A lone skier forges ahead through the snow. In an era of unprecedented challenges for our state, Vermonters must take our "Freedom and Unity" more seriously than ever.

Ben Falk

For Me, Vermont! Why I Support A Second Vermont Republic
Ian Baldwin
Vermont Commons Publisher Emeritus

After he has sworn the oath of allegiance to the Constitution on January 20th, will President Obama begin the process of unraveling the evil and unconstitutional decrees of his predecessor? Will freedom of speech and assembly once again be absolute, protected rights in these still United States? Will that most ancient and hallowed right of the West, habeas corpus, once again be guaranteed to all citizens?

By his deeds shall we know him. And we shall know him soon.

I voted for Mr. Obama. Why would I, a sworn secessionist ...? I voted for Barack Obama for many reasons, if not out of political conviction. I am entangled. Entangled by history, by family, by friends by a sense of justice and honor toward those fellow human beings my Euro-American tribe first enslaved and then segregated as non-equals. Human beings who are finally honored and respected without any equivocation. Set free. For them I am moved – not for the United States.

For the United States the hour is late, very late.

Any one of you who have African-American friends knows how deep, how absolute and complete Mr. Obama’s election to the office of the U.S. presidency is for them, in particular. The meaning of this achievement lies unbounded by words, unshakeable in the hearts of our African-American brothers and sisters.

I am a lone secessionist in a large community of family and friends, almost all of whom (not quite all!), starting with my walk-beside, my own wife, do not share this peculiar dream of mine. So, even if the Vermont secessionist movement grows, despite Vermonters’ overarching vote for Mr. Obama and his promise of change, what about New Mexico or North Carolina or Massachusetts or anywhere else in the multitude of Empire’s diverse homelands, where secession still sleeps? I have daughters, sons, granddaughters, every imaginable in-law, a mother, brothers, cousins, and friends who live all over America and for that matter, the world. Thus mindful, if I look at, if I sense the man Obama presents in the media, I see a smile that feels true, eyes that betray more than a hint of unmalicious humor, a face that reflects the joy of being connected to others – in short, a mensch, not a trickster.

This man inherits the role of Warrior-in-Chief inside the dark belly of The Beast. The very limits of his soul will be tested not only by the powers that surround him but especially by those extra-
Editorial

Vermont Independence: Yes We Can!

“The political mind is the product of men in public life who have been twice spoiled. They have been spoiled with praise and they have been spoiled with abuse. With them, nothing is natural, everything is artificial.” —President Calvin Coolidge

“Town meeting is the true Congress, the most respectable one ever assembled in the United States.” —Henry David Thoreau

For close to four years now, we’ve been writing about the nuts and bolts of independence here in the Green Mountains – the promise of renewable energy, food sovereignty, homestead security, an educational system that respects and trains our children, and a working, financial, and entrepreneurial landscape that can provide meaningful work for all Vermonters.

And yes, we’ve been writing about political independence. About the possibility, one day soon, that many years to come. We also acknowledge and applaud the once-and-future Vermont republic.

Looking south toward the U.S. Empire, we acknowledge and applaud the symbolic significance of the election of Illinois Democratic Senator Barack Obama to the presidency, and we cordially invite him to do something his White House predecessor never once did in his eight years of tenure in the Oval Office.

Visit us here in Vermont.

Here are some hard questions for the U.S. government as we consider Mr. Obama’s message of hope, and his promise of change.

Will an Obama White House and the U.S. Congress work to repeal the constitutional abuses wrought by the USA PATRIOT Act, the John Warner Defense Act, the Military Commissions Act, the so-called “war on terror,” and the oppressive culture of Homeland Security?

Will an Obama White House and the U.S. Congress work to end what one of Vermont’s finest political minds, Eugene Jarecki, describes in the title of his book, “the American Way Of War,” bring a swift and just end to the U.S. occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, and shrink the size of the U.S. Empire’s annual military budget, the largest and most corrupt the world has ever seen?

Will an Obama White House and the U.S. Congress work to end the U.S. militarization of outer space, reduce the U.S. foreign policy of full spectrum dominance, and shrink the U.S. “Empire

continued on following page

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Please e-mail letters to editor@vtcommons.org or post to PO Box 1121, Waitsfield, VT 05673. Although we will try to print your letters in their entirety, we may edit to fit. Please be concise. Be sure to include your contact information (name, address, telephone, and e-mail) for verification purposes.
Letters to the Editor

SOUTHERNER SUPPORTS VERMONT INDEPENDENCE

Editor, Vermont Commons:
I hope to be the first Southerner to retire to the Northeast—although I’m not a stereotypical Southerner and have no intention of retiring. Unlike many of my fellow Southerners, I do not spend my time lamenting the loss of a war that occurred 130 years ago, so my interest in secession has nothing to do with grapes of wrath. I am, however, exploring how I might relocate to Vermont and make a contribution to the quality of life that you enjoy.

Like so many, I am totally disenchanted with a federal government that has become the slave of the military-industrial-intelligence complex. I don’t consider myself at all radical, nor do I have any inclination toward armed resistance. Nevertheless, many of my forebears fought in the American Revolution to establish a democratic republic. Their dream of representational government has been twisted and distorted into an empire that they would not recognize, an empire unlike anything their British oppressors imagined. Unfortunately, I don’t believe that Barack Obama and a Democratic Congress are going to significantly alter our direction. Although infinitely more capable of intelligent reason and compassion, I don’t see the incoming administration as being powerful enough to affect change.

So, the idea of an Independent Republic of Vermont has great appeal to me, and I think Bernie Sanders would make a great first president of that republic. I’d like to be part of that... and one of the first to hold a Vermont passport.

John Drew
Columbus, Georgia

VERMONT INDEPENDENCE CONVENTION REDUX

Editor, Vermont Commons:
Recently, I attended the Vermont Independence Convention at the Statehouse. There was an amazing lineup of speakers and performers addressing Vermont’s potential economic, agricultural, educational, and political independence. The convention offered alternatives to the McWorld of corporations, mega-agri-businesses, assembly-line education, and the U.S. Empire. A giant corporation doesn’t have the interests of the economy and ecology of a small Vermont town at heart. The uniform tests and mandates of No Child Left Behind cannot help the countless types of children with countless manners of learning that suit them best. And the policies of the enormous U.S. Empire do not help Vermonters cope with the challenges of day-to-day living.

In fact, McIntories are an active impediment to local well-being. Mega-corporations drive out local business, move money from working people to already rich CEOs, and have little regard for our local environment. No Child Left Behind costs taxpayers $800 extra per student, I learned at the convention, and obstructs teachers from creating the type of educational experience their students need. Food shipped from California unnecessarily uses fossil fuels and doesn’t taste as good as local produce. The U.S. Empire has us tied to massive debt and two wars. Many think that things will be better with Obama as president. Barack Obama is just one person, who will be atop an organization weighed down with corruption and bureaucracy. He will try to manage a vast area of land and 300 million people. He is trying to keep a hot air balloon that is far too heavy afloat.

We can help both the U.S. and ourselves by flying our own balloon. It is time for Vermonters to reject the McSolutions of empire, corporations, and mega-farms. It’s time to start working together to build sustainable local structures in their place.

Ari Erlbaum
East Montpelier, Vermont

Editorial, continued from previous page

of Bases” – more than 700 of them in more than 130 countries around the world?

Will an Obama White House and the U.S. Congress work to undo the rampant national voting fraud brought about as the result of Congressional passage of the so-called Help America Vote Act of 2002, which mandated the deployment of electronic voting machines in states across the continent, leading to wholesale national election theft during the past decade?

Will an Obama White House and the U.S. Congress work to hold the global corporate bankers to account in the wake of the so-called free market “bailout”?

As we move into a new year full of promise, let us consider the citizens of the 21st century Vermont might better be able to feed, power, educate, and entertain themselves as an independent republic, working in concert with the rest of the world, rather than as one of 50 states in the U.S. Empire.

President-elect Barack Obama is right – change is coming.

We have much good work ahead.

And, in this emerging crisis some call “the Long Emergency,” we are here in the Green Mountains for the long haul.

Decentralization and relocation are our goals.

Scession is every American’s birthright.

Long live the United States.

Free Vermont!

Rob Williams
Editor/Publisher
For Me, Vermont, continued from page 1 (1972) convinced me to leave my job and work for the new environmental organizations that were doing battle in the federal courts on behalf of the commons that our lives depended on and that economists insisted were mere externalities. Alas, the economists won the argument about growth and thereby doomed the environmental movement. Unknowing, we lived those heady days on the cusp of the Milton Friedmanite-inspired Pinocho- Reagansomics laissez-faire, neoliberal-statist revolutions that were to consume the world’s poor and middle classes and further enrich the miserably few.

