Tax Time: Why Vermonters In An Independent Republic Would Pay Lower taxes

Hans Ohanian

Two hundred and score years ago, we freed ourselves from a despotic British government in a protest about taxation without representation. Today, we have a supposedly democratic government with representation. But what kind of representation is it when a majority of people vote for one presidential candidate, but the other candidate nevertheless grabs the office? And what kind of representation is it when an overwhelming majority of people oppose the war in Iraq, but our supposed “representatives” in Congress nevertheless continue to approve the expenditure of trillions of our tax dollars for this military adventure?

Our Democrat and Republican representatives are equally to blame for this outrageous violation of democratic principles. As my favorite bumper sticker says, “Republicans and Democrats: same shit, different piles.”

An independent Vermont Republic would certainly guarantee a more representative government. But would Vermonters have to pay for this enhancement in democracy with higher taxes?

The idealists amongst us are undoubtedly willing to pay any price for true democracy. But the frugal may conveniently forgets to tell you that all this extra cash comes from IOUs on which he has put your signature. He isn’t giving you his money, but merely pockets some of it.

In its calculations, the Tax Foundation took Sam’s scam into account, but not to a full extent. For Vermont, the actual raw number for the ratio of federal expenditures received to federal taxes paid is $4.645 million / $4.085 million, or $1.14 per $1.00. The Tax Foundation revised this downward to $1.08 per $1.00 by making a correction for the cash deficit, which it treated as an extra hidden tax burden. But the feds incur debts not only in cash received vs. cash expended, but also in “internal” transactions, such as misappropriations of funds from the Social Security and Medicare Trusts, which they divert to other purposes. And they incur even larger debts by the accrual of new obligations to pay for future (as yet unfunded) Social Security, Medicare, and drug benefits.

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Knowing how to catch your own augurs well for an increasingly independent Vermont. (ANIMAL FARM)

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- Inter States (Novel in Progress)
- Vermont: The First Populist Republic (History)
- State Sovereignty: An Interview with N.H. Representative Daniel Tise
- Blogging Vermont’s Commons (Blogroll)

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Vermont Commons is a print and online forum for exploring the idea of Vermont independence—political, economic, social, and spiritual. We are unaffiliated with any other organization or media, and interested in all points of view. We welcome your letters, thoughts, and participation.
Editorial

No Apologies:
Retooling Vermont For Revolutionary Times

Everything must be examined, everything must be shaken up, without exception, and without circumspection.
— Denis Diderot

“We will not apologize for our way of life.”
— President Barack Obama
January 20, 2009 Inaugural Address

O.K. then.
Let’s not apologize for our way of life. But let’s examine it.

For we live in revolutionary times. And revolutionary times, as Enlightenment philosophe Denis Diderot understood, demand that each of us – as Vermonters – take a good hard look at where and who we are.

Begin with the where. The once and future Republic of Vermont occupies a northeastern niche within the richest and most powerful nation the world has ever seen, an Empire teetering on the edge of bankruptcy. Down in D.C., after several weeks at the helm, the Obama Administration has demonstrated it is “business as usual” for the U.S. Empire. While we applaud Mr. Obama’s early announcement “business as usual” for the U.S. Empire abroad.

Meanwhile, back home here in the States, the O Team’s “Gang of Four” – NEC Director Lawrence Summers, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, Federal Reserve Chair Ben Bernanke, and OMB Director Peter Orzag – have barely managed to hornswoggle a compliant Congress and fearful public into accepting a near-$1 trillion (and counting) so-called “stimulus” package that even the Wall Street Journal, friend of “too big to fail” banks everywhere, admits will probably not work. Last month, Wall Street itself remained unconvinced by the “Gang of Four’s” desperate charade, dropping hundreds of points in the wake of Geithner’s February announcement, on the very same day.

Writing in the San Francisco Chronicle, longtime Democrat and Beltway insider David Sirota put it bluntly: “Washington is the same one-party town it always has been – controlled not by Democrats or Republicans, but by Kleptocrats (i.e. thieves).” Or, as Jim Hogue points out in these pages, “disaster capitalism’s” economic bubbles – dotcom, credit, housing, and terror – are created, inflated, and popped quite deliberately by those in the know. No accidents here.

All of this news might, perhaps, serve as a wake-up call for anyone who has drunk too deeply of the O Team’s Kool-Aid.

While bankster elites duck and cover, and the economic crisis hits home in the Green Mountain State, one person sacrifice themselves for the greater good.

Rob Williams, editor and publisher of Vermont Commons, is a teacher, historian, writer, and musician. He lives in Waitsfield.

The very same day.

No apologies:
— President Barack Obama

Contributors

Lauren-Glenn Davitian is executive director of CCTV Center for Media & Democracy (www.cctv.org), celebrating 25 years of community media in Vermont in June 2009. Recognized as the “mother of public access TV” in Vermont, she also works in the national arena to protect free speech, public access, and open networks. Her e-mail address is davitian@cctv.org

Carl Etner is director of Peak Oil Awareness in Montpelier. He hosts two radio shows and blogs on the subjects of Peak Oil and relocalizing.

Ben Falk grows food and fuel in the lower Mad River Valley, and develops post-petroleum human habitats with Whole Systems Design, LLC.

Carolyn Baker is a recent college graduate living in Burlington. ‘The Greenneck’ lives and writes in the rusted-out shell of a one-ton Chevy pickup somewhere in Cabot.

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Jim Hogue is an actor who portrays Ethan Allen. He operates a small farm in Calais, has a weekly radio program on WGDR, and works with Vermonters for Voting Integrity.

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Ron Miller has written several books on progressive and alternative education, and is currently editor of Education Revolution magazine a member of the Vermont Commons editorial board. He has taught at Goddard, St. Michael’s and Champlain colleges, and established the Bellow School in Williston.

Tim Newcomb is a graphic designer and political cartoonist who lives in Worcester. His latest collection of cartoons, A Gaggle of Governors, was published in November 2008.

Hans Olanian is a physicist and writer. He has taught at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Union College, and UVM. His latest book is Einstein’s Mistakes: The Human Failings of Genius.

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Woody Tasch is chairman of Slow Money, an NGO dedicated to catalyzing the flow of patient capital to local food systems. He is former chairman of Investors’ Circle, a nonprofit investor network that has facilitated the flow of more than $130 million to more than 200 early-stage sustainability-oriented ventures since 1992. He is author of the recently released Inquiries into the Nature of Slow Money: Investing as if Food, Farms and Fertility Mattered.

Vermont Commons welcomes your input.

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.

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Mountains, our governor and the Vermont Legislature debate a gay marriage bill and try to “guessimate” how much federal “stimulus” money may be conjured and sent our way by the Federal Reserve. Meanwhile, citizen legislators in 20 states – including Arizona, Hawaii, Montana, Alabama, Arkansas, California, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, and Washington – are exercising their Ninth and Tenth Amendment rights, moving to enact legislation that would nullify specific federal laws their state legislatures deem unconstitutional (Read more at www.vtcommons.org/blog).

Interposition. Nullification. States’ rights. Revolutionary times, indeed.

And these times demand retooling.

In this issue, permaculturalist Ben Falk (Homestead Security) offers a comprehensive “retooling” check list.

And as we retool, let us consider this three-legged stool: Finance. Fuel. Food.

Start with finance. It is clear that the halcyon days of the petro-dollar, that most-powerful of global fiat paper currencies, are numbered. We can continue to trust in the wisdom of Tim Geithner and the Fed, or we can move aggressively to create our own parallel and local currencies here in the Green Mountains. Steve Moyer’s Vermont Freedom Currency (Issue 19 – Summer 2007), Amy Kirschner’s Vermont Sustainable Exchange (see this issue), and the growing Vermont “time banking” movement (listen to Vermont Radio interviews at www.vtcommons.org with Onion River Exchange’s Monica Kimball) are but three options ripe for support from Vermonters of all political stripes. “Give me control over a nation’s currency,” wrote Baron M.A. Rothschild, “and I care not who makes its laws.” Perhaps the time has come for Vermonters to create their own cash to match the cachet of the Vermont brand. And, as Hans Ohanian and “H.D. Thoreau” suggest in these pages, let’s rethink our relationship to our federal tax dollars while we are at it.

Beyond finance, it is fuel that powers Vermont’s economy. In an era of Peak Oil, Vermonters are beginning to get serious about alternative and renewable energies. As Carl Etnier chronicles, the Transition Town movement is beginning to take root in our communities, and schools (Middlebury College moves to biomass power!) and businesses (Green Mountain Coffee Roasters goes solar!) are moving aggressively to switch away from fossil fuel energy and towards renewables. But our efforts could use some more political leadership at the town and the state level, particularly with regard to electricity generation – two-thirds of our state’s electricity comes from Vermont Yankee nuclear and Hydro Quebec. Simply stated, this old centralized way of generating power will not make the cut in this new century of smaller scale decentralization.

