Leaving The Empire:
In Defense Of Vermont Independence
Keith Brunner

“Whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of [Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness], it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”

The Declaration of Independence, 1776
This past April, many Vermonters may not have given much thought to the fact that by filing out their taxes they are funding a United States government that has proclaimed global military hegemony, a government that doesn’t even try to conceal its devotion to private-sector interests, a government that has ignored any attempt at curtailing major climate change, and a government that is running itself into the ground – and taking the rest of the world with it.

Desperate times call for desperate measures. It is time that Vermonters take another look at nonviolent secession from the United States as the most reasonable attempt at dissolving the U.S. Empire and providing the citizens of a 21st century Vermont with a better opportunity for a life of liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The U.S. Empire: Military Power
The United States of America is undoubtedly an empire, and furthermore it is the largest empire that has existed in the history of humankind. Its military budget exceeds the total military budget of the next 25 nations. As U.S. policy analyst Chalmers Johnson has recently pointed out, “defense-related spending for fiscal 2008 will exceed $1 trillion for the first time in history.”

As of 2005, it officially had 737 military bases located on foreign soil, and 2.5 million U.S. military personnel spread across the planet. Furthermore, the Bush II administration clearly stated that it would resort to force to eliminate any perceived challenges to U.S. hegemony – an audacious claim echoed by the Obama administration.

The danger of having an aggressive behemoth on the world scene has become apparent after the invasion and subsequent annexation of oil-rich Iraq into the Empire.

The U.S. Empire and the Planet
It seems that those in charge of our country have forgotten the basic fact that any economic system that does not benefit the natural community on which it is based is inherently unsustainable. In them to influence such diverse fields as the housing market, currencies, and most recently food prices. This unprecedented push toward a socially intolerable and financially unstable consolidation of power has been aided and defended by the U.S. government, at the expense of its own citizens as well as the rest of the world.

With or without active participation in its demise, the U.S. Empire is on its way out. Every empire that has ever existed has eventually collapsed or deflated, and ours will prove to be no different, whether the final blow comes from Peak Oil, another great economic depression, or the wholesale collapse of earth’s life-support systems. Given the destructive nature of this Empire, and the fact that every day that it continues to exist it pushes more and more species to extinction and puts more and more people below the poverty level with the intent of increasing the wealth and power of a small few, we cannot sit around and wait for it to collapse on its own. We must take it down.

As one of 50 states in The Empire, Vermont holds some measure of power in and over the United States. What would happen if our state decided that it had had enough, and left The Empire to form its own nation? We have governed ourselves before; it is high time we start thinking about it again.

Nonviolent Secession as Direct Action
The citizens of Vermont have elected representatives who consistently speak out against the Iraq war, yet the occupation continues. One of Vermont’s senators has introduced the most progressive climate-change bill in the Senate, yet it is not taken seriously. Vermont has joined with California in supporting states’ rights to make their own greenhouse-gas emissions laws for auto

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Uncle Sam’s Empire: I Want You, your Money, your Identification, your Phone and E-mail Correspondence, your Health Records, your National Guard, your Schools... citizen

Issue 22 of Vermont Commons (“Mud Season,” 2008), Kirkpatrick Sale observed:

Science is in agreement that all the important systems upon which human life depends are in decline and have been for decades: the erosion of top soils and beaches, over-fishing of every ocean fishery, deforestation, freshwater and aquifer depletion, pollution of water, soil, air, and food, overpopulation, over-consumption, depletion of oil and minerals, introduction of new diseases and invigoration of old ones, extreme weather, global warming, rising sea levels, species extinctions [on a scale not seen for millions of years], and human overuse of the earth’s photosynthetic capacity.

As the global empire and the culture with the highest level of consumption, we are setting the bar of planetary destruction for the rest of the world to follow. The very habitat of Homo Sapiens Sapiens (and every other life form) is being razed to make way for the “global economy,” and it is our country that is spearheading and cheerleading this effort. As long as the Empire exists, this trend toward a barren earth will continue.

The U.S. Empire and Capitalism
Since the 1980s, U.S. internal and foreign policy has become dominated by hands-off, “free-trade” advocates, resulting in the axing of social programs and consequently the highest levels of income inequality since the 1920s – right before the Great Depression. The removal of regulations on financial markets has also allowed for financial speculators to gain an unprecedented hold on the domestic and global economy, allowing

Vermont’s statewide independent news journal
Minting New Vermont Patriots

On Monday, May 11, 2009, at UVM’s Dudley Davis Center, U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders stood up in front of close to 500 Vermonters at the “Summit on the Future of Vermont” conference and stated: “I know there are some Vermonters who believe we should secede from the Union.” Brushing aside the sporadic cheering, Bernie launched into the argument that Vermont might become a national leader on – you guessed it – Bernie’s litany of cure-alls: single-payer health care, green economy, and communications/transportation revolution, for starters.

The “Lead, not Secede” solution.

It was a remarkable moment. To our knowledge, Vermont’s most popular elected politician had never before publicly acknowledged the growing presence of one of the most vibrant nonviolent secession movements in the country, the one in his home state. Perhaps Bernie was responding to Thomas Naylor, the founder of the Second Vermont Republic and an inspirational voice in the current resurgence of the traditional Vermont preference for local autonomy and community-based interdependence. During the SVR Convocation last November, Naylor had publicly challenged Bernie to forsake the rotten, sinking USS Federal Government to run for governor and commit to doing “real work” on behalf of Vermonters.

Secede and Lead, indeed, Bernie.

In terms of the Future of Vermont project, we applaud Paul Costello and Sarah Waring from the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) for their leadership in initiating and managing the statewide effort to develop long-range plans for our state. They mapped out a two-year process, built an impressive funding base and budget, formed a credible 18-member “board,” orchestrated dozens of citizen “listening sessions” and public forums, contracted with two Saint Michael’s College professors to flesh out a final 100-page report with support from a team of experts and contributing authors, and scheduled 14 follow-up public discussions.

Meanwhile, a couple of us Vermont Commons editors (Rick Foley and Ron Miller) busted open our piggy banks, clicked our way through friends-of-Vermont Independence e-mail lists, and pulled together our own project – starting with a “Retreat: Dreaming Vermont’s Destiny.” The purpose of this gathering was to bring together a group of creative problem-solvers who have already begun working toward de-centralization – local self-sufficiency, sustainability and political autonomy – and to develop a comprehensive, out-of-the-box vision for Vermont’s future, one that didn’t rule out sovereignty issues, including secession.

Forty-five feisty activists, deep thinkers, and practitioners convened during the first weekend in May at Goddard College. On Friday evening we introduced ourselves and divided our assembly into six groups based on shared interests—Agriculture, Health Care, Energy, Governance/The Commons, Business/Banking/Currency, and Education/Media/Culture.

On Saturday the groups built the skeletons for Position/Option Papers (POPs) by crafting continued on following page
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expansive, even inspirational visions, or ploughing through self-inflicted Mud Seasons of conflicting perspectives, or pounding out eye-opening, rousing action steps. It was all great stuff. Real, face-to-face democracy, after all, can be a messy business.

That evening five speakers reaffirmed the profound nature of our collaborative work. Thomas Naylor set the tone by acknowledging how our Retreat cohort was positioned to carry on the unfinished business of the original War of Independence, that our small number could mobilize a growing number of Vermonters confronting the reality that the current beast – the corrupt, coercive the American-British Empire – had largely replaced the original target of the American patriots, the arrogant British Empire. But that our revolution would be one conducted in peace.

In the spirit of celebrating the vision of Vermont’s independence, Gary Flomenhoft delivered “checks” for every Vermont Citizen for $1,972 from the VT Common Asset Trust Fund. Adrian Kuzminski reminded us how the original Vermont federation of towns delivered one of the most compelling examples of true, participatory democracy in modern history, grounded in a sustainable currency and economy. Abe Collins stunned the audience with his Carbon Movement (VIM)? As a political party (VIP)?

It will be fun to see how the Retreat participants, our newly minted Vermont Patriots, wrap up their respective vision statements, POPs, and solution sets over the summer. At our next gathering in the fall, we’ll chart what promises to be a radical course toward full-spectrum independence. In Montpelier, in the Statehouse, in the legislative chambers? As a self-selected, re-instituted(meta)physically, the emergent, global constellation of local expressions that Paul Hawken has characterized as the “Blessed Unrest.”

In retrospect, our Retreat’s courageous, informed citizens role-modeled participatory democracy under two flags – physically, the flag of the original Republic of Vermont, and the other metaphorically, the emergent, global constellation of local expressions that Paul Hawken has characterized as the “Blessed Unrest.”

As a self-selected, re-instituted Council of Censors? As a Vermont Independence Movement (VIM)? As a political party (VIP)?

As an open, welcoming participatory shadow government?

Why not? Stay tuned.

But will it be more instructive – if not prophetic – to assess whether our Vermont Patriots’ bootstrap effort or the VCRD project will most clearly illuminate the path to a sustainable, just future for Vermont. What Vermont’s iconic farmer-entrepreneur Will Raap refers to as the Third Way, the coalition of “Progressive Conservationists.”

I’m rooting for both explorations, but my heart is with the Vermont Patriots, the “wing-nuts” at the Retreat.

RICK FOLEY
Associate Editor

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Happy 100th birthday to Marion Leonard, Vermont’s oldest citizen activist and supporter of Vermont independence, shown here in Randolph at her May 23 birthday party. (LINDY KLOORE)
I moved to Vermont several years ago after having spent four summers here in the mid '90s. I came to escape the overcrowded summer conditions on Martha's Vineyard, which had been my home for some 25 years. I found the relief from stress I was looking for and also discovered a place filled with sensible, decent folk. We rented a lakeside cottage in Calais and one of the thoughts that stayed with me after going back home was that whenever we were out walking the dog every car that went by waved a greeting. Of course, there weren’t many cars going by, which made that behavior possible.

When it finally came time to leave the Island (actually, the alternative community that had attracted me so long ago had melted away with the yuppie invasion), I headed to Montpelier where I had made several friends who I thought might be able to help me get started. I also chose the capitol city because I had read and absorbed The Long Emergency by James Howard Kunstler and agreed with him that the suburban lifestyle, which rested on a steady flow of cheap, abundant oil, was going to evolve into a less mobile, less wasteful society. So I got rid of my car.

Like the eponymous character in the film Bob Roberts said, “the times, they are a’changing... back.” Back to a closer, more intimate, more local-ized way of life. Away from the sprawl of contempo-rary suburbia where your neighbors are the people you wave to as you drive by on your way to pick up the newspaper. There will be anguish across the land and resistance to this change. After all, for two generations now we have been told repeatedly that what we have here is the American Way of Life. And that it’s better than what anybody else gets. We’ve been told that privacy and freedom from each other is living on a higher plane; that a cul-de-sac is a better place to raise our children. That living in cities is harmful, destructive, only fit for lesser peoples. But is it? Who are we and what do we really need? I had an experience last summer which prompted thoughts that moved me to join the Vermont seces-sion movement.