The year after Limits was published, Fritz Schumacher’s Small Is Beautiful came out and I was so impressed I traveled to England to befriend the author. Here was an economist who understood the a priori necessity of metaphysics! Who asked the ultimate questions, questions about meaning, about life’s truest significance, its bedrock purpose that had to inform how economics should work in the real world. Human beings were not only material beings but moral and spiritual beings, with moral and spiritual needs that transcended material beings but moral and spiritual beings, that had to inform how economics should work in the real world.

When the Declaration of Independence was penned and signed by our forefathers in 1776, some 18,000 sovereign bodies existed that represented the almost 1 billion human beings then living in the world. A mere two hundred or so years later, with six times as many human beings, that population mushroomed overnight into putrid life, eating like a mushroom monster whose capstone was the right of secession, went with a whiff of spaghetti had no discernible ends or beginnings. A Nazi-nomenclature-inspired Homeland Security Department had mushroomed overnight into putrid life, eating like acid at the nation’s moral foundation.

I was finally forced awake. I could no longer avoid knowing where and who I was, an American citizen whose taxes and personally voted-for representatives were funding the terrors of Gitmo, Abu Ghraib, Baghram, Diego Garcia – the whole vast despicable global gulag of extradition, rendition, and death, whose victims, innocent and not, were dumped, dead or half-alive, on the outskirts of the U.S.-led “Free World.”

I became despondent. Enraged. Aha, I thought, I’ll become an ex-patriot. Within days the shade of my living mother fell on me – my biological mother, and my link to the land my ancestors had inhabited for almost four hundred years. Why should I leave? I couldn’t leave. It was my mother, and my link to the land my ancestors had inhabited for almost four hundred years. Why should I leave? I couldn’t leave. It was my mother, and my link to the land my ancestors had inhabited for almost four hundred years.

Lincoln’s near-genocidal victory for the indivisible Union of all states into one supreme nation-state eroded ancient norms and attitudes in all northerners. The once-sacrosanct autonomy of the individual states of these United States, whose capstone was the right of secession, went into a decline from which they have yet to recover. That very right, its very naming, underwent deep etymological tissue surgery and vanished from the living body of discourse by which we weigh our present and future as communities of free human beings. To me, as a northerner, the concept of secession simply didn’t exist. Even as a decentralist continued on page 20
For months now, Truth to Power [the author’s website] has been informing readers about Barack Obama’s emerging leadership, including the fundamental underpinnings of his agenda and his likely appointments in the areas of economic, foreign policy, and energy issues. Despite the promise of change, Obama’s adherence to neoliberal, globalist policies offers no substantial departure from the U.S. Empire’s ultimate strategies of imperialism, corporate capitalist supremacy, and almost total ignorance of the destructive nature perpetuated by endless growth.

Some would argue that the United States government is somewhat like a sophisticated 747 airliner, the controls of which cannot simply be turned over to individuals who have no knowledge of flying but must be steered by experts who have only earned such a title by way of their expertise as former pilots. Thus, the argument goes, we should not criticize Obama for his appointments, particularly before he even takes office and concretely demonstrates his commitment to the perpetuation of the status quo.

I will return to this notion below, but first, a look at what I consider one of the most stunning pieces of twenty-first century research so far, Naomi Klein’s 2008 book The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism. I cannot recommend Shock Doctrine highly enough for anyone interested in a multi-layered understanding of the origins, evolution, and likely outcome of what she calls “disaster capitalism.”

Disaster Capitalism – microcosm and macrocosm

According to Klein, “disaster capitalism” consists of “orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities.” (6) It has its origins in the “Chicago School” of economics popularized by University of Chicago economics professor Milton Friedman, who actually coined the phrase “shock treatment” to describe the psychological pummeling of societies and individuals who might stand in the way of the advancement of corporate goals. Consider the U.S. invasion of Iraq or the devastation of New Orleans during and after Hurricane Katrina, two examples of the “shock doctrine” in action. The endgame of disaster capitalism is the total privatization of what have throughout U.S. history been state or public services. Not surprisingly, the ultimate outcome of unbridled disaster capitalism will be the supplanting of government by corporations.

While these are examples of societal decimation, Klein’s first chapter focuses on the origins of the current forms of torture used by the U.S. in the incipient, CIA-funded experiments of Ewen Cameron, a Canadian psychiatrist who “believed that by inflicting an array of electrical shocks to the human brain, he could unmake and erase faulty minds, then rebuild new personalities” on what he believed would be a “clean slate.” (29) I was familiar with Cameron as a result of a History Channel documentary called “Mind Control: America’s Secret War,” but most progressives have been loath to discuss many of the CIA’s early torture escapades and have minimized them as perhaps “borderline conspiratorial” – until Klein published Shock Doctrine.

The grotesque details of Cameron’s electroshock experiments are a matter of public record and gave birth to many strategic forms of torture subsequently used and sanctioned by the U.S. government. Klein specifically cites the CIA’s “Kubark Counterintelligence Interrogation” manual, authored by those who were profoundly impressed with Cameron and his focus on psychological regression. The goal? To deprive people of “their sense of who they are and where they are in time and space” and by so doing to convert them “into dependent children whose minds are a blank slate of suggestibility.” (40) One desired outcome of this psychological battering was the manipulation of the subject in their regressed state to believe that someone or something (the torturers, the government) were, in fact, father figures; the uncanny and diabolical intent was to cause victims to bond with their tormentors and experience them as saviors.

Disaster Capitalism globalized

Those at the highest levels of government theorized that they could apply the horrific results of Cameron’s experiments on individual patients to entire societies. Thus, writes Klein:

The terrorist attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon was a different kind of shock from the ones imagined in the pages of the Kubark manual, but its effects were remarkably similar: profound disorientation, extreme fear and anxiety, and collective regression. Like the Kubark interrogator posing as a ‘father figure,’ the Bush administration promptly used that fear to play the role of the all-protective parent, ready to defend ‘the homeland’ and its vulnerable people by any means necessary. (42)

Just as Ewen Cameron had a dream of taking people back to a “blank slate” state of “natural” health before human interactions created distorting patterns, Klein posits, Friedman dreamed of de-patterning societies and returning them to a state of pure capitalism. Like Cameron, Friedman believed that in order to achieve this end, the deliberate inflicting of painful shocks (Friedman’s words) in the form of economic adversity or natural disasters would provide the “bitter medicine” necessary to remove barriers to the desired result. (50)

Klein’s then proceeds to explain how the shock doctrine was applied by the U.S. government around the world, but in Chapter 14, “Shock Therapy In The USA”, she returns to the 9/11 events, where she astutely notes that:

What happened in the period of mass disorientation after the attacks was, in retrospect, a domestic form of economic shock therapy. The Bush team, Friedmanite to the core, quickly moved to exploit the shock that gripped the nation to push through its radical vision of a hollow government in which everything from war fighting to disaster response was a for-profit venture. (298)

Creating a whole new framework for its actions, “the Bush team used the omnipresent sense of peril after 9/11 to increase dramatically the policing, surveillance, detention, and war-waging powers of the executive branch, which some have called a ‘rolling coup.’” (298)

Klein persuasively demonstrates that 9/11 resulted not only in the shedding of the U.S. Constitution and the launching of a permanent state of war that would reap unprecedented profits for the military-industrial complex, (not to mention the perpetual pursuit of fossil fuels); 9/11 also jump-started the creation of two burgeoning new industries, the security industry and the disaster industry, both of which have become as large and lucrative as the 1990s dot-com phenomenon.

Throughout the book, Klein posits that whether it is through the application of electroshock continued on page 14
While many people claim that local food is “elitist,” some of the world’s great cuisines – Chinese, Italian, country French, Indian – come from the people who had the least to work with: peasants.

Few of us are farmers or homesteaders, so unlike peasants, our livelihood is not directly focused on feeding ourselves. Still, there are many things we can learn from peasants and peasant cuisine that can help us lower our food bills and eat food produced closer to home.

Peasants are small-scale farmers, ranchers, herd-ers, hunters, or fishermen and this means that they are close to their food source – they are Localvores by necessity. By U.S. standards peasants appear to be poor, and many of us feel sorry for the “meager” lives peasants lead. In fact, peasant culture is rich in traditions passed down through the generations along with recipes for Cassoulet, Osso Bucco, and Roghan Josh. These classic recipes are typical of peasant cuisine, which often translates into hearty one-dish meals that combine “lesser” cuts of meat cooked in a savory broth with seasonal vegetables and some form of bread. Think Beef Bourguignon and a French baguette, Ribolita which is a Tuscan bread soup, or Huevos Rancheros, and you are thinking peasant food. YUM!

So, what can we learn from peasants throughout the world to make Vermont meals more local and more affordable at the same time?