And let’s not forget about food – the tastiest and most tangible of our three. Currently, the United States agri-economy burns up 10 hydrocarbons worth of energy for every calorie of food we produce. We are, quite literally, eating oil. So, our move in Vermont toward more community gardens, CSAs, a “Vermont-Fresh Network,” a diverse working landscape, and what Robin McDermott calls “Localvore Living” are not just fads. They are a necessary part of our future, if we are to survive and thrive in this new century of diminishing fossil fuel energy opportunities.

At the end of the day, Wall Street, Barack Obama, and Exxon Mobil will not save us here in Vermont. What might do the trick is a combination of courage, collaboration and chutzpah – but only if we get serious about retooling our once and future republic.

We hope you find this issue of use in doing so.

Free Vermont!

No apologies.

And long live the United States.

Rob Williams
Editor/Publisher
Rethinking the scam numbers

Instead of the minimalist deficit correction adopted by the Tax Foundation, it is more equitable to adopt a deficit correction according to the yearly increase of the gross federal debt reported by the U.S. Treasury (see “Historical Debt Outstanding, Annual” at www.treasurydirect.gov), which includes debt from internal transactions of the feds but excludes the long-term debt associated with new obligations for payments of future benefits. In 2005, the increase of the gross federal debt was $554 billion.

The Vermont share of this debt was $1,170 million, if shares are allocated per capita. (To put this in perspective, note that this comes to $1,870 for every man, woman, and child.) If we regard this deficit as an extra tax burden, the ratio of federal expenditures to total tax burden in Vermont drops to 88¢ per $1.00.

This shows that Vermont is not a beneficiary state. Vermont is paying for its federal benefits through the nose, or, more precisely, Vermont will be paying through the nose once the IOUs that Uncle Sam has signed on our behalf become due, and the Japanese and Chinese who hold these IOUs ask for repayment, plus interest.

But wait, there’s more!

And that is not the whole story. Many of the federal expenditures within Vermont are not made for the benefit of Vermonters, but merely for the benefit of the feds — many of these expenditures are not grants, but financial transactions involving payments for purchases of merchandise or for services rendered.

For instance, a bit more than 4 percent of the federal expenditures in Vermont are for the operation of the Post Office. Evidently, postal services are a benefit for Vermont. But we pay postage and fees for these services, and the feds’ expenditures are covered by these payments. For a fair accounting, we must either include payments of postage and fees on one side of the balance sheet and the Post Office expenditures of the feds on the other side, or we must remove these items from both sides of the balance sheet. In its analysis, the Tax Foundation did neither. To fix this mistake, let’s subtract all the Post Office expenditures from the Tax Foundation’s balance sheet for Vermont. When these expenditures are subtracted, the benefit of 88¢ per $1.00 is cut to 85¢.

Millions for “Defense”

Similar arguments apply to expenditures for military procurements in Vermont. For example, if the feds pay, say, $100,000 to take possession of a Gatling gun manufactured by General Dynamics in Burlington, then the wealth of Vermont increases by $100,000. But in the balance sheet, we must also include the fair-market value of this gun as a loss to Vermont. If we reckon the fair-market value of the gun as $100,000, then this sale is a wash. Thus, all such procurement payments are not grants, but compensation for merchandise and services rendered, and they should not be counted when comparing what we give to the feds versus what benefits Vermonters get in the “bargain.”

In fact, all defense payments — procurement, military salaries, civilian salaries, and National Guard grants — should be deleted from the balance sheet, because none are actually for the benefit of Vermont. The feds expend defense funds in Vermont not to protect Vermont, but mainly for geopolitical reasons, to protect and expand the commercial and military empire of the United States — and this is of little concern to an independent Vermont Republic. Defense payments (other than pensions and disability payments) are about 11 percent of federal expenditures in Vermont, and if we delete all this from the balance sheet, we...
What is invisible to the Invisble Hand? Life after globalization, to those who are looking through the lens of economics.

What is more nail-like to the hammer of economics than trillions of dollars of bail-out money? Nothing, it would seem. Absolutely nothing.

We are living at the end of the age of economics, an era in which economics trumped history. We are living at the beginning of a new era, in which we are coming to understand that economics is a telescope, capable of peering into the fascinating and important reaches of fiduciary space, of course, but wildly ineffective at enabling us to see what is happening right in front of our eyes, at our feet, on our land, in our backyards and communities and bioregions.

Although a few of the best and the brightest in the economics profession, including Joseph Stiglitz, are admitting publicly that we are, out of necessity, pouring bailout money into a very leaky vessel – “We are not fixing structural problems that underlie the tech bubble and the housing bubble because we don’t know what those structural problems are,” he observed in a recent television interview – most of the time and energy of the experts is trained on hitting the economic RESET button, printing money, adding regulation, and then once more setting about the task of reviving up that same old securitized, industrialized, consumerized engine of globalization.

The notion that fundamental alternatives are possible seems, still, despite widespread uncertainty and despite words like “the future of capitalism” occasionally hitting the national airwaves, beyond the pale of serious economic consideration.

Niall Ferguson’s The Ascent of Money: A Financial History of the World and Kevin Phillips’ Bad Money: Reckless Finance, Failed Politics, and the Global Crisis of American Capitalism are cases in point. While each in its own way lifts a corner of the veil of free-market economics and capitalist markets run amok, neither provides the coordinates of a new direction.

In his Vanguard Founder John Bogle takes a more entrepreneurial view, excoriating the excesses of speculative, intermediation-besotted finance from the perspectives of a social-equity-minded practitioner.

Ferguson’s book starts off with great promise, observing: “Planet Finance is beginning to dwarf free-market economics and capital markets run each in its own way lifts a corner of the veil of serious economic consideration.”

Phillips peers into economic history and derivaees flaws Phillips elucidates; let’s call it “cannibalizing.” In 1950, manufacturing’s share of GDP was 29.3 percent while finance’s was 10.9 percent; by 2005, those shares were 12.0 percent and 20.4 percent, respectively. By itself, this transfer of power from the “real economy” to the financial sector would be cause for concern. Coupled with the perils of Peak Oil and related threats to the strength of the U.S. dollar, however, the hegemony of the financial sector becomes a cause for alarm.

Unlike Ferguson, Phillips sees a clear, downward historical trajectory that shadows the rise of finance:

Money is “bad,” in the historical sense, when a leading world economic power passing its zenith before the United States, think Hapsburg Spain, the maritime Dutch Republic (when New York was New Amsterdam), and imperial Britain just before World War I – lets itself luxuriate in finance at the expense of harvesting, manufacturing, or transporting things. Doing so has marked each nation’s global decline.

Phillips peers into economic history and derives some clearly cautionary lessons. He sees the flaws inherent in our repetition of economic history, and his analysis of these flaws constitutes a valuable contribution to our current deliberations as a country and a global economic power. While he makes a few passing observations with respect to resource depletion, green energy and the like, in the end, Phillips’ analysis stays pretty well confined to a few key macro-economic and geopolitical arguments, with little to suggest any fundamental concern with questions of sustainability.

So, too, with the third in our triumvirate of continued on page 6
Free Vermont Media, continued from page 5

economic writers, although John Bogle begins turning us more forthrightly toward a new way of thinking. The founder of one of the world’s leading mutual funds, and a long-time advocate of low-fee intermediation, Bogle’s subtitle – True Measures of Money, Business, and Life – betrays a definite humanistic, cultural bias. His small book is studded with entrepreneurial and philosophical insights into the schism between finance, common sense, and common decency:

Fully 70 years ago, Keynes warned us: “When enterprise becomes a mere bubble on the whirlwind of speculation [and] the capital development of a country becomes a by-product of the activities of a casino, the job of capitalism is likely to be ill-done.”

The stock market is a giant distraction from the business of investing.

Amidst this wave of complexity, have we forgotten the fact that the most productive investing is the simplest investing, the most peaceable investing, the lowest-cost investing. . . investing with the most consistent strategies and over the longest time horizon?

Today, in our society, in economics, and in finance, we place far too much trust in numbers. Numbers are not reality. . . Trust, wisdom, character, ethical values, and the hearts and souls of human beings . . . play the central role in all economic activity.

Innovation in finance is designed largely to benefit those who create the complex new products, rather than those who own them. . . With the unfathomable complexity of these and other financial innovations . . . this financial legerdemain creates a modern version of alchemy.

If Bogle is running for the office of Ben Franklin of Wall Street, he gets my vote. His rant against the $620 billion some odd in fees paid annually (that’s right, annually) to Wall Street intermediaries pushes up against the boundaries of Planet Finance.

For all its beauty and insight, however, Bogle’s argument fails, still, to make it all the way to Planet Earth. Like Ferguson and Phillips, there is nary a mention of the fact that our generation is presiding over the unraveling of the web of life, “the largest legal accumulation of wealth in history” notwithstanding. There is no mention of the possibility that we are beginning to confront planetary limits to economic growth and consumerism. (And before the word “neo-Malthusian” springs to your lips, note that a year or so ago none other than Thomas Malthus himself was central to the lead story in the Wall Street Journal, and with more than a modicum of respect and concern.)