I spent the summer touring with Circus Smirkus, Vermont’s home-grown, internationally renowned youth circus. The personnel consisted of some 30 troupers (performers) - all between the ages of 14 and 19 - and approximately 40 staff. The Circus travels around New York and New England from late June to late August. The typical pattern is to arrive at a location one day, do two days of shows, pack up after the last show, and jump to the next location the following day.

The Circus is self-contained: besides the tents and equipment required for the show we had our own generator to provide power for all operations, a kitchen-equipped trailer (called the pie car), porta-potties and bunk trailers for the staff. Troupers at each location were housed in homes provided by local supporters.

The four bunk trailers were some 25 feet long, eight feet wide, and were divided into five rooms each, plus small spaces for showers and laundry. Each room contained two bunk beds, a small closet and some storage for personal effects. Pretty tight quarters for normal-sized adults. It was immediately apparent that the walls between rooms were paper-thin; you could hear every word of conversations carried out in a normal tone of voice in adjacent rooms. And anyone entering or leaving his room on the steps provided would cause the whole trailer to rock back and forth.

The bunk trailers were usually arranged in a quad-rangle forming an enclosed area called the court.
Few Americans are aware that Vermont, the fourteenth state admitted to the Union in 1791, was not a colony like the others; it was a pre-existing independent republic spontaneously created by its residents who rejected the authority of neighboring colonies, particularly New York which had the strongest claim to its territory. In its 14 years of formal independence, beginning in 1777, it very nearly fulfilled the textbook image of a society created voluntarily by free persons living in the state of nature – a favorite motif of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century social contract political philosophers. Texas, California, and Hawaii also enjoyed periods as independent republics, but Vermont’s example reflects a greater equality of persons and resources. In the case of Vermont, in the face of a trend toward oligarchy in America evident even in the eighteenth century – an egalitarian, democratic community for a time found almost complete realization.

It’s a story worth telling. New York had a claim to what became Vermont, based on a 1664 British royal charter granting it the lands to the west of the Connecticut River north of Massachusetts. The same British royal government, however, subsequently recognized some authority over the lands of Vermont by the New England colonies of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire. In the 1740s, the Governor of New Hampshire, Benning Wentworth, began to sell land in what is now Vermont to settlers mostly from New England. Wentworth’s ‘New Hampshire Grants’ were sold cheaply, partly because they lay in disputed territory. New York’s titles to the same lands were monopolized by absentee speculators, while Wentworth’s cheap titles went mostly to actual residents who moved in and cleared the forests and started farms and towns. With Native American populations drastically depleted, the settlers confronted a wilderness amenable to settlement; for them, it was a virgin land rich enough to guarantee ownership to anyone able to homestead it. Rarely in history have free resources been available to those willing to labor on them, without external obligations, as they were in early Vermont.

Content with having sold the grants at a profit, Wentworth and New Hampshire showed little further interest in the lands west of the Connecticut River. New York, however, rejected the claims of those holding Wentworth’s titles, insisting that its own title-holders were the true owners of the land. In 1770 Vermont settler Ethan Allen, having witnessed the validity of New Hampshire Grants denied in a New York court, organized an independent militia to defend the claims of those holding New Hampshire Grants: the Green Mountain Boys. This militia, which later fought in the Revolutionary War against the British – capturing Fort Ticonderoga under Allen’s leadership – did so not as part of the colonial union under the Continental Congress, but as an independent ally of the American colonists.

Allen’s resistance to New York proved, in the end, the vehicle of Vermont independence, which was formally declared at the Westminster Convention in 1777, after the Green Mountain Boys drove off invading New Yorker posses and sheriffs in a series of small hit-and-run battles near Bennington, Vermont.
The Transition Town movement is growing quickly in Vermont. By my count, 14 cities or towns have adopted the “Transition Town” moniker, even if they’re just taking the first steps. And Transition Town Montpelier made national news in May, with the nation’s first vegetable garden at a State House or Capitol. We’re just beginning the Transition from oil dependency to community resilience, but we’re moving!

Transition Town White River Junction (TTWRJ) has been one of the more active groups. Kye Cochran filled me in on the group’s activities. Kye works as general manager of the Upper Valley Food Co-op by day and is part of the initiating group of TTWRJ by night. She attended the Transition Town training in Montpelier in March.

The initiating group has been meeting weekly, she reports. Nine to 11 people attend, many of them young and all of them energetic. (Weekly meetings seem to be important for Transition Town projects; the most successful ones I’ve been involved with in the last year have met this frequently.)

The first meeting open to the public was May 8 and was attended by 35-40 people. The organizers showed the video, The Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil (an excellent 55-minute introduction to Peak Oil and how one country has adapted). They then asked each participant to write on Post-It notes “one thing I can do” to facilitate Transition, one thing White River Junction can do, one thing “I envision for post-oil White River,” and one other idea.

TTWRJ is ready to start forming groups working on various aspects of the transition, which they’re scheduled to do at a June 12 meeting. Cochran says there is a cadre passionate about transportation, so she expects that to be one of the initial groups.

They’ve also begun planning a permaculture makeover of their landscape. There’s a lively community garden group in White River Junction, and in the last year it has expanded from eight subscriptions to 25. The Transition Town group is working on a different type of community garden: fruit trees and bushes that will belong to everyone. They have permission to use a small piece of land on Main Street, and they plan to conduct work parties to clean up the land and plant the trees and bushes.

The arts community is strong in White River Junction, and that shows in TTWRJ’s poster for its events. Cochran reports that the poster for the first event was beautiful, and they were just going out with teasers for the second event. Small posters, about the size of a bumper sticker, have one of six different messages on them, plus TTWRJ’s name and web site. Cochran said her favorite teaser reads, “Transition: It’s like change, only better.”

“People in White River Junction tend to be cynical and witty,” Cochran says. “They really like to have a good time. It’ll be fun to see what Transition Town White River Junction comes up with.”

As of this writing, TTWRJ’s web site is rudimentary, but it does have a word cloud from the May 8 brainstorming exercise and the information for their next meeting. Perhaps by the time you read this, it will have information about the results of the June 12 meeting: http://ttwrj.org.

* Bennington (Walloomsac), Brattleboro, Burlington, Charlotte, Chelsea/Tunbridge
Good-Bye to Rural Vermont’s Exceptional Leader, Amy Shollenberger

Robin McDermott

Something that comes as a surprise to many people when they start getting interested in local foods is the state and federal barriers that prevent Vermonters from becoming less dependent on the industrial food system. Even more shocking is the fact that many Vermont laws around food are much stricter than those at the federal level.

Five years ago, when we moved to Vermont, you couldn’t buy chicken raised and slaughtered on a local farm at the farmers’ market, and it certainly couldn’t be served in a restaurant. Finding farm-fresh raw milk was nearly impossible since the farms couldn’t advertise, and when you did find a farm that sold it chances were that you would have a hard time getting any of the measly 25 quarts a day that the farms were allowed to sell. Few people other than organic farmers knew about harmful effects of GMO crops in our state, and growing hemp—an eco-friendly food and fiber crop—was illegal.

But the tide is turning, and while many people and organizations have been a part of these regulatory changes, Rural Vermont, under the leadership of Amy Shollenberger, has been a consistent force in every one of these agricultural victories.

In the four years that I have been involved with Rural Vermont I have admired how Amy has handled the bills Rural Vermont is behind. In-between meetings to gain support for one of the bills Amy sets goals at the beginning of the legislative session and then develops a carefully crafted strategy for working through the system to achieve those goals. The strategy always includes creating awareness and educating legislators about the issues important to Rural Vermont members, connecting the issues to real people, often farmers or consumers who tell their stories at hearings and in op-ed columns. And then there are the all-important phone calls, e-mails, and handwritten notes that Amy has taught all of us are so important in helping lawmakers form opinions about controversial issues. Amy works tirelessly during the legislative session spending long days and nights in the Statehouse, sometimes waiting for hours just to catch a representative in-between meetings to gain support for one of the bills Rural Vermont is behind.

On July 1, 2009, Amy will be leaving Rural Vermont to start her own consulting business. This plan has been in the works for a couple of years. Amy is leaving the organization stronger than it has ever been, and while the next executive director of Rural Vermont has some big shoes to fill, the right person will find a turn-key operation that is (as its website says): "...Vermont’s community of family farmers, neighbors and citizens committed to supporting and cultivating a vital and healthy rural economy and community. We believe family farms and the local food that they provide are at the heart of thriving communities and environmental sustainability. Economic justice for family farmers is the foundation of a healthy rural economy. Towards this end we strive for fair prices for farmers and we work to counter corporate consolidation of agriculture and the food supply.”

I am sad that Amy is leaving Rural Vermont, happy for her new venture, and a bit apprehensive about the future of local food advocacy in Vermont. But change is good, and whoever steps in to fill Amy’s shoes will surely be a different leader than Amy, but there is no reason he or she can’t be equally effective. Most important for the future viability of Rural Vermont is a strong membership, and that is something that each and every one of us can help guarantee by becoming members and getting involved. Any time that you are willing to give to the organization will be gratefully appreciated, and if everyone in the state who cares about strengthening our local food system gave just one hour a month, the organization would be unstoppable even without Amy.

Best wishes, Amy, and thank you for all you have done for Vermont family farms and those who benefit from their products.

For more information about Rural Vermont or to become a member, please go to www.RuralVermont.org.
Michael C. Ruppert founded From the Wilderness Publications, and is the author of Crossing the Rubicon: The Decline of the American Empire at the End of the Age of Oil and a brand-new book called A Presidential Energy Policy. The following interview was conducted by Carolyn Baker, a member of the Vermont Commons Editorial Board and manager of her website, Speaking Truth to Power. She is a former writer for From the Wilderness and served as its managing editor in 2006.

Carolyn Baker: Mike, I want to thank you for taking time out of your incredibly busy schedule to answer these questions for Vermont Commons. Most of our readers are familiar with you and read From The Wilderness during the years it was being published from 1998-2006. I’m sure that everyone familiar with your work is thrilled that you are returning to public life, especially with the publication of A Presidential Energy Policy, now available at Amazon, and a forthcoming movie, entitled Collapse. You have some very impressive reviews of the book, which can be read at the “From The Wilderness” site, and soon the movie will be released.

Most of our readers know that you are a former Los Angeles Police Department narcotics investigator and were approached several times by the Central Intelligence Agency to collude in their operations to traffic and launder illegal drugs within the U.S. We also know that your harrowing experiences with all of this compelled you to begin speaking out and publishing FTW.