First, carnivores like me need to learn how to work with the less expensive cuts of meat; leave the expensive steaks and roasts to the “nobility” like the peasants do. Serious cooks will tell you that a chuck roast is much more flavorful than a filet mignon, and it is usually a third to a quarter of the price. But you can’t just throw a chuck roast on the grill. It needs to be slowly cooked in broth to make it tender, which can easily be done with a crock pot, on a wood stove, or in the oven.

Second, we need to use a little kitchen creativity to cook with what is both seasonally available and on hand. Missing an ingredient or two from a recipe? Ask yourself, “What would a peasant do?” Since the answer is not “run to the grocery store,” do as chefs in even the finest restaurants do everyday and improvise – substitute yogurt for buttermilk, or sauté vegetables for a stew in saved bacon fat (if you don’t have any bacon available) to infuse a bacony, smoky flavor into your dish.

Third, we need to make the most of everything we have. Maybe the thought of making turkey soup after eating the Thanksgiving or Christmas turkey for three days isn’t all that appealing, but to me it is a crime to throw out the bones. Make turkey broth and put it in the freezer. In January a piping hot bowl of turkey soup will mean a free and delicious meal for you and your family. Most peasants don’t have freezers. Lucky us!

In the cold and dark Vermont winter months who doesn’t crave a big bowl of soul-satisfying soup, the cornerstone of peasant cuisine? So, when your next retirement savings statement shows up in your mailbox, don’t cry about feeling like a peasant. Instead, get into your kitchen and start cooking like one.
Vermont consists of small farms and agricultural based businesses that are thriving and improving the ecology of Vermont foodscapes. Organic farms and gardens supply local food to all members of their community and everyone knows their farmer.

NOFA Vermont Mission Statement

Vermont’s local food system is thriving. With the greatest number, per capita, of farmers’ markets, CSAs, and organic farms, we are leading the nation. Yet, even in Vermont, we are heavily reliant on the global food system. No one knows exactly how much local food we consume in Vermont, but David Timmons estimated in his 2006 UVM master’s thesis it is somewhere between 1.2 percent and 38 percent of our diets. Clearly, no economist, I can tell you that the farmers who went home that evening with money in their pockets will not put their land on the real estate market to be turned into subdivisions and second homes. These are only a few of the benefits. Winter farmers’ markets, and a thriving local food system, are good for our planet, good for our state, and good for our communities.

Yet, for all the sense they make, winter farmers’ markets don’t just spring up overnight in every town in America. There are barriers that must be addressed before a successful market can be established. Communities need to have local farmers. Local farmers must know how to grow for a winter market. Farmers’ market managers have to know how to organize and promote an indoor market. Communities need to build support for local food so that consumers show up on a cold, snowy Saturday morning to buy unconventional root vegetables and cheese that doesn’t come in individually wrapped, fluorescently colored slices.

These barriers are ones that the global economy doesn’t stop to address. In an economy that fails to recognize the value of local small-scale agriculture, we don’t educate students how to farm in schools or universities. In a country where less than 1 percent of the population is farmers, kids don’t grow up learning how to farm from their parents.

Yet these barriers are critical to address if we are to create a thriving local agricultural system supported by local communities. Therefore, these barriers are ones that our local Vermont food system must address through sharing experience, spreading home-grown knowledge, and collaborating. For the past 27 years, the pre-eminent forum for this sharing, learning, and collaborating has been the NOFA Vermont Winter Conference. The Winter Conference is the gathering place for Vermont’s local food system, offering solutions and networks to help develop food sovereignty. Last year alone more than 1,000 people joined us over the course of two days.

The Winter Conference offers more than 60 workshops where farmers and communities can share strategies and develop solutions to the barriers faced as we work, for example, to increase the availability of local food during the winter months. For farmers, the conference will feature workshops such as Eggs in the Dark: Keeping Chickens Laying Without Artificial Light presented by Ben Gleason. Ben, a farmer in Addison County, keeps his chickens in hoop houses throughout the winter months.

Not only does he clear the tops of the hoop houses to provide his birds with maximum daylight, he also shovels the ground beneath the houses to let his birds forage, even in February. There will also be workshops about heating greenhouses using sustainable fuels, storing roots, processing food, and growing winter greens.

Gardeners, homesteaders, and communities also need tools to help grow the local food system. The themes of these workshops range from food policy, to self-sufficiency, to community-level solutions to sustainability issues. Among others, this year’s winter conference will feature a workshop... continued on page 12
Educational policies in the United States represent the agenda of modern technocracy: Through standardized curricula, relentless testing, ruthless “accountability,” and unforgiving sanctions for failure, the corporate state has sought to turn schools into efficient factories for producing reliable employees and consumers. Young people are treated as human capital, their skills and aspirations harnessed to the demands of our voracious economy.

This is the educational agenda of Empire. The corporate state requires a reliable workforce and a politically docile citizenry. Educational success is measured in quantitative, objective terms that serve the smooth functioning of business culture by diminishing the variety and freedom of individuals, communities, and bioregions. The media publish the comparative results of standardized test scores, shaming schools and teachers that aren’t producing the expected results—as if young people’s minds and life goals can be “produced” by order of political authority.

A genuine education would serve local needs and local culture, acclimating young people to the particular rhythms of their community and bioregion—to food sources and neighborhood networks, to wildlife and land use patterns. But curriculum decisions are increasingly distant, centralized, and standardized. For years, corporate leaders have pressed the federal government to exert increasing authority over educational policies and practices across the country, to standardize and measure every aspect of teaching and learning. The most influential of these educational autocrats, former IBM chairman Louis Gerstner, continues to ratchet up the pressure, writing recently in a Wall Street Journal piece that local school boards should be abolished altogether and all educational authority ceded to the centralized power of federal and state agencies. What Gerstner and his colleagues call “excellence” or “accountability” is in truth the deadening of learning, as education becomes increasingly abstract, disconnected, and alienating.

The imperial takeover of education is one more reason for Vermonters to practice greater local and regional autonomy, if not outright sovereignty. Emerson’s understanding belongs to a pre-imperial vision of American democracy, one that honors the individuality, creativity, and intrinsic sacredness of the human being. This vision may be shared by many good people in public schools, but their efforts to practice it are thwarted by the choking control of an increasingly centralized system.

A movement for educational alternatives has been spreading across the U.S. in recent years. Composed of educators and parents inspired by diverse educational approaches, this growing revolution advocates an attitude of respect and even reverence toward the human being. Rather than treating children as future players in the race for global economic dominance, this perspective insists that every human being is an end in oneself. Every individual has a continued on page 21
Vermont is the only state in the United States that has positioned itself to decide on whether or not nuclear generation will play a role in its energy future. The choice, outlined in Act 160, is straightforward: should the Legislature allow Vermont Yankee (VY) to continue its operations until 2032, or should it refuse to grant the approval needed for continued operation when the plant’s current license expires in March of 2012? This one-time-only opportunity is unique and momentous. After this vote, all regulatory control will revert to the federal government, principally through the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC).

The debate over the future of VY that has been simmering for years, particularly in Windham County (home to VY on the flood plains along the Connecticut River in Vernon), has heated up and spilled across the state. Entergy, the giant Louisiana-based corporation that owns VY, borrows from the nuclear industry’s talking points to promote VY’s operations as “safe, clean, and reliable,” and its contributions – jobs at the plant, low electric rates and the dependency of the greater manufacturing and business sectors on that reliable, affordable power – as absolutely critical to Vermont’s economic engine. Bringing a native voice to the Entergy campaign, the Vermont Energy Partnership (VEP) was formed in 2005 to represent 75 business, labor and community leaders. Thomas Salmon, former governor, president of UVM, and chair of the state’s second-largest public utility, Green Mountain Power, is VEC’s best-known spokesperson.

The opposition has coalesced around a collection of grassroots and environment organizations – veteran groups New England Coalition (NEC), Vermont Public Interest Group (VPIRG), and Citizen Action Network (CAN), supplemented with newer players such as Nuclear Free Vermont (NFV) and Vermont Yankee Decommissioning Alliance (VYDA). For more than 40 years, their members have been examining the dark flipside of the nuclear industry’s coin-of-the-realm, in particular the toxic nature of the fuel cycle, public risk to radiological exposure, and the lack of long-term storage for highly radioactive waste.

The cause has also attracted a large affiliation of “anti-nukers” – an eclectic array of proponents of energy efficiency and home-grown renewable electric power. They argue that by decoupling from the conventional thinking that has produced large, centralized generators connected by a high-voltage grid, Vermont could lead the country in developing a more sustainable, decentralized electric power system that would invigorate the state’s economy by retaining and circulating energy dollars that are currently exported to New York, New England, Canada, and Louisiana.