Clearly, Bogle believes there is such a thing as intermediation that is too complex. Too bad he doesn’t go the rest of the way. Think: money that is too fast and companies that are too big. Think: industrial agriculture that is too extractive and industrial philanthropy that is too end-of-the-pipe, too little too late. Think: the end of the era of Wealth Now/Philanthropy Later. Think: What would the world be like if you had to invest 50 percent of your assets within 50 miles of where you live? Think: a fiduciary wondering whether 50,000 McDonald’s and a trillion hamburgers might be “too much.” Think: capital markets based not on extraction and consumption, but on preservation and restoration.

If you want to get up to speed on the history of finance run amok, these three books comprise an excellent primer. That said, the very idea of “up to speed” betrays, however inadvertently, the nature of our challenge. For the task at hand is to recognize that going faster and faster, bigger and bigger, more and more global may land us in the territory of that old adage: insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, hoping for a different outcome.

Ours is the task of looking, finally, and to good effect, toward the territory of what E.F. Schumacher called “meta-economics.” Ours is the task of looking above the top line and below the bottom line, recognizing new measures of progress that integrate the social and environmental realities of the 21st century. Ours is the task of slowing down and bringing money back down to earth. Ours is the task of building a nurture capital industry, creating new kinds of financial compost suited to healthy local economies, appropriate-scale enterprise, and food systems that do not mine soil fertility.

Ours is the task of daring to believe that if, at this moment of profound economic uncertainty, we were to venture beyond the confines of Planet Finance, what we would find is not chaos and darkness, but nothing more and nothing less than our true home, Planet Earth.
Complementary currencies are nothing new, especially in areas that place heavy value on community, sustainability, and the local marketplace. However, in this time when the national monetary system isn’t meeting every community’s needs, having a local currency or type of exchange becomes all the more important.

Amy Kirschner, founder of the brand new Vermont Sustainable Exchange, has had a hand in alternative currencies in Vermont before. After taking a course on local currencies at UVM several years ago, Kirschner, now a graduate student in ecological economics, became a volunteer for the Burlington Currency Project, composed of people who feel that national currencies do not meet the needs of the people. The BCP was responsible for launching Burlington Bread, a local, complementary currency for the Burlington area, in 1998. After Kirschner worked her way up to executive director of the BCP, Burlington Bread was dissolved in the summer of 2007. Although Bread was successful in terms of providing a functional alternative to the U.S. dollar, the cash-only currency couldn’t go as far as users needed it to.

Kirschner has since been working on Vermont Sustainable Exchange, a statewide, online business-to-business barter exchange. Currently in the process of launching, VSE is the first complementary exchange to reach the statewide scale. In this interview with Vermont Commons, Kirschner discusses the benefits of local currencies, the specifics of how VSE will function, and how VSE is designed with an infrastructure to succeed where other currencies have not been able.

Why do you think local currencies should exist?  
Amy Kirschner: There are appropriate levels of currency for different transactions. If we’re growing a tomato here and serving a tomato at a locally owned restaurant, where it is eaten by a local person, why are we waiting on money from Washington to fund that transaction? Why don’t we just do that? On the other hand, if you’re buying a computer from far away, you need a currency that works on those different levels. For purely local transactions, why are we waiting on other people? We’re having to export our decision-making process and our transactions, and that doesn’t seem logical.

A lot of people like to buy local now, but where does that dollar go on the next transaction? This is a way to ensure that the money you create, the money that’s working on these different levels, is staying in the local. This is not your first effort with a local currency or exchange. You were involved in Burlington Bread, which eventually reached its limit of use. Why have other local currencies fallen, and what have you learned from them?  
Amy Kirschner: For many years, people have been pushing the envelope trying to figure out how local currencies work, like with Burlington Bread and Ithaca currency. The circus would come to town and . . . they would extend the tickets into circulation – give them to the people putting up the tents and all that – and people could redeem them and gain entrance. Nobody in the Great Depression had any money to buy the tickets, but if they came and worked for the circus, they could redeem the tickets. It was a currency. There were a lot of great historical examples during the ‘30s, because here you have unmet needs in the community and unused resources, and the only thing you need to make it happen is a way to pay for it.

The U.S. economy right now allows just one way to do business, and that’s with the U.S. dollar. What I really think we have the potential to do here is to create a diversity and a subculture of different monetary systems. I think that’s really exciting. I mean, you feel bad that the economy is going down, but this sort of [local exchange] could make it a bit of a softer landing for us.

Speaking of the national economy, what do you think are the biggest flaws of the U.S. dollar?  
Amy Kirschner: I wouldn’t put it as a “flaw” – I try not to phrase it in terms of “good” or “bad,” but just consider the way it’s designed. The way the national monetary system is designed now is for a growth-based economy only. It’s interest-bearing money. Our monetary system is designed for a certain result, and I think that we’re seeing that a lot of us don’t like that result – the growth without restraint; the growth without thought, really. That’s why a subculture of exchanges in the monetary system would be wonderful. You could design each one with a certain end in mind. If the end was to create community, Time Banks is an incredible currency to do that. Why can’t you create an exchange that aims for that? If the end is to produce strength in local businesses, well, I think that’s what I’m doing now. If your goal is to sort of be a capitalist expanding across North America, then guess what? The system we have now is perfect for that, and perfect for the last three centuries of growth and industrialism. But I think now we’re seeing we’ve grown out of that model. With these lessons, we can look at our monetary system and start anew.
We say we want to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the “war on terror,” and the U.S. Empire. What have we done so far? We expressed our objection to U.S. policies and criminal war of aggression based on lies in Iraq, advocated secession, wrote letters, lobbied our congressmen, voted for anti-war candidates, even protested in the streets.

What impact did this have on our government with Bush in office?

Consider the following: In 1982, Reagan’s Secretary of State Alexander Haig made a telling statement. Hundreds of thousands of people had marched in New York City, protesting the administration’s Latin American foreign policies. When asked what he thought about the huge protest, Haig stated, “Let them protest all they want, as long as they pay their taxes.” Now that Obama is elected will we have “change we can believe in?” Don’t count on it. Empire is a bipartisan affair and it’s been going on for a long time.

Consider this quote from Smedley Butler in 1933, "...I spent thirty-three years and four months in active military service as a member of this country’s most agile military force, the Marine Corps. And during that period, I spent most of my time being a high class muscle-man for Big Business, for Wall Street and for the Bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism. I helped make Mexico, especially Tampico, safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefits of Wall Street. The record of racketeering is long. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. In China I helped to see to it that Standard Oil went its way un molested.” Sound familiar?

Since World War II, author William Blum documents U.S. intervention in at least 69 countries, including invasions, bombings, use of depleted uranium, cluster bombs, chemical and biological weapons, hijacking foreign elections, illegal wiretapping, kidnapping and looting, murder, assassination, torture, etc. Some of the more well-known ones are the overthrow of Mohammed Mossadegh in Iran in 1953 and Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954, as well as the assassinations of Che Guevara of Cuba in 1967, Salvador Allende of Chile in 1973, Patrice Lumumba of the Congo in 1961.

Haig’s statement is even more true today than ever. The empire doesn’t need our consent anymore; all it needs is our money now that Bush outsourced the military! Consider Blackwater, DynCorp International, and Triple Canopy, the three major “security” contractors in Iraq, and all the military contractors like Halliburton, KBR, Aegis, etc. There is no need for a draft. More and more functions of the military are outsourced. Less and more consent is needed from the electorate. That assumes that consent of the governed even matters any more.

What are we going to do until Vermont secedes from the U.S.? It could be awhile. Until then, Kirkpatrick Sale tells us, “The American empire, which began its worldwide reach well before Bush II, now has some 446,000 active troops at more than 725 acknowledged (and any number secret) bases in at least 38 countries around the world, plus continued on following page.
After petitioning for redress, voting for the opposition is our tax money. Unaccountable government. What allows them to want Vermont to secede from a corrupt,街上的 Bail-out opposed 300:1 by the American advantage. As a senator and presidential candidate, Clinton went after corporate in the 1990s, when the Democratic Leadership gave up all pretense of representing the people and financial masters who pay for their campaigns.

Obama has already used Predator drones for killings in Pakistan, and plans to expand the war in our names with our money. Bush was only the most blatant war criminal of past U.S. administrations. Are we afraid of jail? Perhaps we have too much resources to better use such as Vermont secession. There is also a 10-year statute of limitation after which they cannot collect any back taxes or fees.

It is incumbent on those of us who support Vermont Secession to live by our values and withdraw support from the U.S. government. Let’s call it S.E.C.E.D.E. (http://warresisters.org/escrowaccount.htm) The IRS goes after financial assets first, and only rarely tries to seize property. There is also a 10-year statute of limitation after which they cannot collect any back taxes or fees.

To join S.E.C.E.D.E. take the following pledge: “I withdraw my mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual energy from the corrupt U.S. government. I will not give them any financial support, nor will I willingly accept any tax-funded benefits from the U.S. government. I will put my financial resources to better use such as Vermont secession. I will starve the beast.”

