2012 coalition, local energy cooperative? Who will play champion to our watershed Commons?

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The Decentralist Movement: A Third Way

By Kirkpatrick Sale

Just a few weeks ago I took seven large boxes of books from my library to give to the E.F. Schumacher Library just outside of Great Barrington, Massachusetts—books I’d gathered for years on decentralism, anarchism, community, separatism, and the like—and I was struck once again by the depth, tenacity, and importance of the movement to which I was contributing.

For the Schumacher Society and its library were established to provide an intellectual and activist home for what we can call, loosely, the decentralist movement. This is the Third Way that has existed for a century or so outside the varieties of centralists, both conservative and liberal; a movement that has vigorously put forth cogent alternatives to the modern capitalist industrial nation-state.

The Schumacher has most of the library and all the papers, speeches, and articles of Fritz Schumacher, the economist and philosopher whose work outlining the decentralized way went far beyond the notion of “small is beautiful”—however trenchant that idea may be—to include self-managed firms, Buddhist (“right livelihood”) economics, intermediate technology, organic farming, alternative energy and matters of scale in all human endeavors. But it also has the libraries and papers of a number of other decentralist figures.

Among them are George Benello, a scholar and activist whose library emphasized worker ownership, alternative technology, and the Yugoslavian decentralized economy; Ralph Borsodi, the founder of the School of Living and keystone of the homesteading “back-to-the-land” movement in the 1930s; Richard Bliss, a teacher whose material concentrates on the quasi-anarchistic Catholic Worker movement and the English Distributists (who were also called leaders of “a third way”); Henry Geiger, for four decades editor of the decentralist weekly MANAS, whose copies are available on line from the Library; Robyn van En, the creator of the Community Supported Agriculture movement; and Bob Swann, a co-founder (with John McIaughry, David Ehrenfeld, and me) of the Schumacher Society in 1980, who for years acted as its president and guiding light, as well as serving as a leading theorist of land trust organizations.

That’s an impressive group, and it argues that the decentralist movement has not only been wide-reaching and comprehensive but durable and impactful. No, it has not had the kind of support from the capitalist system that has created and sustained the conservative and neo-conservative movements or the various do-gooding liberal parties and unions—largely because it generally stood opposed to large-scale corporate capitalism and the large-scale governments that were its handmaidens. So it has gone along with small and under-funded organizations, working in different parts of the country on different parts of the problem, sometimes without even knowing the others existed. But the point is that it has gone along, for more than eighty years (if we figure its modern beginnings with the Distributists and Southern Agrarians in the 1920s), and it is still to be found everywhere.

Let me see if I can distill the essence of decentralism, and its appeal.

Decentralism is the basic human condition. The community is the oldest human institution, found absolutely everywhere throughout the world in all kinds of societies. As Rene Dubos has pointed out, more than 100 billion human beings have lived on earth since the late Paleolithic period, and “the immense majority of them have spent their entire life as members of very small groups … rarely of more than a few hundred persons.”

Decentralism is the historic norm, the underlying system by which people live even where there arises, from time to time, those centralizing empires that historians like to focus on and pretend are the principal systems of humankind. Empires are infrequent, do not last long, and are sparsely located. Yes, there was a Greek empire, for example, but it lasted effectively for fewer than 20 years; the real story of Greece is long centuries of decentralization, each city-republic with its own constitution, its own social life and cultural peculiarities, hundreds of separate communities that created the Hellenic civilization that is still a marvel of the world.

Decentralism is deeply American, from the anti-state Puritans, through the communalist Quakers and Mononites and religious sects, and on to the original colonies, independent bodies protective of their special differences and characters. The war that separated us from Britain was not a revolutionary war—we desired to have our own country, not take over Britain’s—but a secessionist war. A unified state did eventually arise after it, the product of powerful banking and mercantile forces desiring centralized authority, but it was not especially centralist at that time, and even then contrary forces proved powerful, too. Emerson and Whitman and Thoreau gave voice to the old New England traditions of town-meeting democracy and parish rule. Utopians and communards like Lysander Spooner, Benjamin Tucker, and Josiah Warren gave voice to the yearning for community control and villages free from outside interference.

In the 20th century, that tradition continued with the Country Life movement and other communal impulses; with Lewis Mumford and the original Regional Plan Association, devoted to a resurgence of regionalism; with the Southern Agrarians, determined separatists explicitly—and eloquently—opposed to the national government and its economic hegemony. And think of Henry George and the Georgists, Paul Goodman, Arthur Morgan and his Community Service organization, Ivan Illich, Gary Snyder, Helen and Scot Nearing and their Good Life Center, Wendell Berry, Thomas Berry, Chellis Glendinning and the neo-Luddites, Jerry Mander and the anti-globalists—well, the list could go on into the thousands.

Decentralism continues even now, it is alive and well in this country and around the world. I cannot say it is a dominant mode, anywhere, but I can point to all those ineradicable threads to be seen throughout the American scene: the wonderful bioregional movement, for example; the resurgent Indian tribal societies and organizations for tribal culture; the growth of worker-owned firms from 1600 twenty years ago to more than 10,000 today; the phenomenon of cooperative businesses, which as of 2005 had revenues of nearly $1 trillion; the spread of such efforts as community currencies, community land trusts (100 of them today, at least) and community-supported agriculture (1,400 farms) and local farmers’ markets (4,400 in 2006); the 230,000 private government associations housing more than 30 million people.

All of this is evidence that this great tradition, this basic human impulse, is still to be found in the United States, no matter how autocratic a power it has become.

And in the rest of the world, as well. Separatism, of course, is a powerful force in almost every land, famously in Canada, Spain, Italy, France, and virtually everywhere in Africa, existing in a hundred splinter movements and “independence” parties and groupings wherever you look. The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia split up. Montenegro became an independent state in 2006; Kosovo is becoming one, in its own way. Catalonia gained significant autonomous powers in 2006, as did Aceh in Indonesia. More than 50 percent of the people of Scotland in a recent poll wanted complete independence from England, and that seems likely to happen within a couple of years.

There it is: the Third Way. Ever powerful. And we—you—are a part of that great tradition. •