**“Safe, Clean and Reliable”: verifiable descriptors or tales from the spin-masters?**

The nuclear industry’s position: Entergy’s claim that Vermont Yankee’s contribution to the electric power supply is “clean” is based on comparisons with fossil-fueled plants burning coal, oil, and natural gas – that network of big generators that has been targeted, correctly, as major contributors to greenhouse gases. Nuclear power plants are “clean” and “green” in the sense that they reduce harmful pollutants that otherwise would be emitted by their fossil-fueled cousins.

The concepts of “safe and reliable” rely on somewhat narrow interpretations of the terms, referring to claims that the industry has “a safety record that is nothing short of stellar” and that “no one has ever died of a radiological-related death from commercial nuclear operations in the United States in over 50 years of operation.”

**Anti-nukers would ask:** How “safe” is nuclear power when SWAT teams accompany shipments of condensed ores, refined fuel, finished fuel assemblies and high-level waste as they are transported across the planet by ship, rail and roads; when the international symbol of warning shows a figure sprinting in the opposite direction; when Vermont agencies and representatives dicker over acceptable radiation limits at the VY fence line; when a person standing within a few feet of a dry cask storage container for eight hours will have absorbed a lethal dose of radiation; when the federal regulatory body, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, employs more than 3,200 people and is supported by a $900-plus million yearly budget; when the NRC conducts mock raids on plants, including VY, to test subcontracted security forces?

**Anti-nukers would ask:** How “reliable” is nuclear power when we’ve already reached Peak Uranium and mining companies are processing progressively lower-grade ores to meet demand; when 90 percent of the fuel used in U.S. reactors is imported having been mined, refined, or fabricated overseas; when the VY decommissioning fund is dependent on a robust stock market; when near-catastrophic accidents at Browns Ferry (1975), Three Mile Island (1979), and the Davis-Besse (2002) plants have shut down their units either permanently and for years at a time for repairs; when VY has experienced numerous “unplanned outages,” including continued on page 18
Amid the excitement surrounding technological advances that may be useful in our transition beyond fossil fuels, there is surprisingly little discussion about the daily living techniques required to make this transition a reality. This proficiency building of the individual, home, and community – increasingly referred to as “The Great Re-skilling” — is the focus of this Homestead Security column.

Food, clothing, shelter… and in Vermont: heat. There’s no escaping this part of life in the Northern Forest, and as the age of cheap and available liquid fuels draws to a close we face both new and old methods for keeping warm. For a short generation we’ve become accustomed to the ease of cheap liquid fuels flowing from tank to boiler controlled only by the flick of a dial. Now we find ourselves already making the transition back to the solid fuel lifestyle and its requirements:

• Skills – both new and old
• Labor and time
• Keen awareness (it’s much easier to freeze the pipes, burn the house down, or combust your fuel poorly with a wood stove than an automated furnace).

Self-reliant heating involves the laborious and skill-intensive process of fell-in-the-forest, haul, buck, split, stack, haul again, tend. Whoever famously said that “wood warms you twice” obviously had their wood split and delivered. This article briefly outlines one oft-neglected step in the complex art and science of generating your own heat from this currently forested landscape.

Why wood?
In rural New England wood is the only sustainable and seasonally reliable source of heat that most of us can afford. Super-insulated passive solar homes are great, and if you live in one you’re exceptionally fortunate, but you’ll most likely still need some wood. And then there are the rest of us, who live in 99.9 percent of the other homes and can’t afford a $40,000-$150,000 complete thermal retrofit.

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This article is for those of us not holding our breath waiting for Them to provide us reliable and affordable heat.

access. Even after you spend the $8,000-$40,000 on solar panels, plumbing, and weatherization, you’ll still need a solid cord or two to get through the overcast deepfreeze of November-through-January.

“But wait,” you say again. “No need to worry. They will be making cellulosic ethanol and biodiesel... and hydrogen!”

This article is for those of us not holding our breath waiting for Them to provide us reliable and affordable heat. So, Technotopia aside, warmth=wood.

STEP 1: Secure a firewood source, either your own woodlot or a close friend and neighbor with a large one.

STEP 2: Process your firewood – fell, haul, buck, split, stack.

This last step is where most of us tend to go wrong. Traveling around the state I see more people slowly rotting their wood than quickly drying it. A stack of wood against the north side of a house with a tarp over it is an ideal way to grow mushrooms but it won’t yield wood fit for your stove, although many people burn such wood year after smoky year. The following is an overview of why it’s hard to dry wood well and what it actually requires, putting you one step closer to local self-reliance.

Wood wants to be wet

Really, really wet. In fact it’s the only typical raw material that holds more water than good soil (usually 120 percent to 200 percent of its dry weight). The cells in a tree’s wood have such a stubborn grasp on water (it’s their life currency) that they only release it fast enough to avoid rotting under specific conditions. And it’s in these conditions that you want your fuelwood.

To make things even more difficult, these conditions are hard to come by in Vermont: Throw a hundred pieces of wood from a plane flying over New England and 99 of them (or probably all 100) will begin rottng within a handful of months. This is why finding a large supply of dead wood to burn in the forest is often impossible – the fungi get to it first. Burning green wood (more than about 20 percent moisture content depending on species) is a bad idea because it promotes creosote build-up in the chimney, is hard to keep ignited (while at the same time keeping air flow through the stove to a minimum), reduces heat output by 20 percent to 70 percent (causing one to need about one-and-a-half to three times as much wood for the same amount of heat), emits much more air pollution, and is heavier to process. The only tree in our Northern Forest that is burnable in close to its green state is American ash, due to its exceptionally low standing moisture content.

Drying timeframe

Under average conditions it takes about one year or more to dry 16-inch cordwood thoroughly. Under good conditions cordwood will dry within five to seven warm-season months. Under the best of conditions (very sunny, lots of air flow, tall thin stacks, and stacked with lots of air space between the billets) one could dry wood adequately for efficient burning in three to four warm-season months if the billets (pieces of cordwood) are in very short lengths (14 inches or less) and split on most or all sides. Even small billets that are unsplit take a very long time to dry as the bark holds moisture in the wood very effectively.

Remember that wood only really dries in Vermont between April and November when temperatures are above 40°F and humidity levels are relatively low. A well-sited and built wood stack does most of its work during July through September with high heat and low humidity. If, like most people, you find yourself needing to rapidly dry a small amount of wood, piling it near the stove for a week or two before burning it can remove as much moisture (especially in small billets) as months of drying – as well as humidifying your house. Having the wood near the stove for even just a few days before burning can polish off the remaining excess moisture of marginally dry wood and is an oft-used strategy.

The soundest approach to properly heating with wood is to put it up well in the autumn or winter a year or more before it will be burned. This requires a surprising amount of space dedicated to wood drying: about 128 square feet for four cords, typical (minimum) of most home needs; that’s one stack 4 feet high by 4 feet wide by 32 feet long per year, two of them at the beginning of winter. In addition to food gardens, the life-after-oil front yard will be dedicated to wood storage – about two car parking spaces worth of wood; more if you’re home isn’t very well insulated and/or your stove burns inefficiently.

continued from previous page

“But wait,” you say, “there’s solar hot water.” Solar hot water is also great, but let’s face it, it’s still mostly for rich people here (until Vermont’s incentives catch up with other states) and for the minority of Vermont homes with good solar access. Even after you spend the $8,000-$40,000 on solar panels, plumbing, and weatherization, you’ll still need a solid cord or two to get through the overcast deepfreeze of November-through-January.

“But wait,” you say again. “No need to worry. They will be making cellulosic ethanol and biodiesel... and hydrogen!”

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on starting up winter farmers’ markets in your town, home cheese making, keeping a family cow, making fruit wines, root cellaring, and growing blueberries.

‘Grow it Here’ gurus
This year, we’re pleased to be joined by two excellent keynote speakers. The man who wrote the book on growing for winter markets, Eliot Coleman, will keynote the conference on Sunday and lead a vegetable farmer workshop on Monday. Eliot is co-owner, with Barbara Damrosch, of Four Season Farm, a market garden in Harborside, Maine, which produces vegetables year-round, and has become a nationally recognized model of small-scale sustainable agriculture. He has many years of experience in all aspects of organic farming, including field vegetables, greenhouse vegetables, rotational grazing of cattle and sheep, and range poultry.

This accumulation of knowledge has enabled him to write several books including *The New Organic Grower*, *Four Season Harvest*, and *The Winter Harvest Manual*.