My first question for you is this: What are three or four of the most important things you’ve learned since you began your public work in 1998?

Michael Ruppert: That there is a God and that God knows who I am; that the “love of money is the root of all evil”; and that until you change the way money works, you change nothing.

CB: I recall that back in 2001-2002, you became interested in Peak Oil and began writing and speaking about it. The End of Suburbia had some very significant footage of you on the topic which, having watched so many times, I can almost recite from memory. I’m curious though, what initially drew you to researching Peak Oil?

MCR: It was just after 9/11 when the whole world was turning inside out. I was contacted by a geologist named Dale Allen Pfeiffer, a truly brilliant guy, who sent me a very well-organized draft of a story about Peak Oil and what it meant. This was just maybe ten days after 9/11 when I had already figured out two things. First I knew that the government’s account of events on 9/11 was absolutely not-credible. The second was that 9/11 was an epochal event in human history. When I read what Dale sent me it was just so incredibly well-documented and… logical. Both Peak Oil and 9/11 were epochal events and I intuitively understood that they were somehow connected. It took me roughly two and a half years to understand and prove how they were connected. The rest is a matter of very large record.

CB: Soon after 9/11, you began working on your first book, Crossing The Rubicon: The Decline of The American Empire at The End of The Age of Oil. I must tell our readers that Rubicon is absolutely essential reading for understanding the decline of Western civilization.

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Trying to understand collapse without having read it is like trying to grasp astronomy without understanding the Copernican revolution. In *Rubicon* you stated that the events of 9/11 may well affect the world for the next 500 years. Many people do not grasp the full significance of the role of fossil fuel energy in the orchestration and cover up of 9/11. Can you summarize for our readers how you connect these dots?

**MCR:** It’s so easy in hindsight. Developments right after 9/11, especially vis-à-vis Iraq, pointed directly at the connection. Cheney was torturing people all over the world—in part to “extract” information that could be used to justify the invasion. The PATRIOT Act was passed. Paul Wellstone was murdered. I started digging deeper into Peak Oil and discovered great souls like Colin Campbell, Kjell Aleklett, and Jean La Herrerre. I don’t think I met Rich Heinberg and Julian Darley until late 2002 or early 2003. Some big dots fell into place quickly. Iraq had the second-largest oil reserves on the planet (maybe 90-100 Mb of recoverable oil) and they had not been over-produced. In fact, due to the sanctions following Gulf War I, they had in effect been sequestered. In 2005, maybe that’s the way it should be. It was truly a completely painful “death” that was followed by a slow, gentle, and profound healing that has changed my consciousness.

As far as the Tillman investigation goes, FTW’s series was the basis of every handout given to Congress, especially Henry Waxman’s Government Oversight Committee. It was Waxman’s hearings on Tillman that resulted in the disciplining of nine general officers and – it’s pretty clear – the sudden resignation of Donald Rumsfeld. What we know and have a record of since then is that the Ashland Police Department has admitted to me—in front of two separate witnesses, and on two separate occasions—that the original police report submitted by a since-fired officer was . . . incredibly flawed, unprofessional and biased. (I’m paraphrasing.) Apparently they couldn’t even find a supervisor to approve it. Ashland police apologized profusely to me when I showed up in person.

Eleven days after publishing this direct attack on Bush-Cheney, our offices were burglarized and all of our computers smashed beyond recognition.

CB: In 2006 the offices of From The Wilderness in Ashland, Oregon were vandalized, and you left the country for a while. At the time, you and FTW’s military affairs editor, Stan Goff, were working on a series about the murder of Pat Tillman and the subsequent cover-up called The Tillman Files, which I highly recommend to our readers. You’ve stated that that series could have been the catalyst for the attacks on FTW because of its far-reaching impact. Can you say more about the impact of that series in the media and in the higher echelons of the U.S. government?

**MCR:** I’m glad you asked this. As it turns out there was another great motive for the smashing of all seven of FTW’s computers followed by a really stupid attempt in the press and elsewhere to imply that I had done it myself. On June 14th, 2006, I wrote and published FTW’s fourth and last-ever Economic Alert, called “The Abyss Awaits” (http://www.fromthewilderness.com/free/ww3/061406_abyss_awaits.shtml). In that alert I reported that the Bush Administration had just issued orders allowing an unknown number of unnamed major companies to stop reporting their financials to the SEC—on grounds of national security! By that time I and most of us were well aware that collapse was not only inevitable, but likely going to be preceded by a complete collapse of the economy... the ultimate demand destruction. I gave my last and final warning to FTW readers to get their “s—” together and stated clearly that the Bush Administration intended to loot the U.S. economy. I could not have been more clear, and I was right.

CB: You’ve written about the impact that the attacks on FTW had on you personally—physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and the health crises that ensued. Now here you are three years later publishing a book and about to release a movie. We’ve all had crises in our lives, some seeming absolutely insurmountable, and for those who survive such crises it often appears from hindsight that they were enormously teachable moments in our lives. Tell us a bit about what you learned during these past three years that has facilitated your coming back to life, so to speak, and doing so in a manner that may make your work more impactful than ever.

**MCR:** What happened to me between July 2006 and the middle of 2008 was the most painful death-rebirth initiation of my life. There literally are not words to describe such transitions, and maybe that’s the way it should be. It was truly a completely painful “death” that was followed by a slow, gentle, and profound healing that has changed my consciousness.

For the first time in the last thirty years I had the opportunity to let my life catch up with me. The timing was spiritually perfect because I had been fighting so hard, for so long, to warn people about collapse and it had finally arrived. It may sound strange, but I have become able to embrace collapse like an old friend. There is no longer any sense of urgency to warn. It’s here.

That was exactly the place I needed to be in to write *A Presidential Energy Policy*.

CB: Readers of *Vermont Commons* are by and large residents of one of the smallest states in the nation, with only $30,000 people, vast stretches of arable land, enormous quantities of water, a population containing a host of independent thinkers—and a significant portion of that population has given considerable thought to seceding from the United States. Even for those who don’t embrace secession, there is a remarkable consciousness in Vermont regarding local economies and self-sufficiency independent of large, centralized systems. What are a few of the most important things you’d like to share regarding localization in the areas of energy, food security, community, civil liberties, or any other topics relating to localization which you think are crucial?

**MCR:** From my worldview, you are three years later publishing a book and about to...
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mobiles, but legal roadblocks continually pop up to stall the effort.
It is clear by now that indirect action through representatives will not alter the course of this destructive juggernaut. From 1777 to 1791, the Republic of Vermont “issued its own currency, ran its own postal service, developed its own foreign relations, grew its own food, made its own roads and paid for its own militia,” as Jim Hogue has observed in Vermont Commons. We can do it again.

Vermont’s nonviolent secession from the United States of America would serve a dual purpose. First, it would be a direct action against the U.S. Empire. The act of Vermont’s citizens collectively standing up and saying “We’ve had enough” would make many U.S. citizens in other states think long and hard about Washington’s legitimacy, inspiring movements for major change across the country. Secessition would also show the rest of the world that there are chinks in America’s armor. Given the United States’ enormous military, breaking down the Empire from within may be the only feasible option.

Second, and just as important, Vermont’s nonviolent secession would provide a better life for Vermonters than is currently possible under U.S. domination. The federal government consistently upholds laws favoring agribusiness at the expense of the family farmer. The effects of this cannot be overstated; these restrictions choke the life out of local economies and force citizens to depend upon the corporate-controlled, fossil fuel-intensive infrastructure that is lacing our bodies with pesticides, consuming 80 percent of the nation’s fresh water, and providing us with crappily food to boot. Restrictions on the sale of raw milk, on the small-scale slaughtering of animals, and on growing industrial hemp are thinly veiled attempts at preventing rural economies from developing any measures of self-sufficiency.

Vermonters should be free to implement whatever kind of health care they desire, without having to answer to Washington. The same can be said about education, about drug laws, about same-sex marriage, about the death penalty, about abortion rights, and especially about sending their sons and daughters off to fight in an unjust war. In a February 2008 poll, 77 percent of Vermonters agreed that the United States had lost its moral authority. Why should we be governed by a body without morals or ethics? The same poll, done by U.V.M.’s Center for Rural Studies, found that 11.5 percent of Vermon ters favored secession and the establishment of an independent Vermont republic. As The Empire of which it is a part of continues to fall apart, those numbers surely will grow.

Secessison is possible. The U.S. Constitution does not forbid withdrawal from The Empire. According to the Tenth Amendment, “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.” Nowhere in the Constitution or in the state ratification documents is there any renunciation of sovereignty to the national government – which means that states can leave any time they please. When the Confederate states were in the process of leaving the Empire, three amendments to the U.S. Constitution were proposed that would forbid secession. These did not pass, which makes it clear that it is fully constitutional to secede. And when the Empire’s army withdrew from the South, it forced the Confederate states to sign a clause forgiving the right of sovereignty. This clearly implies that states which have not signed this clause – Vermont being one of them – have the full right to secede.

Out of all of the 50 states, the transition to self-governance would be easiest in Vermont, where almost all of the state’s 237 towns convene once a year in a town meeting to vote upon issues of importance within the town. This is direct democracy in action, normal citizens getting together to make decisions for themselves, without lobbyist and special interests getting in the way.

Our state is enjoying a renaissance of farm businesses, giving a boost to our own economy, invigorating Vermont agriculture, and creating an embargo on Vermont, then leaning on other countries – especially Canada – to also adopt the embargo. Sanctions would have a profound affect on certain Vermont industries, but they would also force citizens to spend their money in-state (sorry, in-country), giving a boost to our own economy, reinventing Vermont agriculture, and creating scores of jobs in the process.

We are on a sinking ship. The U.S. Empire is economically, politically, socially, and especially environmentally unsustainable; and far from fixing itself, it is just getting worse. When a government that has no moral authority is in possession of enough nuclear weapons to destroy the world many times over, in the position to dominate the global economy for its own interests, and continues to place the needs of the “economic system” above the needs of the natural world, the time for action cannot be put off any longer. Someone, or some entity, needs to stand in front of U.S. “progress” with an enormous red STOP sign.

Vermont’s exodus will prove to be just that.

We are an anomaly among the 50 states of the Empire. We are a peaceful, ecologically responsible, and mostly agrarian state in a country dominated by big business, industrial agriculture, and swollen, impersonal government. It is time that we once again step up to the world stage and return to being a self-governing republic.

On behalf of the citizens of Vermont, I would like to say, “Thanks for the hospitality, Uncle Sam. The past 217 years have had their ups and downs, and after a long time together we will now be on our own. We bid you adieu.”

Empire: Possible Reactions to Vermont Secession

Should Vermont secede, the United States would be faced with a number of options, ranging from diplomatic to quite-violent action. Given that our government is willing to eliminate even “perceived” threats to its power, secessionists should consider and plan for the federal government’s reaction.