At the top of this page is a handy form for you to use. Cut it out and fill in boxes 1, 2, and 8. Leave boxes 3, 4, 5, and 6 blank. Box 7 is filled out for you. It says “EXEMPT”. Sign and date the form, and give it to your employer. This will force your employer to stop withholding money from your check. The employer has no right to change it unless there is a court order from the IRS.

NOTE: If you are not actually eligible to claim exemption and your income meets the taxable level, this may subject you to IRS legal action. This is an act of civil disobedience for which there may be consequences. Thanks for joining us.

We are setting up a Second Vermont Republic escrow/endowment account for this purpose. The money will be invested and interest used to fund Vermont secession. Donations and loans will be accepted in addition to redirected federal taxes. If a depositor needs the money back it will be available. Only interest will be spent, not capital. This fund is modeled after the Conscience and Military Society Of Ethical Citizens Expeditiously Defunding Empire.
am K: How can an average person – one who doesn’t own their own business or have a special trade to contribute – become part of the exchange?

AK: We’re starting out initially accepting only businesses or nonprofits into the exchange. One of the things we found out with the Burlington Currency Project was that businesses were happy to take [Burlington Bread] and happy to encourage it in the community, but had difficulty spending it. That’s something we’ve learned this time around. Let’s make sure the businesses have the flow going on amongst themselves first, and then let’s get the citizens more involved.

I think that in Vermont, especially . . . there is this whole category of things happening in people’s houses or farms that are marketable, that aren’t quite businesses, but could certainly enter the network. I really see a strong possibility for branching out in that direction, and helping people make those connections.

am K: What is the “end” in mind for VSE?

AK: What we really want to do is relocalize the supply of things. If [there is] a source for a supply . . . at a national level, maybe we can find a source for it at a local level and . . . get it from there. It’s really about using those credits in a new way to localize the supply chain.

am K: What is your long-term vision for VSE?

AK: The business-to-business exchange is really the engine to a potential economy rather than the end goal. If we can dream it, we can do it. By creating a well-managed, well-designed, and sufficient monetary system, we can now unleash the creative potential that has been dormant inside us. I see VSE as a place to launch these new ideas and design the types of money that support businesses rooted in community, projects grown with positive intentions, and personal dreams. I would like to see VSE move towards member ownership, similar to a co-op, because money is a commons and we should all be stewards of that resource. I will also be starting a related nonprofit this year which will help people in Vermont learn about these issues and serve as a resource for them to create their own resource exchanges or currencies. A monetary system should be a vibrant, living system that honors people and the environment instead of enslaving them. We are on our way to creating that living system in Vermont.

am K: How do you recommend others get involved in a local exchange?

AK: I think everyone should participate in a Time Bank. Time Banking is a fantastic way to get started experiencing (community) relationships and talking about money, and then you can go from there.

It’s important to realize these local currencies and exchanges are, in a way, an alternative; we’re not trying to replace the U.S. dollar. I think there are people out there trying to do that, but that’s not what I’m trying to do. I’m trying to say that the mainstream national economy operates in one way and we recognize that it doesn’t meet all of our needs, so let’s complement that with another parallel economy, within limits. We don’t want somebody to earn so much of a local currency that they can’t pay their U.S. denominated bills. But we want to continually be trying to increase what we can do. It’s a bit of a balancing act. •
“Milk Prices Crash” read the headlines in the Burlington Free Press on January 31, 2009. The article went on to report that the February price for Class I Milk (that is fluid milk) dropped to $10.72 from $15.74 in January. That is more than a 31-percent decrease from the price just a month earlier.

You don’t have to be a farmer to understand the devastating impact this five-year low in milk prices will have on Vermont farms. How can you keep a business afloat that already operates on wafer-thin margins when your revenues are cut by nearly a third but the costs of running the business – feed, fuel, labor, etc. – remain the same (or higher) as they have been in the past?

In the Burlington Free Press article, Robert Wellington, a vice-president at Agri-Mark predicted that by the spring farmers will be getting just $1 for each gallon of milk that they had gotten $1.99 for in August of 2007. Given that it costs farmers in the New England region about $1.55 to produce a gallon of milk, we will no doubt be losing more dairy farms in Vermont this year.

I checked in with Addison County Organic Dairy farmer Mike Eastman to get his read on the situation. He milks a small herd of about 40 cows and supplies CROPP, which is the cooperative for Organic Valley, with his milk.

My question for Mike was, what can I, a milk-drinking, cheese-eating, yogurt-loving person do to help Vermont dairy farms during this difficult period? Interestingly, one of Mike’s ideas doesn’t take federal or state money and could actually increase the overall demand for milk. Mike suggests that if farms were allowed to sell more raw milk AND deliver that milk to their customers, it could have a positive effect on the problems facing the dairy industry in Vermont.

How could this be?

First, a relatively small farmer like Mike could reduce the size of his herd from 40 to 10 cows. If he was able to sell all of his milk directly to the public, he would be able to get $6 to $8 a gallon for the same milk that he currently gets a little more than $2 a gallon for from his organic co-op. Obviously, his costs would be lower and he wouldn’t have to work as hard because he would be managing a much smaller herd.

The second point Mike made was that his milk would now be taken out of the over-supplied commodity market, and perhaps there would be a better balance between the demand for milk and the supply.

A third benefit is that the entry cost to get into dairy farming could be much lower and more affordable because you could conceivably start a business with a very small herd of cows and still make a living from it. Over time, this could actually mean an increase and not a decrease in the number of family-sized dairy farms in Vermont.

Mike argues that by allowing more raw milk to be sold by farms, plus the convenience of a milk-delivery service for people who don’t want to travel to a farm to get their milk, the demand for dairy would actually increase. From Mike’s experience, people who start drinking raw milk often were not milk drinkers anyway. I can attest to that myself. So, instead of taking away from the existing milk sales in stores, he theorizes that increased raw milk availability could actually create a whole new market of milk drinkers.

Unfortunately Vermont regulations are preventing Mike and other small dairy farmers from selling more than 50 quarts of raw milk per day and delivery is strictly prohibited. But it doesn’t have to be that way!

I am hoping that this year’s budget squeeze will encourage the Vermont Agency of Agriculture to think beyond mobile processing units and other expensive “solutions” that are not affordable in today’s economy. I believe that there are more creative solutions than money can buy. If legislators and regulators can keep an open mind when they ask themselves, “What can we do to help Vermont farms that doesn’t cost anything?” they will find a huge number of opportunities for Vermont farmers that will also bring the citizens of the state more healthy and local food options. A better and more convenient supply of raw milk is just one of the many possibilities.

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Localvore Living: A Solution to Plummeting Milk Prices

Robin McDermott
Tax Time, continued from page 4

discover that our benefits amount to only 75¢ per $1.00 of taxes paid.

Income tax in a Vermont Republic

For a calculation of the total income tax that Vermonters would have to pay as citizens of an independent Vermont Republic, let’s assume that we retain all programs and grants now being paid for by the feds with the exception of defense and a handful of minor programs of questionable value (e.g., No Child Left Behind grants, Improving Teacher grants, Homeland Security grants). Let’s also assume that expenditures on all existing Vermont state programs remain the same. The total income tax to be paid in an independent Vermont Republic is then the existing Vermont state income tax, plus a surcharge that pays for the federal programs that we want to retain.

The starting point for the calculation is the total expenditure by the feds in Vermont: $4,645 million. To see how much of this has to be funded by the income tax surcharge, simply subtract the portions that will be deleted in our Vermont Republic, and the portions that are funded by sources other than income taxes. In millions, these subtractions are: $197 (postal service), $496 (defense), $33 (questionable federal programs), $1,894 (Social Security and Medicare, funded by payroll taxes). Besides, the independent Vermont Republic will be collecting the excise taxes, estate taxes, and duties that now accrue to the feds, which effectively subtracts another $280 from the amount that must be raised from income taxes.

 Immediate savings

The residual expenditure to be funded by a Vermont Republic income tax surcharge is then $1,745 million. This is to be compared with the 2005 federal income tax burden of about $2,200 million placed on Vermont. Thus, the citizens and corporations of the Vermont Republic would immediately save about $470 million in income taxes. This amounts to about 16 percent of the combined 2005 income tax burden (combined federal and state, individual and corporate).

Furthermore, in the long term, we would save the full amount of the deficit burden that the feds, by hook and by crook, place on us. For 2005, the feds’ deficit burden imposed on Vermont amounted to $1,170 million. In contrast, the Vermont Republic would have no deficit; it would cover all expenditures out of the taxes it collects. The combined total savings in tax and deficit burden amount to $1,620 million!

Case study in savings: A family of three

Here is a specific example of how this works out for a family of two adults (Ethan and Edwina Allen) and one child, with an income of $50,000, which is roughly the median income for a family in Vermont. According to 2005 tax tables, the Allen family pays $3,631 in federal income tax and $1,049 in Vermont state income tax – that is, a combined income tax of $4,680. As citizens of an independent Vermont Republic, the Allen family would pay a larger Vermont tax, but no federal tax. Their Vermont Republic income tax would be 16 percent lower than their existing combined income tax, that is, they would save about 0.16 × $4,680 = $750.