Expanding to a two-day event last year, the Winter Conference has started a tradition of featuring a Vermonter keynote to inspire us with their hands-on involvement in Vermont’s local food system. This year we’re honored to have Andrew Meyer join us in that role. Andrew wears many hats, serving as a managing partner in Vermont Soy LLC, and Vermont Natural Coatings LLC. Andrew is also president of the Hardwick Enterprise Group LLC, specializing in the promotion of innovative value-added and agriculture food-based businesses. He is a founding member of the Center for an Agricultural Economy, a nonprofit whose mission is to create a healthy food system in the greater Hardwick area. The Center’s vision supports the desire of rural communities to rebuild their economic and ecological health through strong, secure, and revitalized agricultural systems to meet their own food needs locally, as well as to determine and build the best opportunities for value-added agricultural exports. On top of it all, Andrew is a partner in North Hardwick Dairy, an organic family dairy farm.

Mr. Meyers, Mr. Coleman, and the dozens of workshop presenters that will speak at the Winter Conference are planting and cultivating the seeds of food sovereignty in Vermont, enabling and inspiring Vermont’s communities, farmers, and gardeners to *Grow it Here*. These two days help grow a strong local food system, moving our state closer to realizing NOFA Vermont’s visionary Mission Statement, where “small farmers thrive and . . . everyone knows their farmer.”

Communities need to build support for local food so that consumers show up on a cold, snowy Saturday morning to buy unconventional root vegetables and cheese that doesn’t come in individually wrapped slices.

We hope you will join us, Saturday, February 14, and Sunday, February 15, at the Vermont Technical College in Randolph, Vermont. More information and a registration brochure can be found on our website, www.nofavt.org •
Movement Within Movements: Seeding Our Vermont Food Movement Cheryl King Fischer

Cheryl King Fischer’s “Movement Within Movements,” is a new column exploring how social change takes place, in New England and particularly here in Vermont.

Today’s food movement in Vermont is really two sub-movements. One food system is driven by consumer, human, and environmental-health concerns: the organic food and farming interests, sustainable agriculture, Slow Food, community gardening, farmers’ markets, community-supported agriculture (CSAs), food co-ops, farm-to-school, the localvore movements, and more. The other food movement focuses on hunger and poverty – the food security and food justice movement.

Vermont’s food movement consists of several hundred organizations – and what a diverse mix! Rural Vermont speaks on behalf of our small farmers. NOFA Vermont leads the organic interests, Shelburne Farms, the Intervale, Two Rivers/Foodworks, and new, emerging food-system hubs including the Rutland Area Food & Farm Link, Hardwick’s Center for an Agricultural Economy, and Vital Communities/Valley Food & Farm are building a local food system, and nearly a dozen localvore groups are demonstrating that eating local is not only possible but fun. The Vermont Food Bank is Vermont’s only food bank that serves 270 network partners: food shelves, pantries, senior centers, shelters and after-school programs.

The seeds of Vermont’s food movement were planted decades ago. Humanity grew its food “organically” until World War II. The “Back to the Land” movement grew out of the Great Depression, personified by Scott and Helen Nearing, who left New York City to homestead in Vermont in the 1930s. Their book, Living the Good Life (1954), became a road map for the hippies of the ’60s, who returned to the land to try to live more simply.

An industrial food system, meanwhile, got its start when WWII chemical-weapons producers needed new applications for their businesses. Oil-based pesticides and fertilizers helped usher in the global food system that Vermonters are now questioning. Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring (1962) was one of the first challenges to the growing industrial model, and by the early 1970s some agricultural experts came to realize that the chemicals that were being used in the treatment and production of food products had serious negative effects on both the environment and people’s health. The hippies were among the first modern, everyday folks to both demonstrate that the big system was not the answer and that our food could be grown without chemicals.

Most agree that reinventing our food system and assuring food security is the new core of the “food movement.”

“Uniting around food is often a catalyst for addressing broader social and economic justice issues,” observed Andy Fisher, executive director of the Community Food Security Coalition. “The proliferation of local food projects, farmers’ markets, CSAs, farm-to-school programs, and progressive public policies aimed at both supplying wholesome food to all and stemming the loss of family farms should restore hope that another food system is possible.”

Congratulations Vermonters! We are ahead of the nation and well on the way to building a local food system that will make us more healthy, self-reliant, sustainable, and secure. Keep focused on feeding ourselves first. There will be plenty left over to share with the rest of the world.

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“Uniting around food is often a catalyst for addressing broader social and economic justice issues.” Andy Fisher
Naomi Klein, continued from page 3

"therapy," military campaigns of shock and awe, or the pseudo-management of natural disasters such as Katrina to dramatically enhance corporate profits, individuals and populations are traumatized and manipulated to achieve disaster capitalism’s ends.

Conspiracy fact on steroids

By the time one arrives at page 300 of Klein’s book, one is riveted by the array of conspiracies—and I use that word intentionally—that Klein lays out. The genesis and evolution of disaster capitalism from her perspective are anything but coincidental. They are intentional, well-orchestrated, and brilliantly executed. It’s almost like watching the 2001 film Conspiracy, a dramatic recreation of the Wannsee Conference where the Nazi Final Solution phase of the Holocaust was devised.

Should we not take Obama’s appointments to task? Should we wait until the actions of his administration demonstrate a commitment to the status quo?

Nothing is spontaneous, accidental, or left to chance. Consequently, disaster capitalism’s escape paves constitute, in terms of lives lost and suffering perpetrated on humanity, the most horrific Holocaust in human history.

Klein has put disaster capitalism under the microscope as no one else ever has, but she isn’t quite ready to acknowledge it is the mechanism for achieving the consummate agenda of organizations such as the Bilderberg Group, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Trilateral Commission: to wit, the dissolution of nation-states in favor of a global corporatocracy. For most progressive intellectuals, who tend to minimize the role of elite organizations in international and domestic affairs, the mere mention of these organizations suggests "conspiracy theory," yet what Klein has given us in Shock Doctrine is conspiracy fact on steroids! Moreover, a number of left-liberal poster children are members of one or more of the ruling elite groups mentioned above—an inconvenient truth, so to speak, for true believers tethered to the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, in search of salvation from all things Republican.

Post-election comments by Naomi Klein

Appearing on “Democracy Now” on November 25, Klein wasted no time taking to task Larry Summers, former Clinton secretary of the treasury, whom Obama has just appointed director of the White House National Economic Council. According to Klein, Summers has embraced the three ‘ations; privatization, stabilization, and liberalization. So he has been preaching the [shock] doctrine. He is by no means an innocent bystander. He is a dyed-in-the-wool privatizer and free trader.

Klein has also spoken out about Obama’s new treasury secretary, Timothy Geithner, and about Robert Rubin who, although not appointed to a cabinet post in the Obama administration, will continue to serve as a key economic advisor. We shall consider the backgrounds of Geithner and Rubin below, but first, a troubling statement by Klein in the “Democracy Now” interview regarding the role of Clinton Administration Democrats in the origins of the current economic collapse:

Part of what causes the situation that seems to be very disappointing appointments is the fact we have not been honest about the legacy of the Clinton years. So much misinformation was spread during the election campaign, because it was a nice message to present the nineties as these wonder years in contrast to the Bush years. That is exactly what created the situation where you could have Summers being presented as the wise man instead of going down with Alan Greenspan. When Alan Greenspan’s reputation was raked over the coals, it should have been Rubin and Summers along side him.

University of Ottawa Economics Professor Michel Chossudovsky’s November 9 article asks “Who Are the Architects of Economic Collapse?” and offers a litany similar to Klein’s of the key players in Obama’s economic entourage. Chossudovsky notes that:

Timothy Geithner is CEO of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, which is the most powerful private financial institution in America. He was also a former Clinton administration Treasury official. He has worked for Kissinger Associates and has also held a senior position at the IMF. The FRBNY plays a behind the scenes role in shaping financial policy. Geithner acts on behalf of powerful financiers, who are behind the FRBNY. He is also a member of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR).

Of Paul Volcker, now heading Obama’s economic team, Chossudovsky states:

Paul Volcker was chairman of the Federal Reserve Board in the 1980s during the Reagan era. He played a central role in implementing the first stage of financial deregulation, which was conducive to mass bankruptcies, mergers and acquisitions, leading up to the 1987 financial crisis.

Another significant player in the Obama economic team is Jon Corzine, current governor of New Jersey and former CEO of Goldman Sachs.

In summary, Chossudovsky asks:

Where are Obama’s “Main Street appointees”? There are no labor or community leaders on Obama’s list for key positions.

The President-elect is appointing the architects of financial deregulation.

Meaningful financial reform cannot be adopted by officials appointed by Wall Street and who act on behalf of Wall Street.

Those who set the financial system ablaze in 1999, have been called back to turn out the fire. The proposed “solution” to the crisis under the “bailout” is the cause of further economic collapse.

There are no policy solutions on the horizon. What we are witnessing is continuity.

Should we not take Obama’s appointments to task? Should we wait until the actions of his administration demonstrate a commitment to the status quo?