The first potential reaction that comes to mind is invasion or attack. If the 625,000 people of Vermont sought to leave the Empire, there is a very real possibility of a U.S. military occupation. Occupation, however, would garner Vermont an enormous amount of international support, and would revolutionize the political scene within our own country. The cracks in the Empire’s façade of freedom and democracy would become obvious and deepening, as the cultural core and foundation of our country was revealed to be nothing more than political doublespeak.

Arguably, the most realistic scenario would involve the United States developing a package of economic sanctions and placing some sort of an embargo on Vermont, then leaning on other countries – especially Canada – to also adopt the embargo. Sanctions would have a profound affect on certain Vermont industries, but they would also force citizens to spend their money in-state (sorry, in-country), giving a boost to our own economy, reinventing Vermont agriculture, and creating scores of jobs in the process.

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Agriculture has long been at the heart of Vermont’s identity. The logging, potash, and charcoal industries went to work on Vermont’s forests soon after statehood, and by 1890, 80 percent of Vermont’s landscape was cleared. We grazed sheep on the open pastures and sold the wool to larger markets to the south. After a huge exodus of farmers to the Midwest in the 1850s, Vermont’s agriculture slowly rebuilt itself with a booming dairy industry. But with milk prices recently falling as low as $10 per hundredweight, it is looking like Vermont maybe heading for another agricultural transformation.

Montpelier seems to have set its sights on specialty products as the future of Vermont’s rural economy. It has set strict guidelines for the use of ‘Vermont’ on any label and has shown it is willing to go to court over it after its recent battle with Boves of Vermont, whose pasta sauce is apparently made in New York. As much as I love Vermont’s artisan cheeses, meats, and maple syrup when I can afford them, that’s a risky basket to place all of our eggs in.

First, as we saw recently, our world economic system is on a very shaky foundation. This is probably not a surprise to people who have been reading this publication over the years, but even the most stubbornly consumerist society in the world (that would be ours, by the way) is starting to cut back. When we finally start living within our ecological constraints, are people really going to be purchasing $8 blocks of cheese?

I’m not trying to downplay the important role these value-added products have in Vermont’s current and future economy, but there is another aspect of Vermont’s emerging agriculture movement: our diversified, small scale organic farms. Many would put these in the same category, but these farmers are focusing less on finding high-end markets in Boston and more on feeding their neighbors. As Vermont continues to make its move toward sustainability and independence we need to support and encourage these farmers, because before we know it we are going to rely on them.

Interestingly, as the number of young Vermonters leaving the farm to pursue careers out of state was becoming a crisis, the organic farming craze has now begun bringing educated youth back into the state and providing them jobs. This movement is not limited to Vermont, and even the New York Times picked up on it in a May 23, 2009, article, saying, “The interest in summer farm work among college students has never been as high.”

Although the movement may be nationwide, it is strongest here in Vermont. So how did this Back to the Land Movement Round II begin, and where are these young adults getting their inspiration?

Some may be looking as far back as Helen and Scott Nearing, whose lifestyle and writings – most notably Living the Good Life (published 1954) – laid the path for the original Back to the Land Movement in the ‘60s.

Many, however, are looking to more contemporary works. King Corn and Our Daily Bread are just two of the numerous documentaries that have come out recently critiquing the industrial food system. Last summer, Michael Pollan’s book, The Omnivore’s Dilemma, was swept up by farmers and non-farmers alike. The book critiques both the industrial corn-based food system and large-scale organic. Pollan also looks at two other options; wildly foraged foods and those grown and pastured locally. Pollan’s work can be partially credited with bringing food-system issues into the mainstream.

So what are young farmers reading this summer, in the wake of the Pollan frenzy?

Local author and Vermont agriculture expert

continued on page 12
Ron Krupp published his latest book earlier this year, *Lifting the Yoke: Local Solutions to America’s Farm and Food Crisis*. Krupp has an impressive agricultural resume as an organic/biodynamic farmer for 10 years; he once published the monthly newspaper *The Green Mountain Farmer*, and he has worked with several local farming projects like the Tommy Thompson Community Garden at the Intervale in Burlington and Heartbeet farm in Hardwick.

The book is broken into three sections. Part I: “The Globalization of Food and Farming,” describes the perilous situation of our current food system and its domestic and international implications. It covers everything from the debate over ethanol to the impacts of our national policies on developing nations like Haiti and the Philippines. Krupp then summarizes the complex 2008 Farm Bill, its problems and some of its improvements over previous farm bills. In “A Short History of How Agriculture Lost its Soul” Krupp explains how we went from having an agriculture system composed of family farms in tight-knit rural communities to one that is controlled by the corporate agriculture-industrial machine.

The second part explores the link between obesity, poor nutrition, hunger, and food insecurity in children and adults. Krupp also looks into different Farm to School programs, including Vermont’s Food Education Every Day program (FEED). Prior to the program’s founding only 10 percent of food served in our schools was “fresh or lightly processed” and only 5 percent came from local farms. The program helps connects local farms, food service workers, teachers and other community partners to ensure that our kids are being well fed and well educated when it comes to food.

The last – my favorite part of the book – is titled “Sustainable Markets and Regional Solutions.” It sets a goal for Vermont to increase the amount of food purchased locally from 5 percent to 30 percent by 2015. In order to accomplish this 25-percent increase, Krupp cites the important work being done by several local organizations like Rural Vermont, the Center for Sustainable Agriculture at the University of Vermont, and NOFA-VT, to name a few. He also looks at the Intervale in Burlington as an important training ground for new farmers and a model to be replicated in other parts of the state.

Krupp does a considerable amount of research to identify the main roadblocks to his 25-percent-by-2015 challenge. He looks past the typical complaints of limited crop diversity and long Vermont winters as barriers, and considers specific crops and how they compare to national prices. He identifies potential opportunities in the Vermont market and areas we need to expand if we want to be self-sustainable.

One of these areas is wheat. Vermont is full of artisan bakeries and pizza shops, but we produce very little wheat ourselves. This is because...
What do educational alternatives bring to the arena of public policy? At first glance, taxpayers, legislators, and those who work in public education would seem to have little reason to consider the relevance of home-schooling or independent schools. Let a small minority choose those options and pay for them, they might say; it is the public schools that serve the needs of our communities and most of our young people.

But how well does public education actually serve these needs? Saddled with political mandates, prescribed curricula, and an obsession with testing, public schools are hampered from addressing the urgent challenges of a rapidly changing world. In important ways, schooling is largely driven by a sociocultural agenda, a worldview, that is stubbornly rooted in industrial-age assumptions about teaching, learning, and the individual’s place in society. Our present system of standardized schooling was devised by the same industrial mindset, the same urge to manage and control nature, that invented standardized agriculture. Schooling strives to produce an educational monoculture—an authorized curriculum, mechanically “delivered” to students through textbooks and scripted lessons, backed up by relentless testing and grading. We accept that this is what “education” means because we are so fully immersed in the modern worldview.

Since the mid-1800s, schools have been charged with the task of preparing youths for their roles in the industrial economy. As numerous educational historians and informed critics have pointed out, the “hidden curriculum” built into the design of school buildings, the fabric of daily routines, the hierarchical structure of management and discipline, and the demand for constant assessment is oriented toward sorting young people according to class and vocation and training them for their future positions in society. Other facets of their growth that make for a whole and meaningful human life, such as self-understanding, emotional and aesthetic richness, authentic connection in their local community, and a conscious connection to the natural world, are considerably less emphasized and often completely neglected.

However, as the industrial age winds down, as the global corporate economy unravels, young people will require skills and capacities that are not part of the standardized, test-driven curriculum, such as resilience, resourcefulness, and understanding how to live with what nature and culture provide locally and bioregionally. Industrial-age education will need to give way to an ecologically informed education, what many of us call “holistic” education. Here, precisely, is where educational alternatives offer a valuable resource to parents, citizens, and policymakers: They are the seeds for an ecological-age approach to teaching and learning, demonstrating in many ways that holistic education is relevant, effective, and inspiring. Homeschooling families and independent schools can address the critical needs of communities and young people in a dramatically changing world, in ways that a public school system bound to the industrial agenda cannot.

An ecological or holistic worldview is fundamentally different from the mechanistic, technocratic worldview that has dominated the modern world. It appreciates the interconnectedness of everything in the cosmos. Ecology means mutual relationship. Instead of looking for mechanical causes and effects, whether in nature or in the practice of education, we look at processes of co-creation, of self-organization in response to a living, meaningful environment. From an ecological perspective, diversity and individuality contribute to the health of the system as a whole; an open, diverse system is more sustainable than a monoculture. An ecological worldview values the organic process of learning, the cultivation of authentic relationships between person and world, between individual and society. A holistic education cultivates a rich and diverse ecology of learning.

No single way of knowing (or “single vision,” as the poet William Blake put it) can adequately encompass the dynamic complexity of the world. In a holistic worldview, cultural meanings are not fixed; they are contingent and fluid. Consequently, this worldview challenges any educational approach that enshrines a selected body of “facts” into a fixed curriculum. Education needs to respond with dynamic open-endedness; it needs to foster renewal and transformation, not mindless obedience to fixed standards or ideas. Any educator’s or technocrat’s list of “what every third grader should know” represents a partial view of the world, based on one particular, necessarily biased and limited, point of view.

Inquiry, reflection, wonder

Our young people need more from us than a standardized curriculum or institutional environments that manage their learning and behavior; they need opportunities and encouragement to discover their personal gifts and meaningful connections to the world around them. From a holistic perspective, the primary goal of education is not to transmit pre-selected portions of knowledge but to help students experience a sense of wonder and passionate interest in the world, along with habits of open-ended inquiry and critical reflection. Possessing these qualities of being—inquiring, reflecting, relationship, and wonder—holistically educated people can engage the world purposefully, creatively, and transformatively; they are not being educated merely to perform assigned tasks or assimilate information.

A holistic perspective views each learner as a complex, multifaceted being. No child is merely a future worker or citizen in training, or a “B student,” or an information-processing machine. Each person is nested in layers of context: Internally, each of us understands the world through our distinctive temperament and blend of multiple intelligences; each of us experiences emotions and physical sensations that color our learning. Externally, each individual belongs to intimate circles of peers, neighbors, and family members, and beyond that to a social and political order that shapes the meaning of experience—and beyond that, to historical and cultural forces that fashion a collective unconscious. More subtly, every person exists within the contexts of the natural environment—the local topography, climate, and ecological web of living beings—and also within some mysterious realm of archetypal or spiritual energies that only a few can claim to comprehend.

All these contexts go into making up who we are as individuals, and a truly relevant and responsive education takes them into account.