 Additional savings: $6,000-plus and counting

And besides that, the Allen family would save a much larger additional amount by elimination of the deficit. In an independent Vermont republic, the Allens would not be allocated a yearly deficit burden and a corresponding yearly increase of their share of the U.S. public debt. In 2005, their share of the U.S. deficit was $5,610 (if allocated per capita). As citizens of an independent Vermont republic, they would save $750 in income taxes and $5,610 in deficit burden. Their total savings would be $6,360. Today, as in 1776, independence yields a tax cut.

Lessons learned

Even without independence, this tax analysis teaches a valuable lesson: The feds are giving Vermonters a bad deal.

And, with the ballooning deficits proposed for 2009, this deal is getting worse and worse. With the bailout and the economic stimulus package included, the projected deficit for 2009 is nearly $2 trillion (or more than $6,000 per capita). The feds are taking far more from us than what they give back, and they are drowning us in a tidal wave of red ink and burdensome debt. Besides, they inflict on us a muckload of irksome rules for spending what is, ultimately, our own money.

Borrowing a page from Benjamin Franklin’s playbook, Ethan Allen would have told the feds to go fly a kite and get struck by lightning.

What’s our response? •

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What does the word “education” mean to us? Does it refer to the state’s power to shape the minds and attitudes of citizens to provide human capital for economic and political purposes? Or is education, instead, an intimate human encounter between caring elders and young people with their own aspirations and potentials?

If we believe that genuine education has more to do with the latter, then the hierarchical and authoritarian structure of our present system of schooling is absurdly inappropriate. All important educational decisions are made by distant, impersonal forces completely out of human scale, turning teachers into technicians, parents into consumers, and young people into products. The standardization of teaching and learning through prescribed curricula and textbooks, and the obsessive pursuit of accountability through relentless testing, reflect the concentrated power of political leaders, corporate CEOs, influential foundations and the mass media. 

No Child Left Behind (sic) is the educational policy of a technocratic empire.

Through much of the history of public schooling, but especially since the publication of the Reagan Administration’s report A Nation at Risk in 1983, educational decisions have not been made by those most intimately involved in the educational endeavor – teachers, parents or young people – but by technocrats pursuing their agenda of centralized social management. Policymakers are not concerned with the experiential quality of life or learning in schools, but only with measurable results, with “outputs,” with the economic value of the nation’s human resources.

Educational decisions are made by distant, impersonal forces, turning teachers into technicians, parents into consumers, and young people into products.

There is an alternative to this model; indeed there are numerous educational alternatives outside the managed system, from Waldorf and Montessori models, to progressive, learner-centered schools, to homeschooling and travel adventures, and many others. Advocates of educational alternatives aim to give parents and students a wider range of learning options, to engage them in meaningful ways in the decisions affecting their education. The alternatives movement represents the decentralization of educational authority. It redefines learning as an intimate, human-scale relationship through which young people are empowered to discover their own inner resources and their own unique relationships to the community.

Educational alternatives promote participatory democracy. As described by Vermont’s own progressive philosopher, John Dewey, “participatory democracy” means a society that encourages individuals to take an active part in shaping the social and political lives of their communities rather than entrusting decisions to policymakers and other elites. It is not enough to elect representatives periodically, or to passively accept the decisions of bureaucrats and technocrats. But how can we best prepare each new generation to participate in a more robust democracy? Dewey explained that education must encourage active, personally meaningful learning and critical inquiry; he argued that the coercive transmission of an authorized curriculum can only educate youths to become passive citizens in an authoritarian social order.

Educational democracy involves the redistribution of cultural power from the hands of a few policymakers to local communities, parents, teachers, and youths themselves. By repealing standardization and obsessive testing, we would enable those most closely involved in the learn-

continued on page 20
Transition Times: Making It Up As We Go Along  Carl Etnier

On a Saturday early in January, Transition Town Montpelier took a chance. Our group was warned by a more experienced Transitioner that we were too early in the Transition process to try something this bold. But we rented a large room and invited anyone interested to gather together for four hours and help chart what near-term steps we in the area could take to create resilience in the face of peak oil, climate change, and economic disintegration. We also asked them to bring potluck dishes, and their own plate, cup, and utensils.

More than 80 people filled the room, with their hope and ideas, and the smell and taste of good food. Gray-haired men and women who had gone back to the land in the 1960s or 1970s mixed with young parents, and energetic pre-school kids careened around the room. Not only were a lot of good ideas exchanged, groups formed that continue to meet, including one to start a day or a week celebration with building things together in Montpelier, and one planning a food garden on the State House lawn.

The experience underscored for us that there’s no one path for the transition to strong community resilience. We’re making it up as we go along, and the process builds on wherever the community happens to be.

Rob Hopkins’ The Transition Handbook captures the tension in the process. A whole chapter is about envisioning a future so desirable and clear that people will be inspired to bring it about. Yet one of the 12 ingredients recommended for every Transition Town process is “Let it go where it wants,” embracing the uncertainty of our work.

Transition Towns aren’t alone in making it up as they go along; policy makers are doing that at all levels in these uncertain times. Unlike top-down improvisations like the bank bailout and the stimulus package, the Transition movement learns from its grass roots. The Transition Handbook itself is subject to ongoing revision, with contributions welcome from anyone in the movement, at a wiki site: http://www.appropedia.org/Category:The_Transition_Handbook

Holding on to a clear vision of the future, while letting the process for getting there go where it wants, can be difficult. In Montpelier, we plan to let the community steer the process in many ways, through a series of monthly gatherings. At the same time, those of us on the initiating committee are working to make our visions and scenarios for the future more concrete, to guide the gatherings.

Jesus of Nazareth, often given to agricultural metaphors, told his disciples that if they had faith as small as a mustard seed, they could move mountains. In a world where most of our important life functions are eroding, “keeping mountains in place” may be the more apt metaphor.

Starting a Transition Town is like planting tiny, black brassica seeds on a steep slope and not knowing whether they will grow into mustard greens, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, cabbage, or rutabagas. We have faith they’ll grow into something tasty, and the plants will hold the soil in place, keeping the mountain from moving downhill.

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

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Homestead Security: Re-Skilling and Re-Tooling For Transition Times Ahead

Ben Falk

Amid the excitement surrounding technological advances for our transition beyond fossil fuels there is little discussion about the daily living techniques required to make this transition successful. The proficiency-building of the individual, home, and community – sometimes called “the Great Re-skilling” – is the focus of this Homestead Security column.

After last issue’s focus on drying wood I was encouraged by several people to take a wide-angle view in the next article and offer a perspective on the incredibly broad range of re-skilling work before of us. In this issue I’ve attempted to do so, highlighting tools and techniques most applicable to rural New England as we undertake the transition toward a post-oil life that is more durable and self-reliant. The lists are long yet incomplete: the tools are many and the techniques diverse. While the cheap-energy era has advanced our conveniences, it has done so at the expense of our skills, awareness, and general human abilities. The upshot is that moving into the solar age necessitates an expansion of what it means to be literate. We will again need to interpret more than just words on paper, but also signs in the forest, shifts in the wind, movements of animals, the ripeness of a plant, and untold other intricacies in the places we inhabit. Localization is an enlivening process.

A disclaimer: The exact tools and techniques most suitable to a livable future is unknown because they are dependent on which future scenarios unfold – from technological utopia at one extreme to nuclear winter at the other. The perspective taken in this article is, I hope, a conservative middle ground that sees a future that is far less energy intensive than the present, radically more solar energy-based, and by necessity far more localized and community-oriented. The tools and techniques of living well into a post-oil future will be as varied as the context of their application, and range according to site, scale, social conditions, and the specific aptitudes and interests of the individuals using them. Yet, they have several characteristics in common distinguishing them from the typical tools and techniques we relied on in the oil age.

Tools and techniques of solar-powered societies tend to be:

- Human or animal powered: they function on relatively small amounts of energy available on site.
- Site-specific: they are customized for and born of relationship to the exact location in which they are applied, adapted to the conditions of place, including soils, climate, and resources available.
- Small scale and diverse: they number many but are applied in relatively small increments, not rubber-stamped generically.
- Adaptable: they change over time as conditions dictate.
- Simple in technology, complex in technique, skill-intensive, awareness-based: they tend to be the reverse of oil-dependent strategies, which are usually complicated tools requiring simple application. Consider the scythe versus the lawn mower: The scythe is infinitely simpler mechanically, but using a scythe is more complex and skill-intensive than using a gas-powered mower.

Techniques

I. Food and Water

Wells and springs

- Locating, tapping, diverting and maintaining water sources, spring digging, and spring-box construction

Gardening

- Garden positioning, site preparation, soil-building, planting timing, seed selection, seed starting, plant arrangement, pest identification and management, companion planting.
Burting Our Bubbles:
The Theft of Our Common Wealth, the Collapse of the United States (Are Vermonters Already On Their Own?)