Once you finish Naomi Klein’s Shock Doctrine, you may find yourself asking: What can I do? It’s really quite simple, and so very, very challenging: Withdraw your time, energy and money from larger, centralized systems, and invest them in your local economy in the areas of food security, energy, alternative healthcare, education, the arts, and other vital aspects of your local community.

You want leadership? Then lead by joining with others who share your concerns. Now that’s change I can believe in. Yes we can! •
Vermont Vox Populi: Secessionist Sensibilities: An Interview with UVM Political Scientist
Frank Bryan Alyssa Jean Findlay

As a newcomer to the Vermont Secession movement, I have tried to speak to a variety of people on the topic, both within the movement and on the outside. Some say they were born into it; some came to it as the conclusion of a journey of political or economic identity, and several view it as the only solution to the problems in the United States, as well as those facing the world. Frank Bryan, a political science professor at the University of Vermont, got involved with secession in 1991 when he was asked to take the “pro” side in a statewide debate about the topic. This is no enthusiastic secessionist, however. He views Vermont leaving the United States as similar to the break-up of a good marriage; with sadness, and a sense of inevitability. He believes that secession is a privilege; this is a break-up that needs to be earned; Vermonters need to prove that we deserve the right to take care of ourselves by taking an active role in town decision making and local economic choices.

—Alyssa Jean Findlay

What is the strongest argument for Vermont secession?
Frank Bryan: We can do it better ourselves; smaller states are more efficient.

So why hasn’t Vermont seceded yet?
FB: Nobody wants to, and I don’t think that we’ve proved that we’re ready. We ought to prove that we’re ready. We need to start acting independent, demonstrate that a small state can govern itself, and then we can secede. I’m a big decentralist; that’s most of what secession is. And there are things that we can do now to prepare for secession in the long run, and I don’t see them happening. I also don’t think that a lot of people are very serious about it; it’s more about hating America. Hate and outrage are not going to make this movement successful; it needs to be approached like the break-up of a good long marriage – as a last resort. We don’t deserve secession yet; we need to be more active in our democracy, and take some more power locally.

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fb:
Ben Falk
What about town meetings? Aren’t they a fairly direct form of democracy?
FB: Town meetings are the most distinctive characteristic of Vermont, but the extent to which the state government is taking [power] away from town meetings hurts Vermont. The towns need to have more decision-making power. These are the values that Vermont needs to take away to secede, but I don’t think that town meetings should lead to secession. We don’t deserve secession yet; we need to be more active in our democracy, and take some more power locally.

Do you think you will see secession in your lifetime?
FB: I hope secession doesn’t come in my lifetime, because it would break my heart. I think that my grandchildren will be closer to it; maybe in 50 years or so. My worldview is that we are moving to smaller states – let Tibet be free. But an independent Vermont is in the cards. I think we need to start acting independent, demonstrate that a small state can govern itself, and then we can secede. We can do it better ourselves; smaller states are more efficient. We can do it better ourselves; smaller states are more efficient.

What issues need to be faced?
FB: The only way we can secede is if America lets us. This is a peaceful movement. I’d like to see some kind of policy-neutral zone where states can experiment with this [form of independence]. We also need to think about foreign policy. People have to understand that we need protection, and we’d be a free rider on the continent, like Luxembourg. Twenty-five percent of people’s taxes go to defense, which means [in the event of secession] that we’d have more money to spend on ourselves. But is it then ethical to be a free rider? Because either the U.S. or Canada is going to protect us, and we need to pay for that, to recognize that the U.S. military maintains peace. Also, lots of things have happened that have destroyed Vermont’s ability to govern itself, and we need to get that democracy back. The power and the decisions are being concentrated in Montpelier, and the towns need some of that decision-making power back. Democracy is better the closer it is to home.

What do you think about the economic crisis?
FB: Technically I don’t know what to think, I’m not qualified. But intuition tells me it is a function of size; we have an economic empire, and we can’t pay attention to everything at once. We have to be more efficient, and big is not efficient. Look at the Soviet Union; it wasn’t a failure of communism, it was a size thing. Smaller states are more efficient, and once we see decentralization we can be better set up to save the environment and local economies.

Is the result of the November election going to change anything?
FB: We’re not going to get the change we hope for, but that’s not the point. This election was a melodrama; it was gross. All the journalists are saying, “Now that the election is over, what are we going to do?” Everyone tuned in to this one event, which was good for the media. Obama brought a fresh perspective, but still, now he’s stumbling like Bush. When you have to speak to everyone all the time – I feel sorry for him; he’s so afraid of offending someone. And his appointments are all the same-old same-old. He’s advised by experts, but the greatest problems in the world were caused by a room of experts. They don’t always know the way the world works. And he has all these problems to face – economic and environmental. There is too much for one center to focus on, and nothing is going to get done if we rely on Washington to make all of the decisions.

Is the United States beyond reform?
FB: Understand, I don’t come to secession because I hate America, I come to it with sadness because I love America, I still get teary-eyed when I hear the Star-Spangled Banner. I don’t see America as an evil empire. We are an empire, but I think as far as empires go we aren’t that bad; we’ve had plenty of opportunities to take over the world and we’ve turned them down. We do have an economic empire, but the real problem with the United States is that our democracy is dead. We need to go back to democracy on a human scale.

“I love Vermont because of her hills and valleys, her scenery and invigorating climate, but most of all, because of her indomitable people,” wrote Calvin Coolidge in 1928. Given unfolding challenges in 2009 (Peak Oil, climate change, a teetering U.S. Empire), in which direction will Vermont’s “indomitable people” move? Ben Falk
More than 200 people packed into Montpelier’s Unitarian Church on a November night to hear Naresh Giangrande describe the Transition Town model. Giangrande co-founded the world’s first Transition Town in Totnes, England. Nearly everyone stayed and moved downstairs for the food and question period afterwards. The excitement about the model was almost palpable.

The Transition Town model is a very different way to address peak oil and climate change than most of those now getting headlines. We hear a lot about getting other people to do something: build electric cars, erect wind turbines, re-build passenger rail, or sign the Kyoto Protocol. In Transition Towns, people get together themselves to weatherize each others’ homes, repair bicycles, create community gardens, and plant nut and fruit trees in parks and along streets.

The Transition Town concept started in Kinsale, Ireland, in 2004. Rob Hopkins was teaching a college-level class in permaculture. The class learned that peak oil meant that global supply lines would become increasingly unreliable in a fairly short time. They threw themselves into creating an Energy Descent Action Plan for the town – a step-by-step plan for building community resilience to oil shocks and reducing their carbon use.

Hopkins moved on to Schumacher College in Totnes, England, and started engaging the entire community in planning the transition.

In the Totnes approach, an Energy Descent Action Plan is a later step in a long process. First, the Transition team raises awareness of the challenges of peak oil and climate change as well as the possibilities of local responses. They also network with local government, use committees to tackle individual transition issues (food, transportation, medicine, education, etc.), promote “re-skilling” in the arts of community self-reliance (farming, sewing, cooking, etc.), and create tangible projects (tree plantings, bus shelters from local materials) quickly.

Much of what is happening in Vermont fits the Transition Town model, even if that language hasn’t been used much here. In November, Transition Town Montpelier became the first officially designated Transition group in Vermont. Addison County’s Conservation Congress in October was inspired by the Transition Town model. Post Oil Solutions in Brattleboro has been working along similar lines. A group in the Mad River Valley is working on Transitions, and lots of organizations are doing some form of re-skilling.

Transition Town Montpelier has its work cut out for it just identifying and listing all the organizations that are already part of re-skilling: Food Works, Freeride bicycle collective, Roots survival skills school, Monteverdi music school, and the Button-Up Vermont home weatherization workshops are just a few in the Montpelier area.

The most important contributions of the Transition Town model may be the positive vision of a low-energy future it offers, and the opportunity for individuals to work together to create that vision. In this column, I’ll note how people around the state are doing just that.

Training for potential Transition Town organizers is scheduled for March 7-8, 2009, in Montpelier. Details (and other Transition-related events) will be listed at www.transitionvermont.ning.com.

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**Transition Times: Transition Towns Generate Enthusiasm**

Carl Etnier

Much of what is happening in Vermont fits the Transition Town model, even if that language hasn’t been used much here.
“If we don’t have it, you don’t need it.”