Holism recognizes that it is the essential nature of life, including the human continued on page 16
Homestead Security: Post-Oil Land Use, And The “Other” 90 Percent of Vermont’s Landscape  Ben Falk

One Unit of Production for 9 Units of Consumption

Only about 10 percent of Vermont is composed of “agricultural” land. The vast majority of the state is too wet, dry, steep, shallow-soiled, or infertile to reliably support conventional field-based crop production, though it has been tried before. Vermonters once farmed much of the state’s non-ag land, clearing about three quarters of Vermont’s land base by the mid 1800s, mostly for pasture and potash. Devastating soil erosion ensued, along with rapidly decreasing yields and migration to the deeper, then-intact soils of the Midwest.

As we enter the 21st century, land that is still clear of forest represents Vermont’s most forgiving landscape – generally low-angle slopes with deep, well-drained soils supporting (usually via constant inputs) pasture and annual row crops such as corn and grass for hay. Currently, nearly all of Vermont’s food production is derived from about one-tenth of its land base, upon which the capacity for future yields shrinks in both area and productivity each year. “Prime soil” lands, having been abused for nearly two centuries, continue to lose capacity each year as mechanized, tillage-based farming compacts soil structure, exposes the soil to erosion, and damages soil health through continual inputs of liquid fertilizer. The actual acreage of “prime soil” land also shrinks yearly due to suburban sprawl and transportation developments.

In a future of diminishing energy resources and increasing challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss (read pollinator failure), socio-political instability, and economic insolvency, we will need to generate value regeneratively on the majority of our landscape, without relying upon one unit of input-based production to sustain nine units of consumption. A solarized, more reliable food and fuel system requires agriculture as diverse and sophisticated as the landscape itself. In Vermont, that means gleaning value from the hills, forests, wet fields, and rocky, infertile lands – those same lands that failed a century or two ago – without incurring further damage.

This means enhancing their biological capital by doing the opposite of what was done before: building soil and increasing biodiversity while they are worked. Truly sustainable land use will engage us simultaneously in land conservation, land repair, and “working” the land – in one cohesive process. Land conservation, currently practiced in Vermont, is a luxury of the oil age: an attempt to protect certain areas by using them lightly (or not at all) while we use other areas sub-optimally. Though we don’t often acknowledge it, our verdant hills are made possible by razed, eroding hillsides in other parts of the world. A more localized and resilient economy will require us to use our land base with greater skill, skill, intensity, and diversity.

Mending the landscape, diversifying our use

We already have a diversified landscape, but those diverse characteristics are largely negative: rocky areas; droughty (parched) areas; areas with poor drainage; areas with degraded, infertile soils. How do we produce lasting value in conditions like these?

Fortunately, such challenges have been confronted for millennia, in many parts of the world. Degraded and inherently challenging landscapes can be regenerated and maintained as highly productive, low-input, no-till, perennial agricultural systems, yielding fruits, nuts, fiber, fuel, meat, milk and even perennial grains and vegetables.

In Vermont, we have few examples of such systems and need to look elsewhere to find truly sustainable cold-climate models. Permaculture, continued on following page
with its emphasis on low-input, self-fertilizing crop arrangements (guilds) and no-till approach, is particularly suited to producing food and fuel crops on degraded and sensitive landscapes that fail under large-scale, mechanized, input-dependent, soil-exposing, tillage agriculture. Successful versions of “agriculture for the hills” from elsewhere – such as the oak, walnut, and chestnut pasture agroforestry practiced in the Mediterranean – are not likely to succeed by simply replicate them here.

Vermont’s climate, soils, and culture are unique and require equally unique land-use systems. Establishing a reliable, sustaining, and regionalized food system here will be an innovative process that has only just begun. We know how to degrade our soils yet still produce surprisingly high yields with off-farm inputs in open fields, but we have to build, from the ground up, land-use systems that can function durably across the majority of our landscape. This means developing a “new-old” hybrid agriculture for forested, rocky, thin, infertile, seasonal inundated land.

Here are a few strategies we could employ:

1. Select for and develop new plant and animal varieties (and revive formerly used heirloom varieties) optimal for the diverse conditions of Vermont’s landscape. A heartnut (sweet walnut variety) bearing 500 pounds of nuts per year on well-drained soils in Weybridge may not produce a single nut in the wetter, cooler highlands of Roxbury. Currants, gooseberries and elderberries are a staple at homesteads on the hills of Pomfret, but could not produce a single nut in the wetter, cooler highlands of Roxbury. Currants, gooseberries and elderberries are a staple at homesteads on the hills of Pomfret, but could not produce a single nut in the wetter, cooler highlands of Roxbury.

2. Change the scale and mechanics of our production systems from large to small, from mechanized to human- and animal-powered, and further adapt practices to achieve successful production on our various land types without damaging them further.

Farming “special-needs” landscapes
Relocalization in Vermont will necessitate skilful use of the incredible diversity that our landscape contains – from the acidic conditions of a pine plantation, to the anoxic clay soils of a wet, abandoned field, to the thin, dry, dead soils of an abandoned steep pasture.

Utilizing marginal lands requires more skill and care than “prime” agricultural lands, with erosion, infertility or lack of production resulting from their mistreatment. “Marginal” lands represent some of the most important and sensitive ecosystems on the planet, but can also produce some of the highest crop yields anywhere (the largest food staple in the world is rice, grown in poorly drained wet soils). Use of these landscapes must be undertaken with considerable planning and great understanding of the opportunities and challenges of the site.

It is possible to glean agricultural yields from these ecosystems in ways that promote the health of the ecosystem and offer human yields as well. Appropriate agriculture for marginal lands must be flexible and diverse; farming landscapes other than typical “prime-ag” stereotype requires that humans work in synergy with the ecosystem, seeing themselves as members of the site’s living community and supporting continual fertility development and long-term yields. Below are some suggested approaches to challenging but commonly found conditions.

Droughty and rocky land
Land that is dry and sloped presents an interesting challenge for agriculture. Strategies for dealing successfully with these conditions involve:

• Species selections for plants that can not only handle, but actually thrive, in dry, poor soil, and improve the soil for future plantings. Rocky soils are most suited to a perennial-focused agriculture. Example species include sea buckthorn (Hippophae rhamnoides), black locust, (Robinia pseudoacacia), buffaloberry (Shepherdia argentia) and various other berry and nut shrubs and trees. These species are nitrogen-fixing, land-healing plants.

A comparative look at production from a typical, flat field, and from regenerative processes on difficult or damaged land. BEN FALK

continued on page 20
Education by Design, continued from page 13

species, to strive for transformation toward greater complexity and integration – toward greater wholeness. Holistic educators assert that every person intrinsically strives to participate in this journey of transformation, and requires a nourishing cultural environment to undertake this quest. Holistic education is not a methodology, a definable series of steps or techniques leading to a specified outcome. Nor is it an ideology, a fixed system of assumptions and beliefs derived from some authoritative text or charismatic founder. Because it follows, rather than dictates to, the organic unfolding of life, a holistic pedagogy must remain open, responsive, flexible, and self-reflective.

A public education policy informed by ecological or holistic principles would support a diverse range of educational alternatives – plural – rather than a mandated curriculum or system imposed by bureaucratic authority.

Our present system of standardized schooling was devised by the same industrial mindset, the same urge to manage and control nature, that invented standardized agriculture.

If we could provide public funding for educational diversity, abandoning the technocratic obsession with a narrowly conceived “accountability,” then we could have a truly public system of education, one that serves the authentic needs of growing, striving human beings rather than the managerial agendas of economic and political elites.

Find out about alternative schools and homeschooling programs in your community. If you are a taxpayer or legislator, see for yourself how success-ful and inspiring these places of learning are for young people and the adults in their lives. People engaged in these educational experiments are building nurturing communities that strengthen our youth for the challenges that lie ahead. They deserve our support.

Leaving the Big Top, continued from page 4

yard. This is a circus tradition which provides staff with a sense of continuity, privacy, and home, no matter where we were set up. The courtyard was off-limits to troupers, outsiders, anyone who was not staff. It was our space, which we shared with 39 others – which brings me to my point.

After a few weeks and several jumps into the tour, something became apparent to me. Here we were, 40 disparate people living in close quarters with very little conflict. No one had to tell us what the rules were and, in fact, no one did. We all seemed to intuit what we could and couldn’t do to maintain the social equilibrium. Mutual consideration was the watchword. No loud talking or music. No going into another’s space. Folding chairs left out in the courtyard were available for use by anyone. If you heard something which wasn’t your business, you ignored it. The unspoken, subliminal adjustments we all made came automatically without any conscious awareness.

When I reflected on this I realized that we had all tapped into something which went deep into human nature. To paraphrase Lincoln Steffens, I have seen the past – the deep past – and it works.

Humans evolved in small groups, bands, numbering between, say, 10 and 50 individuals. This pattern lasted from the very beginning of humanity until the adoption of agriculture some 7,000 years ago. The band provided protection from external threats, cooperative effort in the search for sustenance, and the comfort of familiarity within the safety of the group. Each member of the band knew all the others. It struck me this summer how quickly we all learned each others’ names and roles. It also struck me how readily we all pitched in to help whoever needed it.

We are social creatures. Empathy has immense survival value. It is our ability to identify with each other and cooperate that is our greatest strength. The emphasis on competition in recent American mythology is misplaced. Collective intelligence will usually triumph over individual effort. The traits that allow us to function – no, thrive – in small groups are still in us. They served us nicely for countless millennia. Given circumstances like I experienced last summer they surface readily, unbidden. They are what we are.

We’ve fallen away from this concept in our political organization, largely because of numbers. There are too many of us – more than 300,000,000 – to identify with. Group identity falls away when the numbers get too large, so our collective identity has come to rely on abstract symbols instead of personal relationships. Things like the flag, songs, the Statue of Liberty. But symbols can be, and have been, manipulated. The power of the mass media, in the hands of a few, to shape and control thought are frightening and real.

There’s excitement in the land after the election of an intelligent, capable black man as president. But the problems we face are deep and structural: militarism, inequality, a lack of accountability, a lack of voice, the failure of the rule of law. They can’t be solved by any man, no matter how well-intentioned. Ask yourself if you think Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, et al will be brought to court to answer for the crimes they have committed in the last eight years. If not, what does that say about us?

We need to come up with an organizing scheme that is small enough to tap into our basic humanity. It’s not likely that we will be able to effect such a change given current conditions. But it seems that we are heading for a fall, perhaps soon. If things come crashing down it’s important that the seeds for smaller, more-responsive local governance be prepared. That, to me is what the secession move-ment is all about.
few organic varieties have been developed for the Northeast. However, Quebec has a booming wheat industry, so it can be done, and the organic wheat industry is growing 20 percent a year. Finally, Krupp highlights some examples of the best farmers’ markets, farms, restaurants, co-ops, and specialty-product producers in the state.