Jim Hogue

Jim Hogue’s recent radio interview with Richard Cook served as a springboard for this feature article. Richard Cook served as a policy analyst for the U.S. government from 1970 until 2007, and his career included service with the U.S. Civil Service Commission, the Food and Drug Administration, the Carter White House, NASA, and the U.S. Treasury Department. He also taught history at the Field School in Washington, D.C., and owned and operated an organic farm for 10 years while commuting to work from rural Virginia. Cook’s most recent book is *We Hold These Truths: The Hope of Monetary Reform*, released in December 2008 (available through tendrilpress.com).

In my interview with economist, author, and former U.S. government official Richard Cook, he explained that the economic collapse we see before us didn’t happen merely from greed or an over-enthusiastic faith in the American dream, as the pundits report. The collapse is part of the Reagan revolution to shrink social services, quash democracy and nationalism, and bloat the military. The leaders of this revolution (Elliot Abrams, John Negroponte, Henry Kissinger, Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Bushes Senior and W, et al) constituted a shadow government under Carter and Clinton, surfacing from time to time in the BCCI fraud, in the Iran Contra affair, and were behind “The October Surprise.” The major players in the Iran Contra affair were protected by Lee Hamilton and John Kerry. They produced a blueprint under Clinton known as The Project for a New American Century, one that the Democrats were only too happy to bring to fruition.

**Bubbles: planning and bursting them**

The economics of this coup took the form of planned bubbles and bursts on the one hand, and the theft of our common wealth accompanied by vast federal expenditures on the other. (Why anyone falls for that canard about Republicans shrinking government is beyond me.)

As the economy switched from real production to financial maneuverings in the 1970s, investments were made in China and Mexico. Manufacturing was sent abroad and money flowed like water in the purchase of companies in order to take advantage of cheap labor, until interest rates shot up and the bubble collapsed. That bubble was collapsed deliberately under the auspices of Paul Volker in 1979. Those in the know made out like . . . well, like bandits.

The recent housing bubble was created by lowering interest rates and was burst by raising them. Certain not-quite-elite-enough companies such as Lehman Bros and Washington Mutual were caught in the crunch as part of the predatory consolidation process.

To burst the bubble is the plan, not a mistake. Those who plan it win. They are not patriots. They do not consider themselves as belonging to one country or another. They are international financiers with no allegiance to anything or anyone but themselves. Among those who planned it is David Rockefeller. He announced the plan in Baden, Germany, on June 15, 1991, with the words: “The world is now more sophisticated and prepared to march towards a world government. The supranational sovereignty of an intellectual elite and world bankers is surely preferable to the national auto-determination practiced in past centuries.”

Better for whom?

The “bailout” and Mr. Obama reconsidered

The current collapse of the economy was engineered. Those who planned it worked with those we bailed out: Citibank, Morgan Stanley, and Goldman Sachs. They were not bailed out to help the folks on Main Street. They were bailed out to help themselves. So, the economy is collapsing and...
The Greenneck: A Careful Consideration of the U.S. Economic Crisis

Christ, but it’s been a hard winter. The new G’N’R album finally came out, and it was shit. The morning of the biggest damn powder day of the year, he broke a cylinder mount on the plow, and he spent the day lying on his back in a snowstorm, wrestling with cold steel, rather than chasing the vapor trails of his ski buddies through the trees of Mad River. He put up the firewood too late (WTF? Will he ever learn?), and so each morning finds him crouched at the stove, swearing and aching as his starter logs hiss and pop. By mid-January, it had become painfully obvious that he’d be digging into his stash of next year’s stove wood by the middle of March (and he does mean “digging,” for it lies under a good three feet of wind-and-rain-packed snow).

Oh, and the economy. He should preface this by noting that yes, he voted for Obama, of course he did. It wasn’t exactly a lesser-of-two-evils choice; he’s not that cynical. Not quite, anyway. But now… he’s not so certain. To be sure, the man seems intelligent, kind, and decent, qualities long lacking in America’s corridors of power. And yet this utter failure to grasp the obvious truths of our nation’s economic woes… He finds himself waffling between the certainty that of course the man understands, and the utter, cheated disappointment in considering that perhaps Obama and his minions are just as clueless as the men whose jobs they inherited on January 20.

What else to make of the so-called “stimulus” package and the ever-evolving, shifting plans to prop up a banking system that’s circling the toilet bowl of finance so fast, there’s simply no way nor reason to save it from finding its rightful place in the septic system of inflated expectations and broken promises?

The thing that makes him saddest is this: We are perched on the cusp of a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rethink and reshape the American bad dream, and our bold, hopeful leader is blowing it. In too many ways, this is no different from the criminal misdeeds of W in the months following 9/11. He, too, squandered the chance to draw a new map, to humble himself and his fellow Americans in ways that would have assured a more stable, less fearful future.

Are you scared? You should be. The Greenneck certainly is. The American political machine is in high gear, desperately trying to placate a citizenry with the false promise that our nation’s best days are before us, that if we only borrow these trillions from our sons and daughters, we can get back to the sorry business that’s come to define us. A little hair of the dog, if you will, to quell the shakes and nausea. Yeah, we all know how that turns out.

No, Obama will not tell the truth. He’s coming to understand that it really doesn’t matter whether the man even knows the truth or not. He’s coming to understand that all that really matters lies within his domain: the sleepy town he calls his home, the farm and family he calls his life. So he laces up his boots and draws a file across the saw chain because, after all, the woodshed’s getting low. And it’s going to be cold for a while.
Ignite Democracy: 
Take Charge of Your Communications Future 

Lauren-Glenn Davitian

In one way or another, this problem of communications is vital to every democratic society. Getting together is important. Getting our ideas together is important. Once good feelings and good ideas move like wildfire across the democratic sky, we are halfway towards building a community worth living in. – John Grierson, "Searchlight on Democracy," 1939

John Grierson wrote about the promise of radio and documentary film to unite people to common purpose – to fight fascism and win World War II. His hope for democracy through film and radio would have been further fueled by the major explosion of communications and media that followed in our lifetime – the convergence of broadcast, cable and satellite TV, high speed internet (broadband) and mobile devices. While Grierson may not have predicted cell phone video, he would celebrate grassroots media – public access TV programs and the massive amount of “user-generated content” as a way to bind people together and move us to action.

Talk about “wildfire.” What more evidence do we need than the latest presidential campaign and victory? Millions of people were mobilized to donate, volunteer, and vote for a relatively unknown yet inspirational new leader of the free world. It was a networked campaign, and it animated a new generation of citizens who showed up on the great lawn of Washington, D.C., to celebrate with people across the globe.

Vermont is blessed with locally and/or family owned newspapers, radio and TV outlets, phone and cable systems, and a city-owned cable/TV/phone network. Advertise in these venues first. Subscribe to these services if you have a choice.

Yet, with all of this communications capacity, the free flow of information and open communications networks have never been so threatened. Congressional and Federal Communications Commission permission to merge newspapers and magazines with TV, radio, cable, satellite, broadband, theme parks and hotels in the 1980s and 1990s resulted in a handful of mega-media-telecom corporations, a multi-media matrix and, strangely, fewer outlets for reported news, information, and entertainment. Add the perfect storm of credit crisis + debt ridden media outlets + rapid loss of advertising dollars and it equals empty local newsrooms and loss of public interest conditions. When a skeleton crew is left to report on City Hall, Congress or the world at large, our work as citizens is compromised.

In Vermont, competitive pressures embolden cable and telephone companies to knock down public interest requirements to save money at the expense of the public. Phone companies (such as Verizon) take years of rural equity, federal investment, and millions of dollars out of the state to invest in high-speed networks in dense revenue-friendly cities like New York and Boston. Cable companies like Comcast (the largest cable and Internet company in the U.S.) are now working overtime to cut funding to public access TV channels in Vermont. At the same time, these companies join forces as the “broadband industry” to establish themselves as internet “gatekeepers” that seek to close their networks to competitors or other customer uses that they don’t control.

What’s a citizen to do?
Never underestimate “people power.” If recent political events are any indication, dedicated and hard-working people can influence the future of both communications and democracy in Vermont and across the nation:

- Watch local. Buy local. Support locally owned media and communications networks. Vermont is blessed with dozens of locally owned newspapers. The state also hosts the oldest family-owned radio group and the last family-owned CBS affiliate in the country, a half-dozen locally owned phone and cable systems, and a city-owned cable/TV/phone network. Let your dollars do the talking. Advertise in these venues first. Subscribe to these services if you have a choice. Fight national policies that promote further consolidation of our nation’s communications resources. Support policies that diversify ownership, and, especially, promote local control of public broadband networks.

- Produce local. Make the media YOU want to see. Citizens aren’t waiting for the fourth estate to disappear; millions have taken media into their own hands with blogs, tweets, podcasts and on-the-spot video reporting. In Vermont, we have a handful of college and low-power radio stations as well as the unique resource of 43 community access TV channels that air on cable systems across the state. These channels are the last of the public and open electronic real estate on the TV dial. Tune into your local meetings, cultural events, and the free speech soapbox. With Town Meeting coming up, educate yourself by watching any of dozens of candidate forums and check out election results on the air or online (for example: www.channel17.org). Think about how you can use these channels to tell your own stories and promote your good works. Remember, access channels provide free training, equipment, and airtime.

continued on following page
to their communities; take advantage of this vital resource. Check http://vermontaccess.net for a complete list of Vermont’s access operations.