MEMBERS
- Adaman Co-op
- Barnard General
- Barnet Village
- Barre/Dente’s Market
- Bloomfield/Debanville General
- Bradford/Bliss Village
- Braintree/Snowsville General
- Bridgewater Corners Country
- Cambridge/Village Market
- Castleton Village
- Chelsea/Will’s Store
- Danby Four Corners Store
- Dorset/H. N. Williams Store
- East Charleston Country
- East Poultney General
- Eden General
- Glover/Currier’s Quality Market
- Granitville General
- Greensboro/Wiley’s Store
- Hydeville/Harbor View Gen.
- Jericho Center Country
- Mendon Country
- Newbury Village
- Newfane Market
- North Bennington/
- Powers Market
- Norwich/Dan & Whit’s
- Orleans/Northern Exposure Country
- Orwell/Buxton’s Store
- Panton General
- Pawlet/Mach’s General
- Pittsford/Kamuda’s Market
- Randolph Center/Floyd’s Store
- Ripton Country
- Roxbury Country
- Saxtons River Village
- South Strafford/Coburn’s
- South Woodstock Country
- Taftsville Country
- Waits River General
- Waitsfield/Village Grocery
- Wardsboro Country
- Warren Store
- West Arlington/Wayside Country
- West Danville/Hastings Store
- Woodstock/F. H. Gillingham

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS
- Cabot Creamery
- Capital Candy Co.
- Dowling’s Wholesale
- Dr. Gonz’s Uncommon Condiments
- Farrell Distributing
- Foley Distributing/Services
- Green Mountain Credit Union
- Gus’ Tobacco Shop
- Hibbert & McGee
- Long Trail Brewing
- McKenzie Country Classics
- N-L Distributing
- Noyle W. Johnson Agency
- Pepsi-Cola Bottling Ventures
- Sam Frank Inc.
- Vermont Roots Inc.
- Vermont Smoke and Cure
- White River Paper

FRIENDS
- Hughes & Company
- Preservation Trust of Vermont

Vermont Alliance of Independent Country Stores
www.vaics.org
Shame on us if we remain ignorant of an industry generating the most toxic substances on earth, hiding behind a smokescreen of corporate propaganda paid for by its unwitting customers.

mining destroys geological formations and water sources – from surface waters, rivers, lakes and, most disturbingly, the deep aquifers that require hundreds of years to recharge — across swaths of the entire planet.

On a biological level, any radiation above naturally occurring background radiation has been deemed unsafe for living organisms. Radiation from nuclear power plants and their on-site spent fuel is constantly emitted as a function of doing business – a simple matter of fact, standard operating procedure. The industry attempts to hide behind the concept of “regulation” as a mechanism to protect the public, when in fact regulations establish the level of toxicity or risk the public will be exposed to, like it or not. On the other hand, nature is self-regulating and millions of species, including our own, have evolved over millions of years in the absence of human-produced concentrations of natural substances and millions of new pollutants, including drugs, volatile organic materials, and radioactive technologies. Indeed, the nuclear energy industry is simply another modern player in the rush to control and exploit nature — its unintended consequences hidden beneath the arcane, arbitrary criteria of regulations and their handlers.

It turns out, despite reassurances from the nuclear industry and regulators, even super-low levels of radiation adversely affect cells, including those related to reproduction; hence, the threat targets current human populations and their future generations. Ever wonder why they test for radon in the basement when you buy a home in Vermont? And that’s just based on the possibility that removing some dirt to build a basement or crawl space will expose naturally occurring radiation in the bedrock.

The most insidious form of the industry’s toxicity invades our personal psychology and collective cultural consciousness. In retrospect, it is simply mind-boggling that entire populations of our species accepted and practiced the concept of slavery – that a human being could be treated as a commodity and owned, leased, sold regardless of family ties, let alone personal autonomy. It is only a matter of time before future generations will shake their heads in disbelief that a fair number of so-called “developed nations” were infected with such levels of arrogance and hubris as to claim that power plants generating catastrophic levels of radioactive materials in their neighborhoods was an acceptable form of doing business. Nuclear slavery: simply the latest form of the modern industrial society.

Anti-nukers would ask: Are we citizens/consumers expected to line up and sleepwalk into the 21st century content to switch on our lights without one iota of awareness of where the millions of invisible electrons were spawned and how they were ferried to our homes? Shame on us. Blithely ignorant of an industry generating the most toxic substances on earth, wedded to a web of impossibly complex and dangerous technological systems, hiding behind a smokescreen of corporate propaganda paid for by its unwitting customers, propped up by millions in federal subsidies, protected from liability and insurance claims by federal legislation (Price-Anderson Act), supported religiously by a self-governance structure (NRC) insulated from local control through co-opted state agencies and aggressively guaranteed by federal preemption. Indeed, it is the federal government’s trump card – martial law – that ultimately elevates the industry beyond our civil rights.

Anti-nukers would ask: Martial law? Is that an exaggeration? In order to secure vulnerable transmission lines and large electric power plants, especially Vermont Yankee’s cooling tower collapse last year. Safe? Clean? Reliable? ZACHARY P. STEPHENS
that renewables alone will not be able to maintain the grid, the federal government retains jurisdiction over the national grid and large generators under the preemptive rubric of “national security.” Since 9/11, when questioned by state authorities and the public about the levels of risk related to terrorism (not just reactor buildings, but soft targets like control rooms, spent fuel storage pools, and connections to water sources as coolants and the grid for back-up power), the NRC simply claims that this particular threat to “safety” is off the table for discussion. The entire realm of terrorism risk-assessment and countermeasures disappears behind the veil of “national security,” maintained by the same national security system that spectacularly failed—well before and on the morning of 9/11.

Anti-nukers would ask: Why don’t the nuclear lobbyists, even the audacious folks shilling for Entergy, even lip-sync the word “sustainable”? Is it simply because the nuclear energy industry receives an “F” on all four basic criteria that define the term?

• It’s an extractive, non-renewable industry that depletes the natural sources of uranium ore faster than the Earth’s crust can replace it; just like the oil and natural gas industries, it has tapped out the highest-grade ore and reached its “peak” production.
• It produces waste products faster than they can be broken down by natural processes, and these radioactive byproducts will be lethal for thousands of years.
• Its global systems deplete/degrade a wide range of resources and ecosystems faster than they are regenerated (farmland, mountains, watersheds, lakes, rivers and aquifers).
• And the bottom line? It subjects people to conditions that undermine their capacity to meet their present needs and compromises the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

If it’s not sustainable, can nuclear power be branded “green”?

The Fear Cards: jobs, electric rates, and the economy

Here’s the final sneer: “If you close VY, where will the juice come from?”

When confronted with the anti-nukers’ pushback on environmental issues, Entergy has responded with repeated warnings that if VY is not allowed to continue operation for another 20 years Vermont will lose 600 well-paying jobs; consumers’ electric bills will soar, perhaps double at the stroke of the 2012 New Year; inevitably high electric rates will force local businesses, especially manufacturers, to move out; and Vermonters will have to import “dirty” power from the New England grid’s coal, natural gas and oil-fired generators. Despite nods to adding new renewable energy sources to the mix, the Entergy spokespeople are blunt in stating that renewables alone will not be able to maintain a clean and dependable power supply; it is therefore crucial that Vermont keep VY.

And Entergy claims that they and the Vermont Department of Public Service have commissioned their economic impact assessments to quantify the evidence.

Ah, welcome to the debate. In subsequent issues of Vermont Commons we will explore the anti-nukers’ medicine cabinet of antidotes to what they consider an insidious, toxic concoction of misinformation. We will explore how sustainable-energy proponents envision the Green New Deal playing out in our fair state, why increased energy independence will create jobs, circulate monies (salaries, investments, and profits) and invigorate our state’s economy, and who among their numbers will help Vermonters to slip from Entergy’s grip.

And the sustainable-energy proponents claim they have studies, commercial projects, and grassroots success stories to backstop their vision.

• Innovative funding: VPIRG’s agenda of 2009 legislative initiatives, in particular a financing model (based on California’s terrifically successful CityFIRST program) that encourages property owners to install energy efficiency upgrades and renewable energy systems, funded by taxable municipal bonds with reasonable, fixed interest rates fixed over 20 years.
• District heating: An ad hoc group that calls itself BTU (Burlington Thermal Utility) has made impressive progress on its vision for a biomass cogeneration district-heating project that it has been diligently pursuing for almost two years now. Find more details on this ambitious 15-25 megawatt (MW), $100 million to $200 million adaptation of the European-model vision at brattleborothermalutility.org.
• Community-owned wind power: Based on success stories from the Midwest, key Vermont policy-makers and entrepreneurs are mapping out solutions to the current stalemate (involving local resisters, wind advocates, outside investors and state regulators) on commercial-scale projects.
• Small hydropower: If studies indicate that Vermont hosts more than 1,000 MW in existing and potential sites (four times VY’s current contribution to Vermont), how do we make it happen—following, perhaps, the path of the Greensboro Energy Small Hydro Project, which will tap the Caspian Lake to meet the town’s school, town hall, library, fire station, public works, and streetlights, at a profit after expenses.