The book would be an ideal textbook for an introductory course in the failure of our national food system, and how Vermont is a leading the way to a new alternative. Trying to cover all of the problems and implications of this corporate food system is an almost impossible task. Because of its scope, Krupp only has time to touch briefly on problems that other authors have devoted books to. Fortunately, he cites other sources along the way and has put together a website where he goes into more detail. The last part of the book doesn’t put forth many new ideas; rather it is an ode to the many people and projects that are working to improve Vermont’s food system. After finishing the book I was left with an even greater appreciation for the work being done in Vermont, and the knowledge that we are at least heading in the right direction.

To keep this energy moving, we need to stop buying imported produce and start buying from our local farmers market.

The Green Cup

Good People. Great Food.

40 Bridge Street
Waitsfield, Vermont 05673

www.greencupvt.com

“The perfect meal starts with perfect ingredients.”

Free Vermont Media, continued from page 12

Revisiting Berry
For those of you who are already educated local-vores and are looking to dig a little deeper this summer, try picking up Wendell Berry’s, The Unsettling of America. Berry grew up in a small agrarian community in Kentucky and saw firsthand the disastrous effects of corporate agriculture. He watched as farms were forced to “get big or get out.” He writes about the unsettling of these small communities, loss of crop diversity, loss of topsoil, and he does so in an engaging and poetic style. The intriguing part of this book is the urgency with which he writes. Frighteningly, he wrote about these emergencies in the heart of the United States more than 30 years ago, and the situation is even more dire today. Michael Pollen and other food experts have been heavily influenced by Berry. If you have not already been convinced that farming is the noblest of occupations, you will be by the end of the book.

If Vermont is to secede it is going to need a functioning food system, and this is not something we want to leave up to chance. Fortunately, for those of us who like to eat on a regular basis (and I think I’m in the majority on this one), the hard part has already been done; the groundwork has been laid, the movement is quickly picking up momen-
tum, and the nation is already starting to turn to Vermont for an alternative model.

But let’s not get too high on our horse Vermont. We are still far from having a sustainable food system. To keep this energy moving we need to stop buying imported produce and start buying from our local farmers market. Say goodbye to the produce section of your grocery store for good. Then, get a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) share from a nearby farm next summer, and next time you’re at a restaurant ask if the ingredients were sourced locally.

We need to show to the next generation of farmers that there is a market for their food and that they can make a decent living doing it. Trust me; they deserve every penny of it.

To get a second opinion, I asked NOFA-VT board member, Shelburne Farm’s cheese-maker, and UVM senior Kate Turcotte what her top five agriculture related books were. She gave me six:

Second Nature by Michael Pollan
Harvest for Hope: A Guide to Mindful Eating
by Jane Goodall
It’s a Long Road to a Tomato by Keith Stewart
East of Eden by John Steinbeck
Hope’s Edge by Frances Moore Lappe
The End of Food by Paul Roberts

To get a second opinion, I asked NOFA-VT board member, Shelburne Farm’s cheese-maker, and UVM senior Kate Turcotte what her top five agriculture related books were. She gave me six:

Second Nature by Michael Pollan
Harvest for Hope: A Guide to Mindful Eating
by Jane Goodall
It’s a Long Road to a Tomato by Keith Stewart
East of Eden by John Steinbeck
Hope’s Edge by Frances Moore Lappe
The End of Food by Paul Roberts
Crafting a New Praxis:
The Art of Excoriating Technology For the Sake of the Natural

Frank Joseph Smecker

I t is imperative, when acting from one’s ethical sensibilities, or hankering for conditional propitiousness, to remain grounded in craftsmanship. Author and philosopher Christopher Manes states: “Technology confronts the world, forces it to do things it wouldn’t do naturally. Craft belongs to a humble, more ancient relationship with nature…Craft fits human needs into the existing landscape…technology attempts to alter and deny landscape at an ever accelerating pace with no recognition of nature’s limits.” I would go on to promote that craft is an agency for creation that is heedful to the limits of its resources and their ecological provenance.

The progression of technology has indeed accelerated, offering convenience and expedience to the tasks and avocations of our everyday lives. However, the evolution of technology has left a lucid trail of debris, destruction, and annihilation (e.g. CFCs, depleted uranium, automobiles, airplanes, routine international trade, computers, plastics, endocrine disrupters, pesticides, vivisection, internal combustion engines, fellerbunchers, dragline excavators, televisions, cell phones, and nuclear [and conventional] bombs). The ascendancy of technology has violated and imperiled oil and other energy sources, water sources, and food sources (not to mention it has been culpable for genetic transmutation of crops and trees: i.e. tomatoes spliced with fish genes, fish spliced with human genes, cotton with larval genes, trees vacant of lignin [picture a human being without a skeletal structure] pesticidal seeds, ad nauseam).

Over the last 70 years annual pesticide use has gone from zero to more than 500 billion tons worldwide. How much sense does it make to poison our own food?

Technological advancement (viz. technomania) has been responsible for forced and violent dissolving of traditional communities in order to access mineral-rich lands; it has been responsible for cancers and other degenerative ailments (while ironically providing novel remedies and cures for specific ailments that, well, nature has provided all along). And let’s not forget Zygmunt Bauman’s book Modernity and the Holocaust – which is quite the indictment of the modern industrial rationalistic scientific instrumentalist perspective. And industrial technology has been culpable for the assault on ecosystems that pervade the far reaches of the planet, undermining the homes of species and cultures of remarkable complexity.

• Migratory birds are in inexorable decline.
• Honeybee populations are in inexorable decline.
• Whale populations are in inexorable decline.
• Siberian tigers are in inexorable decline.
• Rainforests are in inexorable decline.
• Potable water is in inexorable decline.
• Amphibian populations are in inexorable decline.
• The Eastern Lowland gorilla is in inexorable decline.
• Traditional, vernacular communities are in inexorable decline.
• There is more plastic in the planet’s oceans than there is phytoplankton.

Ultra-sonar blasts, used by the U.S. Navy and for seismic surveying for oil beneath the ocean swells, are killing whales. Sonar causes gas bubbles to form in the whale’s blood, fatally damaging their livers and kidneys. The fact that schools of hundreds upon hundreds of whales no longer impede the passage of seaborne ships brings me to tears. When is enough truly enough?

Year after year, technological contrivances and their byproducts are discarded profligately into the planet’s waters, ground, and air (e.g. landfills, greenhouse gas emissions, illegal dumping, fluoridation, spent uranium holding tanks, et al.) – destabilizing the complex system that supports life. With its dependency on fossil fuels and mineral ores (extracted and refined at devastating costs to natural communities) continued, wanton technological advancement will be responsible for the loss of one-third of all species on this planet within the next 40 years. Michael Soule, the founder of the Society for Conservation Biology, says, “For all practical purposes vertebrate evolution is at an end… only large mammals left in another decade or two will be those we consciously chose to allow to exist.”

The anthropologist Marvin Harris warned that as the industrial bubble expands “its skin becomes thinner.” And it will pop.

Whether technology of “civilized” proportion has been implemented for practical purposes or recreational purposes, it is not sustainable, and essentially has only been of practical use to humans (and of course not all humans) as a way to pander to a Western ethic, or Transcendental ethic, proclaiming, “certain obligations hold true everywhere at all times for all people.” Omniscience and omnipotence, a (delusional) desire that has emerged from the Western philosophy perennis canon, is the ultimate (delusional) goal of a static and technologized world.

Philosophy aside, technology has become the hallmark of modern societies and contemporary economies, and deeply imbedded in a culture of extraction, hyper-exploitation, and a lack of reverence for natural realities that circumscribe us. There is no doubt we are about to find out what it means to overshoot our physical limits, as we’ve invested an entire history of thought...
Vermont Republic, continued from page 5

What is relevant to us in this story, in addition to the opportunity for ownership of land free of external state or corporate power, is the radical democracy of the Vermont settlers. Indeed, the former informed the latter. They achieved, albeit briefly, a startling decentralization of political and economic power seldom seen in human history. Unlike the neighboring American colonies, with their links to Europe and their increasing hierarchical power structures rooted in the commercial seaport centers like Boston and New York, Vermonters in their hills were able to achieve widespread ownership of land as independent farmers and artisans, without reckoning with an established wealthy elite in control of most resources (especially financial ones) as well as of the government.

Vermont came into existence from the ground up, wholly on the local level, farm by farm, and town by town – as clear a case I can find of a free society founded in a state of nature. Without any superstructure of preestablished authority controlling land grants, Vermonters were able to realize very largely the populist vision, which seeks to reconcile political freedom and personal private property in locally rooted radical democracy. The essence of populism is the recognition that private property widely distributed (not concentrated in few hands) is the precondition of genuine democracy at the grassroots. Indeed, the Vermont constitution [of 1777] demands attention. . . . A septennial Council of Censors was to mandate its printing for the public’s information. . . . No presidency could declare a bill unconstitutional. Any bill into law the same year it was proposed, legislative sessions and forbade the passage of legislation. . . . To maintain civic virtue in a body of representatives personally known to each voter in isolation for one or another media image of their communities. . . .

The center of life and the ultimate sovereign authority in Vermont was the town meeting, open to all resident adult males, where all aspects of public life were debated and decided. As in ancient Athens, meetings proved lively and sometimes contentious; officials seldom held office for more than a term. Official positions of authority were discounted, and the officers of the local militia were elected. Such radical democracy obviated the need for the traditional separation of powers. Separation of powers as we know it is designed to check each of the major branches of government – legislative, executive, and judicial – by providing recourse to any one of them against the others. It was developed by Madison and other founders as a way of controlling the abuses of oligarchy (which it has not done) while avoiding democracy. It also has the less-noticed effect of confirming a considerable amount of unaccountable authority in each branch of government (and its divisions), thereby actually concentrating rather than dispersing power.

By contrast, a decentralized system of local democracies provides for another kind of separation of power: its breakup into numerous local governments. The basis of Vermont democracy, reflected in the works of Ethan Allen, is the doctrine of natural rights (not revealed religion or state authority). The essential natural rights for Allen are the rights of each individual to freedom AND property. This early populist world was a pragmatic world, not one driven by ideology or religion.

What is crucial is the recognition by the first Vermont republic not only that democracy must be established in face-to-face local assemblies, or town meetings, but that these assemblies can maintain their freedom only by being confederated together in a broader representative body directly and wholly accountable to those assemblies. Direct democracy at the grassroots was characteristic of much of colonial America, but most colonial governments, with their royal governors, councils, etc., were not unalloyed representatives of the grassroots, as Vermont was, but were subject to varying degrees of control from above, a pattern which continued after the Revolution and intensified after the Civil War. The unicameral legislature of the first Vermont republic was composed of representatives chosen by local communities to represent those communities.