• Build local. Support the development of public broadband projects in your town or city. The public rights of way are given for little or nothing to private companies, who, if they could, would close these “electronic highways” to everyone but their own customers. We need more public highways, affordable and open to all. You can make this happen by organizing for public broadband projects in your community. Find out more about Burlington Telecom (rolling out in Vermont’s Queen City) and EC Fiber (coming soon to 23 rural communities in central/south Vermont). Look out for federal money coming down the pike to promote local broadband projects. Ask your elected officials what they will do to make a community-owned broadband project happen in your town or region. Take the lead! This is the surest way secure democratic communications and advance local self-sufficiency.

• Prepare to fight! All Hands On Deck! Public electronic real estate is hard to get and harder to keep. Commercially owned media and communications are working NOW to prevent us from keeping and expanding local broadband ownership, public access cable channels, community radio and universal service. We need a new U.S. Telecommunications Act that gains us access to a portion of the spectrum/bandwidth and a percentage of revenue to keep diverse, public discussion going. You can play a vital role. It is not as hard as you think:
  • Stand tall with local public access channels as they renegotiate the next round of contracts with Comcast across Vermont. Comcast is actively working to pare down access budgets with a focus on reducing capital expenses (that is, the equipment you need to tell and transmit your stories to your neighbors and officials). Pay attention to these fights and join your access center’s efforts to solidify local support for these precious channels.

• Join forces with national and local efforts to protect free speech, the fourth estate, public access, open networks and media justice. Monitor www.freepress.net, Benton’s Headlines (www.benton.org), national activists like the Media & Democracy Coalition (www.mediamerica.org), Common Cause (www.commoncause.org), Consumers Union and New America Foundation, and local activists like CCTV Center for Media & Democracy (sign up for our newsletters at www.cctv.org).

• Mobilize your personal and professional contacts to protect and expand open networks. Ten people can quickly turn into 1,000 if you leverage the “network effect” of your contacts + the Internet. Each of us can play a vital role in creating the “tipping point” that convinces public officials that real votes are at stake if they don’t support free speech in all of its forms.

The promise of democracy is only as strong as the free flow of information. It is not too late to take charge of our communications future, to stand tall with thousands of others in defense of free speech, and to secure public access and open networks for the next generation. Join us. Yes we can! •
Education By Design, continued from page 13

ing process to determine their own educational goals and methods. In taking greater responsibility for education, citizens would participate more vigorously in shaping the intellectual and moral climate of their communities.

Diversity and community

Let’s consider a few examples already operating in Vermont. There are several Waldorf schools around the state, and each of them has attracted a community of parents and educators who seek organic, holistic, “green” variations on modern life, such as whole food, holistic healthcare, and a more deliberate connection to the rhythms of nature through festivals, stories, art and other endeavors. These school communities give people who hold a transformative cultural vision places to share, refine, and practice their ideas.

Another educational community thriving under the radar in Vermont is the network of “unschoolers” – families who believe that the most authentic learning takes place in daily life, when young people become engaged in the social and natural world around them and pursue their own purposes and questions. This practice promotes the sort of intellectual and civic self-reliance that our most visionary thinkers, such as Thomas Jefferson, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, considered essential to a democratic society.

But not all families or communities want to raise their children with a “transformative” vision or with quite so much self-reliance. I am not suggesting that these educational alternatives should simply be co-opted and commodified. I am suggesting that all citizens have to share such values. Educational democracy, educational decentralization, means that all families should have the ability to find learning environments aligned with their values and with their children’s personalities and styles of learning. Schools (and homeschooling situations) that are more highly structured or academically oriented, or more concerned about moral or religious instruction – alternatives that already exist outside public education – would continue to be an important element of the educational environment. The coexistence of diverse educational visions and experiments would nourish a more vibrant democracy.

A frequent objection to this goal of educational freedom is that it would surrender the public school ideal of a shared social purpose, a common good that transcends parochial interests (which Dewey also emphasized as a key element of democratic life). Wouldn’t our society splinter along lines of religion, ethnicity, class, race, political belief, or petty local interests? If we allow people to gather in separate enclaves to practice their own educational philosophies, wouldn’t this give a green light to all sorts of religious extremists, left wing radicals, white supremacists, or tree huggers to freely teach the next generation their weird beliefs?

When Jefferson proposed a system of public education, he sought to spread the intellectual tools of reason, skepticism, and critical inquiry among the population, not to establish a “curriculum” authorized by elite policymakers, especially one that promotes mindless celebration of existing institutions. (He would be horrified, I think, by No Child Left Behind.) When we put educational and political tasks in their proper places, we will see that children who have their developmental needs (such as the need to learn through play) and their individual learning styles well met are more likely to become thoughtful, caring, engaged citizens than those who are bullied and processed by the system of social engineering the technocracy has established. The proof is in the creative, active, generous, socially engaged lives of many thousands of alumni of independent schools and homeschooling.

The second answer to the fear of social fragmentation is to recognize that people will always identify with communities that share their beliefs and values, and that this is a basic, normal human need. Unlike a managed social system or a colossal nation-state, a genuine community provides the experience of communion with others; we become involved with people who know us, who understand and appreciate us, who share certain aspects of our identities. In a healthy democracy, as Tocqueville keenly observed in the pre-imperial American republic, there is space for these kinds of connections; they do not threaten the political coherence of the larger community.

Granted that a functioning democracy requires citizens to reach out to each other across partisan or parochial lines to find common ground and collaborate for a common good, the desire for cultural distinctivity can be pushed too far, until it becomes oppressive, even totalitarian. Social engineering is counterproductive: By forcing everyone into the ideological mold demanded by standardized education, the state drives people to separatist enclaves and makes them suspicious of commonality. Standardization fans the flames of extremism, while honoring diversity invites participation in the larger society.

There is a huge difference between a democratic sense of social responsibility and public spiritedness (which Dewey so thoroughly described), and the technocrats’ goal of social control. Rejecting the yoke of standardization and enforced conformity does not mean “privatizing” education, making it a commodity that only the privileged can afford. A democratic society must provide all its youths equitable opportunities for cultivating their unique gifts and achieving their potentials.

It will surely be a challenge to publicly fund a decentralized system without standardized accountability, but that is a task we must take on. We need to figure out how to encourage educational democracy without invoking the awesome power of the national state to enforce some authorized model of cultural conformity. For when the state becomes an all-consuming empire, this power is dangerous indeed.
The scythe is infinitely simpler mechanically, but using a scythe is more complex and skill-intensive than using a gas-powered mower.
Bursting Our Bubbles, continued from page 16

will collapse further, on purpose, as planned by the financial elite. And those responsible are rewarded and employed for their expertise by Barack Obama who looks to Paul Volker, former president of the Federal Reserve, Timothy Geithner, most recently president of the Federal Reserve Bank of NY, Larry Summers, former Treasury secretary, Jon Corzine, formerly with Goldman Sachs, and Henry Paulson. “Interventionists” all, and all can be relied upon to further consolidate the power of the Federal Reserve. No decentralists are allowed. Consider, Per acknowledged – this at a time when decentralization looks like the clear solution to the economic woes of people the world over. Obama is David Rockefeller’s dream come true.

The creditor controls the military because the creditor owns the means by which the military is employed, including your congressional representative.

The Obama cabinet reflects this as well. Writes Kate Sheppard of Gristmill, Colorado Senator Ken Salazar (Interior secretary) voted against an amendment to the farm bill that would have capped farm subsidies and redirected almost $100 million of those funds to the Grassland Reserve Program and the Farmland Protection Program. The amendment would have closed loopholes that provide giant subsidies to industrial-scale farms.

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, like Salazar, is a booster of agribusiness and a progenitor of genetically made crops and ethanol.

Mr. October Surprise and traitor to the Carter Administration, Robert Gates, is secretary of defense. And, Mr. Revolving Door, James L. Jones, is national security advisor. He is on the boards of Boeing and Chevron, and president and CEO of The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Institute of Energy. That means that he is responsible for consolidating the plans of stake-holders to ensure that you have an unlimited supply of energy whenever you need it (while protecting the environment). So, naturally, he chaired the Independent Commission on the Security Forces in Iraq. General Jones was the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe; and Commander of the US European Command.

This snap-shot of Obama’s cabinet is to point out that these men are empire builders. This is not Small is Beautiful. They are not members of the Schumacher Society. They are the servants of international corporations.

This, of course, is why the Wall Street money poured into Obama’s campaign. A patriot with some public spirit would not look to reward those who perpetrated the biggest robbery in history. (I am not suggesting that a Republican president would pursue another course. But this article is about the situation we have at hand.)