• Creative community collaborations: It’s absolutely astounding how many groups developing energy-related initiatives have sprung up across the state. Their banners include the Transition Town movement, VPIRG (Vermont Post-Oil Network), Climate Protection, SERG (the Sustainable Energy Resource Group), town energy committees, No Idling, biomass heating for public buildings, Low Carbon Diet Eco Team, Carbon Shredders, Kitchen Table Collaborative, and even the Vermont Power and Light outreach to faith communities.

• The grid versus the locals: Southern Vermont is home to what has evolved into the Southern Loop/Colbidge Connector debate, a showcase of the tensions between a) the 20th century’s model of large centralized power plants (predominantly fossil-fueled and nuclear) connected by high-voltage transmission lines, and b) distributed generation: the new model of multiple small generators, featuring a wider mix of conventional and renewable technologies.

• The People’s Study on VY: Doug Hoffer’s “Vermont Job Gap Study (Phase 6): ‘The Leaky Bucket – An Analysis of Vermont’s Dependency on Imports (2000),’” quantified how much Vermont pays for “imported” energy (BTUs and electrons) and set the benchmark for helping folks understand the direct and indirect costs of “cheap energy,” including VY’s contribution. Long-time Windham County nuclear activists Michael Daly and John Greenberg have recently developed a sophisticated economic analysis comparing the continued operation of VY with a shut-down in 2012. They have vetted their work with a wide variety of utility officials, regulators, and legislators. Their assessments completely overturn the conventional wisdom that discontinued operation will lead to higher electric bills and loss of quality jobs. Quite the opposite: Vermont will do just fine without VY’s electrons, and the expanded opportunity for investments in the next round of conservation/efficiency and new in-state generation will produce hundreds of green-collar jobs—a win-win for our economy, the environment, and our collective sense of fairness and stewardship.

So hold on to your hat. Keep this and subsequent issues of Vermont Commons handy. Feel free to use our introduction to the lineups, the debatable issues, and the scoreboard as Show Time rolls out all across our Green Mountains and culminates with the Big Dance in Montpelier.

We at Vermont Commons will be rooting for self-sufficiency, sustainability, and sovereignty.
adrift in the vast and vaporizing waters of Empire, I could not conceive this option, once venerated by our very own secessionist founding New England fathers and mothers.

Impossible to conceive until, led by my compassionate friend to the secessionists’ meeting, I met a southerner named Thomas Naylor, transplanted to Vermont. Southerners have never forgotten their ancient American birthright. The candle snuffed out inside me was magically, unexpectedly lit during the peak of Vermont’s 2003 mud season.

And so, at last, the economic decentralist arrived home, arm-in-arm with the political secessionist. They were one and the same all along. To be small scale requires small-scale sovereignty, or it is no more than a chimera. A feel-good idea. Those of my many friends and colleagues who “like” the idea of small-is-beautiful, of local “democracy,” and “freedom of choice,” but cannot bring themselves to grapple fatefully with their deep sentiment-laden attachment to the immensity that is “America,” and all the massive violence such an immense state implies and entails, are — in my eyes — lost.

It is a strange coincidence that just as the ship of the United States is groaning on the shoals of bankruptcy, leaking dollars like massive jets of seawater, at this precise moment a charismatic black American has arisen out of relative obscurity to become its captain. I can almost see the arrogant smiles of the Trickster and his Masked Troupe of Neo-con armchair warriors and banksters, their pockets stuffed, as they turn over the steerage to Mr. Obama, salute, jump ship, and set sail for the “new” New World Order.

The shores these pirates set sail for will be under the rule of a transnational Triumvirate (some morphed version of the WTO-IMF-World Bank) – and no longer under the sway of any single hegemonic state, but serving the usual suspects, who will have organized their subjects (humanity) into new multi-nation-state regional alliances, among whom the bankrupted United States will be but one voice. (Bankruptcy does terrible things to the prideful.) Gathered on the darkening plains of those shores will be a legion of neo-Keynesian White Knights, refurbished and arrayed to do battle with the blood-soaked but not yet-vanquished and ever arrogant Black Knights of Neo-liberalism for control of the One True Paradigm, whose priests shall then anoint themselves to “guide” the Triumvirate.

Whoever the winners of this battle will be, they will remain committed to the doomed materialist paradigm of growth. They will be, like their slavish followers, essentially clueless, betting on technology and their near-absolute secular powers (none more vital than their control of the world’s monetary policy and its mass media).

We have perhaps two to five more years to organize secessionist movements, widespread movements for local self-reliance. Or let chaos — mere anarchy — reign.

For me, Vermont!

(Based on Remarks at the Third North American Secessionist Convention: Manchester, New Hampshire; 14 November 2008)
creative force within, which is both more spontaneous and intelligent than the identity shaped by society. We carry the seeds of our highest aspirations and potential evolution within ourselves. Self-actualization is nurtured by authentic relationships with adult society and the natural world, not by a coercive pedagogy that demands performance and conformity.

The education revolution is essentially a human rights movement, arguing for a fundamental respect for the personhood of every child. It is a movement for educational democracy. If democracy represents trust in each person’s ability and right to manage his or her own life, and if we were to discover that, in the proper settings, young people even at quite young ages possess this ability to a significant degree, then children are entitled to more autonomy in their learning.

While our culture preaches democratic values to students, it trains them in the habits of authoritarian institutions. The published curriculum says one thing while the “hidden curriculum”—the power structure within the school system—teaches something entirely different. Alternatively, some educators argue that young people are entitled to many of the democratic rights we claim for ourselves. They deserve to have a say in what and how they learn because they are the most direct stakeholders in the educational enterprise. Most learner-focused educators have seen, first hand, that when young people are allowed opportunities to make decisions about their own learning and about daily life in their school communities, they show surprising maturity, creativity, and thoughtfulness.

Young people are not “human capital” to be plumped up with marketable skills for feeding to the corporate economy. They (and their parents) are not “customers” consuming the products of the knowledge industry. Instead, we need to view the child as the great visionary educator Maria Montessori did early in the twentieth century: as the builder of a unique human personality, driven by a creative force from within to engage the world inquisitively and purposefully. This is why human beings deserve rights; we possess both the capacity and the imperative to fashion a personality, an individuality, that will experience and live in the world in ways that no other does, and we require autonomy and security in order to fully achieve this potential. This individuality begins in childhood, therefore children are entitled to educational and existential rights necessary for them to accomplish their task of building a mature individual.

Deep respect for the human being is the core principle of the emerging educational revolution. It lies at the heart of alternative approaches regardless of the specific teaching methodologies they use. In my book The Self-Organizing Revolution, I have identified other core principles as well, and will explore these in subsequent columns here. •
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for the 21st century.
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argument for applying the
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philosophy to the
United States itself."
—Jay Walljasper,
Editor of Utne magazine.

"A celebration of Vermont's
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Drying methods

Skillfully drying firewood (or building lumber) requires managing all the moisture factors – precipitation, temperature, and air movement – through the proper location and construction of a wood stack.

Optimal wood drying and storage sites are:
1. Easily accessible to sled, cart, truck, or tractor
2. Off the ground
3. In a warm sunny area (against a south-facing wall can be ideal)
4. In an area with good air flow
5. Near the point of use

Proper construction of your fuelwood stack (you’re crafting a stack, not making a pile here) involves the same things as any building: a stable foundation, stable shape (not too tall for the width), solid connections (the way the wood stacks against itself) and a sound roof. A solid foundation can usually be made by propping up pallets or 2x4s to form a wide, level surface with plenty of support points.

Ensure air access underneath the stack. Remember that the bottom layers are most likely going to get wet in snowy weather as it drifts against the pile and by lower air flow volumes and wetter air near the ground. Ideally, you burn the top three-quarters of the pile and then restack the remaining one-quarter on top of another stack for the following year. Stable connections between the layers of cordwood are made by ensuring that the wood is of a uniform length – usually 16 inches or 18 inches – that they are layered up neatly and flatly, and that any retaining of the walls (see figure 1) are rock solid.

A sound roof is best made out of anything impermeable, large, flat and rigid, like scrap plywood or, best of all, scrap metal roofing. Ensure that the roofing is pitched and drains water away from any area that would backsplash onto the wood.

Drying wood under a tarp seems like a fine idea until you try it. When you do, you realize how hard it is to keep the wind from removing or misaligning it and snow from forming depressions in it so that water slowly percolates into the pile. If you must use a tarp, heavy canvas or rubber tarps are infinitely more workable than light poly tarps.

Once you have a good supply of well-dried fuelwood on hand you’re ready to heat with it – and that’s where the fun and challenge continues. From air-tight stoves to old school cook stoves to masonry ovens to wood boilers, the options are many. Similar to the drying process, wood burning is usually conducted poorly, with excessive consumption, inefficient combustion, and excess pollution typical – issues that are increasingly coming to the fore as Vermont turns again to wood as our primary heat source. •
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