This is conspicuously not how modern legislatures work. They do not represent communities, they are not accountable to them, and their members are not chosen in face-to-face assemblies. Instead state legislators as well as members of Congress are chosen in mass elections by a dispersed and atomized electorate, in which largely preselected candidates are presented to a passive and manipulated public. Communities and their interests are bypassed in favor of largely symbolic and impersonal relationship defined by mass propaganda and big money, rather than personal experience between the candidate and the voter. The private voting booth, often cited as the essence of democracy, is in fact its negation. Instead of casting a secret ballot in a town meeting for representatives personally known to me and my community on the basis of the problems facing my community, I am asked instead to vote in isolation for one or another media image of their candidates. . . .

The rise and fall

The first Vermont republic was different; it was a true confederal democracy. As Michael A. Bellesiles puts it in his remarkable work Revolutionary Outlaws: Ethan Allen and the Struggle for Independence on the Early American Frontier: “Vermont’s constitution [of 1777] demands attention for the way it lived up to its theoretical assertions, creating the most democratic structure of its time. It clearly established and protected certain basic rights: freedom of speech, print, and public assembly, a modified freedom of religion, the right to a fair and open trial before a jury, and the people’s right to form new governments as they saw fit. . . . The state’s voters controlled every branch of government, electing the state’s executive officers and judges, as well as representatives to the unicameral legislature. Vermont failed to institute a separation of the branches of government . . . . The governor and council of Vermont could not veto legislation . . . . To maintain civic participation, the constitution required public legislative sessions and forbade the passage of any bill into law the same year it was proposed, mandating its printing for the public’s information. . . . A septennial Council of Censors was to review all legislative and executive acts to ensure that the constitution was being fulfilled.

The Council of Censors could amend the constitution by calling a popularly elected conven...
Vermont Vox Populi, continued from page 9

MCR: That’s easy. The last person you want telling someone what to do in Vermont is to ask someone whose home is Venice, California. I have twenty-five points in the book. Almost every one is applicable in one way or another at a local level. You people up in Vermont are smart and have your heads extracted. Take my book, read it, and do what fits your needs. I wrote it that way so that people in Atlanta, Denver, Phoenix or Portland could do the same. A Presidential Energy Policy is the best and most direct answer to this question.

CB: Over the years you have made some amazing predictions which have come to pass with stunning regularity. Sometimes you’ve been wrong, and when you were, you said so. Based on your research as well as that of other researchers I know and respect, I’ve made some projections as well, and as you well know, we have been laughed at many more times than we have been taken seriously. Today, however, we are both seeing the preponderance of our forecasting unfolding before our eyes. In ways that – I speak for myself here – are almost mind-boggling. Perhaps what is so stunning is not that they are happening, but the speed with which the unraveling is occurring.

It seems like ever since you began researching Peak Oil, you’ve been talking about the collapse of civilization. Last year Richard Heinberg wrote an article entitled “So How Do You Like Collapse So Far?” So I want to ask you what you make of the events of 2006, and those in current times? How do you see the next five years unfolding? What are the most important pieces of advice you can give, not only to Vermonters, but to any awake person living in the United States?

MCR: Five years? My map doesn’t go that far. At some point soon chaos will be a larger player at our table. We may not recognize the world in six months or a year even. I am fairly certain that civilization goes off the cliff either this summer or next. The global decline rate is 9.1 percent and was confirmed in an IEA report leaked to the Financial Times last winter. Any kind of ersatz recovery will lead to another dramatic price spike which will pretty much shut everything down. It’s absolutely clear now.

We will see FDIC insolvency, Treasury default, possibly a Federal Reserve bankruptcy, the dumping of the dollar, and hyperinflation within that time. We’ll see maybe 25 percent to 30 percent unemployment, and after that I don’t think statistics will matter. We’ll see massive starvation begin and maybe a large die-off due to a pandemic of either natural or manmade origins. I don’t need to continue here.

The thing to do about collapse is not to deny it or try to prevent it. Both efforts are futile. The thing to do is to go inside your heart and soul and embrace it and seek to help those willing to learn how to survive it. It wrote the book, and in a sense have lived my life, for the sake of those under 30. I never had kids; I just adopted a whole generation. What we’re fighting for is what’s going to be left to them, because it is they who will decide what parts of the human character survive and what kind of world might come from that.

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Seasoned inundated land

An enormous amount of Vermont’s landscape is underutilized due to parched water tables and/or low-angle slopes underlain by poorly drained clay soils. Useful responses to such conditions involve similar approaches to those for rocky, dry land (above).

- Selecting species that are well suited to perennial or seasonally wet conditions, or to inundated conditions. Species particularly well adapted to wet conditions include currants and gooseberries (Ribes spp.), elderberries (Sambucus canadensis), cranberries (Vaccinium spp.) and highbush cranberries (Viburnum spp.), chokecherry (Aronia spp.), willow (salix spp.) and alder (alsinus spp.) for fuelwood and craft wood, and many others. Other useful strategies include grafting non-wet-tolerant species onto wet-tolerant rootstock, such as pears onto hawthorn or quince.

- On-contour swales and island mounds that simultaneously lower the water table in the immediate area of a crop plant while raising up the plant itself. Systems in Europe have practiced tree-based agriculture in wetlands for thousands of years, utilizing woody debris to help form the raised planting mounds. Gradually the woody material breaks down into soil, feeding the plant over time while catching leaves and other nutrient-rich debris that circulates via wind currents in the area.

Vermont Republic, continued from page 19

tion allowing 'possession the same privileges of choosing how they would be governed' without resort to 'revolution or bloodshed.'

Bellesiles then adds the crucial point: "Vermont’s leadership did not seek the approval of the people as an undifferentiated mass. Sovereignty lay in the distinct townships, which held the ‘unalienable and indefeasible right to reform, alter, or abolish government, in such manner as shall be, by that community, judged most conducive to the public weal.’"

Finally, "Vermont’s Declaration of Rights proclaimed ‘that private Property ought to be subservient to public uses.’ . . . And to make certain that the state never got out of hand, the Declaration of Rights stipulated that the people reserved the right of review over every action of the state and its police.” As Bellesiles nicely puts it: “The people of Vermont interacted with their state government through their community, not as isolated individuals.”

Here was grassroots populist democracy, or community-based confederal democracy, in actual practice. It was democratic communities which were represented at broader levels, not individuals, a fundamental distinction which separates confederal democracy from our mis-representative government rooted in oligarchic mass elections. Each community or town in Vermont with less than 80 free citizens got one representative to the unicameral state legislature, or General Assembly, and towns with more than 80 got two representatives (the largest town had less than 2,000 in population). The Windsor Convention, which ratified the existence of Vermont, had 50 delegates from thirty-one towns. Vermont may be the only modern example of a system, at least in the United States, of direct representation grafted onto local assemblies – that is, the combination of direct local democracy with accountable representative bodies, something Jefferson envisioned in his ‘ward republics’ as the completion of the American Revolution, and Tom Paine thought would actually happen throughout the United States.

It has not yet happened, but our current economic and ecological crises beg us more than ever to revisit our largely lost but more relevant than ever populist tradition. Vermont, we should not be surprised, was unable to maintain the radical degree of democracy it developed in relative isolation. If she had supported Shay’s Rebellion in Massachusetts in the 1780s, she might have sparked a second American revolution, this time directed not against the economic elites of London but those of the American coastal cities. And she might have preserved her own confederal democracy. In return, however, for considering an offer of statehood from the United States, the Vermont legislators by a narrow vote rejected Shay’s overtures, and Allen, who had been offered command of a revolutionary army by Shay, elected to stay in retirement at his farm. Under pressure, Vermont caved-in, and gained recognition from the top down in 1791 as the fourteenth state from a national government and federal constitution seriously in conflict with the principles of her democracy. She conceded that her experiment in democracy would henceforth be limited, and no threat to the larger monied interests of the land in the increasingly successful attempts to disassociate free individuals from their property.

Still, Vermont has retained a degree of democratic spirit absent in most other states of the union, a spirit reflected in its election to the United States Congress in recent years of its only independent member, and in a number of environmental, civil, and other reforms, as well as in a continued strong tradition of town meetings. And not least, the example of the first Vermont republic remains an important model for any future reform of our political system.

1 On independent Vermont, see Michael A. Bellesiles, Revolutionary Outlaws: Ethan Allen and the Struggle for Independence on the Early American Frontier (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993).
2 Ibid., pp. 137-9
3 See Adrian Kaizinski, Fixing the System: A History of Populism, Ancient & Modern (New York: Continuum, 2008), Chapter Four, “American Populism,” for background on American populism; see also the Appendix, “Jefferson’s Ward Republics”.
4 Ibid., pp. 352-3
Crafting a New Praxis, continued from page 18

and actions into a way of life that is deleterious and unsustainable.

Essayist, author, and critic Wendell Berry wrote in the May 2008 issue of Harper’s Magazine on the topic of Peak Oil:

To deal with problems, which are after all inescapable, of living with limited intelligence in a limited world, I suggest that we may have to remove some of the emphasis we have lately placed on science and technology and have a new look at the arts. For an art does not propose to enlarge itself by limitless extension but rather to enrich itself within bounds that are accepted prior to the work. It is the artists, not the scientists, who have dealt unremittingly with the problem of limits.

Vermont artisans know intimately this convivial relationship between their handiwork and the natural landscape that offers its consent in the ongoing development of art. And they wear their baleful impacts felt by millions of humans and non-humans alike as a result of poisoning our only atmosphere and our only sources of water are not good enough reasons to stop burning fossil fuels. Instead they are put to us as reasons to continue scientific exploration in search of solutions to these problems.

In fact, the commonality of science and technology advancement can only stand upon the plinth that every decision is a compromise. The common man has an option to remove some of the emphasis we have placed on science and technology. It is the artists, not the scientists, who have dealt unremittingly with the problem of limits.

Furthermore, the argument that science will present synthetic options to substitute for the natural resources we continue to deplete is asinine. This is proven with Liebig’s Law, also known as the Law of the Minimum. Richard Heinberg sums up the law well in his book Powerdown:

“Every species has a list of requirements for survival – water, temperature range, degree of salinity of water, degree of acidity or alkalinity of soil, food of a certain nature, so many hours of sunlight, and so on.” Liebig’s Law elucidates that even if all factors are “optimal” it takes only the lack of one requirement to erode an organism’s ability to survive. Heinberg goes on to note: “This puts a tough burden on humans’ attempts to completely manage a fully artificial environment.”

My exegesis of L’s Big Law takes the form of a question: What is the reason for this giant circus? Seriously, we have proof that acephalous cultures lived peacefully for hundreds of thousands of years without monotheism, science, government, corporations, bureaucracy, TVs, automobiles, industrial modes of production, et al – so what’s our deal? What is it we are striving for through all of this destruction and aimless development?