What is the U.S. economy? It’s a collapsed house of cards. Hence the G-20 summit. The financial elite will be there to create the next bubble and the next gigantic sink hole of debt into which investors will pour their cash. That is the agreement they have made with each other, and that is why the Federal Reserve banks must remain the mechanism for creating money for them, and debt for the people.

Obama, through his appointments, including Rahm Emanuel, will place us even more under the thumb of those for whom the United States is a cash cow. Wall Street must have the assurance that we are the coin of the realm.

Land of the Free, Home of the Brave

Politically, the U.S. is an agreement among those in Congress, certain corporations (including the media), the courts, the executive branch, allies, and the financial elite to provide for the enrichment of selected entities and to consolidate power and control over military forces and financial mechanisms everywhere in the world. They call it “full spectrum dominance.”

There is no place on earth, be it ever so humble, that escapes the notice of these predators. And from Granada to Rwanda, this has been proven over and over again. Now, with the current collapses of various economies and subsequent consolidation, it will become even more possible for the IMF and any other economic hit men to quash a currency, a nationalistic tendency, a democratic movement, or an attempt at local control that might threaten their hegemony over all. If there is a resource, they want it. That is what the advance of civilization means: the ability of the civilized to take from the savage whatever they want. And I don’t have to tell you, gentle reader, how they create savages wherever and whenever they need them. (The most recent attempt at savage creation was Putin. The lies told to us about the big bad Russian bear have a purpose connected to finance and resources, not – surprise, surprise – to the autonomy and human rights of the citizens of Georgia.)

So politically, the agreement known as The United States is a convenience. These players who make use of it are not playing for a national team.

They do not do what they do for King and country. They never have.

Applying force: the USAF in context

Militarily (the ability to use force), the U.S. is major part of the international constabulary that rounds up and kills those who are deemed a threat to the authority of those in power. In the words of Mr. Cook, the military is the “personal police force of the financial elite.” It is the job of the president and Congress (which awarded a $175 billion bonus over the $600 billion military budget) to provide this constabulary to those who request it.

With the current collapses of economies, and subsequent consolidation, it will become even more possible for the IMF and any other economic hit men to quash a currency, a democratic movement, or an attempt at local control that might threaten their hegemony over all.

There are countless historical examples – from the British East India Tea Company in the 18th century to the corporations of today – where private entities send soldiers to do their bidding. Governments (the debtors) provide the mechanism by which the creditors impose their will. The debt is the stick used to beat the debtors into submission. Those who own the nation (or person) through debt have first claim to the labors of the debtor. The creditor controls the military because the creditor owns the means by which the military is employed, including your congressional representative. The 1989 invasion of Panama continued on following page.
(partly to consolidate the drug trade) is a case in point.

Sometimes, of course, the operation is covert, bypassing congress when the job is particularly unseemly. The assassination of John F. Kennedy falls into that category. It was a coup d’état that left the masters at the Federal Reserve in charge of the creation of money. Sometimes a false flag operation such as the Gulf of Tonkin is required to provide cover; but that has never been a drawback even when the operation is exposed.

The elephant in the room, unless you hold your nose or close your eyes, is 9/11. The success of the crimes of 9/11 is but another example of how Congress provides cover for the crimes of its masters.

**Big Media censorship: The more local the paper...**

I mention the media because our founding fathers regarded an informed, educated public as a cornerstone of democracy. It is supposed to be a vital part of what makes this a country. A country cannot remain healthy when its media have no allegiance to the truth.

Author and historian Michael Parenti once admonished me for my naiveté about the media with the following quote: “The role of the corporate media is to support corporate America.” You can stop wondering why so many important stories remain unreported, why so many lies are told, and why so much horse shit is shoveled out ad nauseam. Constant entertainment has calmed the desire for freedom and independence.

We are supposed to make informed choices, but as Mark Twain told us: “If you don’t read the papers you are uninformed. If you do you are misinformed.” In a plug for decentralization, I’ve observed that the more local the paper, the more likely you are to get the truth.

The media support whatever fiction they need to support. And they need you to believe that the recent financial collapse was the result of mistakes, and of forces that got out of control.

The most lethal injections into our republic are the lies and silence of the media on the most crucial issues of our time.

**The UNTied States considered**

It may not be a matter of secession. It may be a matter of surviving when all else has fallen apart.

What is left of the United States of America? Retired Air Force Lt. Colonel Karen Kwiatkowski called it a rotting corpse. Our president called it the greatest country in the world.

Whatever it is – whatever any country is at a given time in history – it is an agreement. This agreement is a fluid, mutable organism that makes its place among other mutable organisms on Planet Earth. Where there is a lack of agreement – say, between South Ossetia and Georgia, Palestine and Israel, Ireland and England, East Timor and Indonesia, Vermont and New York – there is conflict. This conflict has to do with whether or not the people within certain geographic boundaries should be sovereign, and how sovereign they should be. After all, some countries are more sovereign than others.

**continued on page 24**
What is the agreement among us, and among the countries of the world, as to the nature of that political entity, that place, that military force, that economy, that corporation known as the United States?

Maybe the words “United States” are just words used to perpetuate a fiction that this land between the oceans and beyond is something other than what it really is.

Over the last 30 years, those in real power have built a criminal network whose goal has been to destroy the previous agreements that defined the United States. They have crossed the lines of gentlemanly, diplomatic, wise, productive, legal, reasonable, and patriotic policies to such an extent that, today, the world is reeling from the coup. Their success has eclipsed all the feeble attempts to impede it or to construct alternatives. And they have accomplished all this in the last few years in open defiance of the law and all principles of accepted governance. They have changed the political environment to such an extent that what we call the United States is a ghost. To those who now exercise the reigns of power, we the people are sources of money or labor or cannon fodder.

They have stolen our prosperity. They have taken the franchise from millions of our citizens and abrogated the rights guaranteed by our Constitution. In the name of security they have sacrificed our soldiers for their own gain. They discourage fruitful enterprise and commerce on any terms but their own. They do not befriend other nations. They bully and insult them. They do not strive for peace. They create enemies, real and imaginary. They are not stewards of our land and heritage. They are exploiters. They are not public-spirited or even patriotic, as they have stronger allegiances abroad than they do at home. They do not protect. They attack. They are not committed to the well-being of the people because they must enrich the few who stride the globe like a colossus.

What next? (Secede from what?)

What next? Our preparations need not focus in secession, but rather on local agriculture and sources of energy, diplomacy, sustainability, productive labor, a healthy environment, carbon sequestering and soil building, local/complementary currencies, transportation and infrastructure after Peak Oil, and a host of other efforts that communities should do together. These are the sources of sovereignty. Sovereignty is their offspring. And such sovereignty as is not supported by them will not stand, but will be consumed by the greed and terror of those we seek to leave behind.

We must be prepared if we are to go it alone. The federal government has proved that it has no interest or ability to help us or to keep us safe. If we think that it has or ever will again, we might as well believe in the tooth fairy.

We are already on our own.

Bursting Our Bubbles, continued from page 23

Homestead Security, continued from page 21

Village and Community Scale:

• Backhoe, excavator, dump truck, barn, sawmill, hydropower-milling
• Nursery, seedbank, library, greenhouses, plant and spore propagation facility
• Yogurt/cheese-making, distillery, cold storage
• Animal slaughtering/processing, microtextiles
• Methane digestion/biogas, large-scale composting, biochar facility
• Wood/metal/engine/machine shop, pottery shop, forge
• Child care, health clinic, theater, galley, shops, markets
• Biomass-based cogeneration food canning and dehydrating
• Log splitter, chipper
• Oxyacetylene torch
• Generator, solar PV, wind/hydro turbine, inverter, batteries
• Micro-power grid
• Schools, research facilities

We will need to interpret signs in the forest, shifts in the wind, movements of animals, the ripeness of a plant. Localization is an enlivening process.

We are already on our own.

DREAMING VERMONT’S DESTINY

Crafting Position/Options Papers on Self-Sufficiency, Sustainability and Sovereignty

CALL FOR APPLICANTS

First Annual Vermont Independence Platform Retreat

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Where: Goddard College, Plainfield

We’re looking for approximately 50-60 self-selected experts, practitioners and visionaries who will commit to working in groups to explore the primary, key questions that must be asked in order to take the first meaningful steps towards economic sustainability and independence for Vermont at the statewide level.

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Address inquiries and applications
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Sponsored by the Editorial Board of Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence.

Key Questions

• The Commons, who owns our waterways, winds/sunrises?
• Governance, who has the authority? towns? federal gov’t?
• Agriculture, what if we might produce our own food?
• Energy/transportation, why not the domes/plugged-in hybrids?
• Business/credit/local currency, why not $5 Pines, $10 Mapleys?
• Social safety net, how do Vermonters survive the Depression?
• Health Care, 30% goes to paperwork, why can’t we do better?
• Education, honoring the diversity and autonomy of all learners?
• Media, got Fox, who owns our ‘local’ newspapers?
• Culture, tolerance for all expressions, except intolerance?
• Law, judicial system and penal system, who writes the laws?
• Technology assessment, Yankee ingenuity in the Digital Age?
• National security/foreign policy, $600 million for what?

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