Even if, fortuitously, science prevails and a cheap energy source is discovered to supplant our reliance on fossil fuels, what then? Self-aggrandizing economics will surely use it up, continue to dismantle the planet’s resources for other innovations and contrivances, and exponential growth will continue. An important fact one must ponder is that energy comes from matter, and matter is finite. Without self-limitation, the quest for energy will be a perpetual concatenated tail-chase, exhibiting severe nocuous, deleterious, and annihilative repercussions over and over again. And again. And again. Peak Oil should be a matter public interest, and a matter of sustainability for the inhabitants of this planet – especially our communities. Our options for handling the decline in cheap energy sources continued on page 23
What do Barack Obama, George W. Bush, Joe Biden, Dick Cheney, Hillary Clinton, Condoleezza Rice, Bernie Sanders, Mitch McConnell, Howard Dean, Jim Douglas, Keith Olbermann, Bill O’Reilly, Rachel Maddow, and Ann Coulter all have in common? They are all loyal to the U.S. Empire – the largest, wealthiest, most powerful, most militaristic, and arguably most violent empire of all time.

These American Loyalists pledge their allegiance to a government which condones illegal wars with Afghanistan and Iraq, unconditional support for the Israeli military machine, a foreign policy based on full-spectrum dominance and imperial overstretch, multi-trillion-dollar budget deficits, endless Wall Street bailouts, corporate greed and fraud, environmental degradation, dependence on imported oil, and a culture of deceit. They are the twenty-first century equivalents of the Tories who remained loyal to the British Empire during the American Revolution.

But today there is a whiff of revolution in the air across the Green Mountains – a genteel revolution in which the revolutionists are well-educated, articulate writers, artists, academics, blue collar workers, doctors, farmers, lawyers, merchants, publishers, and other Vermont patriots committed to the belief that the United States has lost its moral authority and is unsustainable, ungovernable, and, therefore, unfixable.

Taking their cues from the 1961 Broadway Musical “Stop the World – I Want to Get Off,” these patriots want to free themselves from the corruption and the tyranny of Wall Street, Corporate America, and the U.S. government. To do so they engage in such radical acts as simple living, energy conservation, buying locally produced food, and practicing sustainable agriculture, business, and trade.

Vermont patriots recognize the importance of the village green as a metaphor for Vermont – a place where people meet to chat, have a coffee, a locally brewed beer, a glass of wine, or a bite to eat; read a newspaper; listen to music; smell the flowers; and pass the time away. They know that the village green is all about the politics of human scale – small towns, small businesses, small schools, and small churches. The Vermont village green is neat, clean, democratic, nonviolent, egalitarian, and humane. It is what the United States once was, but no longer knows how to be.

The Vermont village green provides a communitarian alternative to the dehumanized, mass-production, mass-consumption, overregulated, narcissistic lifestyle that pervades most of America – an alternative to the politics of money, power, speed, greed, and fear of terrorism.

Just as the English colonists sought an alternative to British rule 233 years ago, so, too, does the Vermont village green pose an alternative to corporate-controlled statism and global imperialism today. The United States Empire desperately needs a new metaphor.

Vermont patriots stand ready to provide one – Vermont. •
Crafting a New Praxis, continued from page 21

are found in choices of moderation and self-limitation, community solidarity and education. The belief that science will provide new technologies to help us endure nature’s response to our profligate growth (i.e. global warming, desiccation of potable water, diasporas, viral vectors, etc.) reflects a state of denial within the dominant culture, as well as a casuistic rationalizing for the way the dominant culture behaves toward the very planet that miracle us into existence in the first place. It is vitally important that we begin to implement the steps needed to adjust our cultural behavior with regard to our personal limits alongside the laws of nature. Our holistic health, as well as our interrelations, domestic and foreign, is commensurate with the condition of the land beneath our feet.

Starting in Vermont

Vermont provides the intact land bases that can provide for us as a community. CSAs (community supported agriculture), farmers’ markets, organic farming and gardening fare well for the state’s communities. To bring to fruition a sustainable community, on a state level, relocalization is imperative. Initiatives such as worker and producer cooperatives, neighborhood and community associations, collective kitchens, unemployed worker mutual-aid organizations, and more – all working holistically together – are essential to have in a functional community. If we wholly embrace a functional model espoused to cooperation rather than competition in every sector, then everybody on board is working together to build a sustainable community. Eventually, we could even transcend ‘state’ and ‘sector’ and just be a community again.

We owe ourselves a pat on the back for being a step ahead of most of the country. Farmers’ markets, co-ops, community gardens in Burlington’s North End, the Intervale, Pete’s Greens, High Mowing Seeds and the rest of the folks involved with the High Field’s Institute, among others, having done a lot of great work to put Vermont’s foot on the right path.

But there’s still much to be done, and we have to be wary of “mistaking motion for change” e.g., waxing exuberant over $60 recherché quarts of interior finish made of soy whey while 20,000 Vermont children go without food every winter. There’s no excuse for childhood hunger in a state that is quickly becoming defined by its sustainable agriculture endeavors. Poverty is a social deformity largely caused by the market. It’s time we say fuck the market – we’re a community. Vermont’s economy largely caused by the market. It’s time we say fuck the market – we’re a community.

We must reevaluate not only our relationship with our habitat (Earth), but the way we engage with Earth as well. Perhaps the dominant, concerted view of expedience, tools, and appliances that beguiles so many will be transformed by the concept of craft into a more sustainable and pragmatic notion of our vocations and avocations; and then the concept of technology can be replaced by the practice of art; blossoming a new praxis of engagement through arts and crafts.

I’ve been thinking lately about the word “revolution.” And I’ve been thinking about the response that word often conjures up in many folks: sometimes fear; sometimes a laugh; sometimes a smile. The truth is, we’re in need of a serious revolution, and the sooner we recognize this the sooner we can begin. And it should be known that the bulk of any revolution is the time spent building a community. The Black Panther Party worked and advocated for community schools for children, free health clinics for the poor, and other community projects. The Zapatistas believed that the most important work to be done during revolution was the nonviolent work, the education, community gardening and so on. Harvey Milk, despite an urge toward rebellion, worked much harder building safe communities for homosexuals and pushing for legislation that broadened equal rights.

During revolution it is most important to congeal as a community, and to educate, to write, to garden, to relocalize, to de-industrialize while creating a replacement model that is sustainable and safe. It’s okay to be angry over current conditions; how else would we know that those conditions don’t suit us, never did suit us, won’t ever suit us?

But more important, we must love the land beneath our feet, and every being, including ourselves and each other, if we want a sense of peace and sustainability. For we will defend with all of our hearts and might all that we love.
Nearly 30 years ago I wrote in a book that Western civilization was at “a momentous turning point” as it came to the close of the modern era (1500-2000) and that future historians might well mark “a new age beginning somewhere within our lifetimes.”

Two choices faced us, I said. “It could be an age of bigness, continuing certain obvious trends of the present toward large-scale institutions, multinational corporations, centralized governments, high-technology machinery, large cities, high-rise buildings, and all that is implied in the American ethic of unimpeded growth.

“That would seem to have to entail the expansion of the present corporate-government alliance, leading to a fully mixed system of state and private capitalism, government regulation of scarce resources, increased corporate conglomeration, some greater degree of social regulation by the organs of government, further consolidation of political power within the executive branch, and corporate-government encouragement of the arts. Allowing, as always, for a few pockets of discontent, big would be better, progress our most important product.”

But there was another possibility for the new age ahead, I said, in exactly the opposite direction: “toward the decentralization of institutions and the devolution of power, with the slow dismantling of all the large-scale systems that, one way or another, have created or perpetuated the current crises, and their replacement by smaller, more controllable, more efficient, people-sized units, rooted in local circumstances and guided by local citizens.

“In short, the human-scale alternative.”

Well, I have to tell you that so far a lot of the signs point to the big-is-better future, and the latest round of Obamafascism would seem to guarantee that. Except that even as this Empire gets bigger, more militaristic, more intrusive into individual and community life, more in thrall to the corporate-financial megalith, and more desperately mired in debt, deficit, and dollar-debacle, a new and strong counter-trend has emerged.

Triggered by a few careless words by Texas Governor Rick Perry at the “tea party” protest in Austin on April 15 (“We live in a great country . . . and I see no reason at all for us to be even talking about seceding, but if Washington continues to force these programs on the states, if Washington continues to disregard the Tenth Amendment, who knows what happens?”), the idea of secession has hit American politics with a bang. Mostly voiced these days by Republicans appalled at the way Obama and Co. have saddled the nation with an immense debt and a union with the completely corrupt financial world, it is also a tactic that many in the libertarian camp, including Representative Ron Paul, have considered in the past and are now reviving. Add to those the people on the decentralist Left who have long denounced government interference and corporate malfeasance, promoting localized and communitarian projects and solutions, and the camp of people taking secession seriously is great enough potentially to have a real political impact.

In fact, Donald Livingston, the distinguished scholar of secession at Emory University, has said that now is the first time that it has been a genuine subject in U.S. public discourse since the war of Southern Independence was ended in 1865. And, as if in support, the New York Times ran a story in April with the headline “Secession Talk Surfs Uror.”

That same Times story, trying to dampen talk of the practicality of secession as the mainstream liberals are wont to do, said that there has been “no serious argument since the Civil War [sic – it was a war of independence, just like the one of 1776, with no intent of taking over another’s power] on behalf of a legal basis for a state’s secession.”

The U.S. Congress debated in 1861 whether to make secession illegal – meaning that until then it wasn’t – and failed to pass any such statute.

Secession can’t be unconstitutional, since the Constitution says nothing about it whatsoever, it having been an assumed right by the founders that needn’t be spelled out. In fact three states ratifying the Constitution in 1789 – New York, Rhode Island, and Virginia – made the right to secede specific before they would join the U.S. republic, but the other 10 states assumed they had the same right.

Secession can’t be treasonous, since it has been achieved peacefully four times in American history: Maine seceded from Massachusetts, Kentucky from Virginia, Tennessee from North Carolina, and West Virginia from Virginia. No one at the time thought that this was doing damage to the United States or represented an act of treason. Besides, treason is defined in the Constitution as consisting “only in levying War against” the U.S., and if a state departs peaceably, saying good-bye with no shots fired, it can’t be treasonous.

So whatever happens as a result of this remarkable new discussion, we can hope that it convinces the larger part of the citizenry that secession is at least a political alternative to be considered seriously – particularly in those states where federal laws and regulations are felt to be intrusive and unjust and federal practices in defense of the empire are regarded as illegal and immoral. What’s more, we can hope that it is the beginning of a movement away from the growing power of the imperial mega-state and toward that possible decentralist future built upon the human-scale alternative.