



Design by Rob Messick.

Part Five

SELF-GOVERNMENT

"Active bioregionalists don't merely raise their hands to vote on issues but also find ways to interact positively with the life-web around them. They work with neighbors to carry out projects and build a culture together." — Peter Berg

If bioregionalism is a relatively new word, the many modes of thought and experience from which it draws its full meaning have deep roots in history. And, while the political change implied by the bioregional goal of ecologically sustainable, human scale governance—the dismantling of centralized structures—may be clear, the ways by which we work toward that goal, the day-to-day *practice* of bioregionalism, are many and diverse. For bioregionalists organize across a wide spectrum that includes local, regional and continent-wide political work; justice for native peoples and peoples of color; the creation of local economic and trading networks; the development of sustainable agriculture systems; and the education of a new generation. The rich mix of traditions that informs this work ranges from Western anarchism and the contemporary vision of the future known as the Fourth World, through the practice of consensus used by native peoples, Quakers and anarchists alike, to the wisdom of the modern feminist movement.

Bioregional politics is the politics of scale, of decentralization, the politics of cultural autonomy and *self-government*. By extension, it is also the way by which we can most clearly see the reality of empire—how Western Civilization has emerged on the backs of indigenous peoples and at the expense of viable local cultures and local ecosystems. The bioregional project, in this regard, is to establish the conditions for the re-emergence of sustainable local communities that might form the nuclei of new worlds.

Michael Zwerin's *Devolutionary Notes* distinguishes "states" from "nations" and points out the commonality among the world's Native peoples and, for example, southern French farmers: occupation! While

warning of the dangers of nationalism, his voice is one among many through history which has spoken up for a radical scaling down of contemporary government. To this, Leopold Kohr adds the successful experience of Switzerland's canton system, and Murray Bookchin outlines what he calls "municipal libertarianism": the taking back of power by local councils and townships according to a long tradition that has included the French and Spanish revolutions in Europe, and the town democracies of New England in the United States.

The Fourth World movement—made up of communities, indigenous peoples and small nations—is one of the "sister" movements to bioregionalism, advocating the small scale in all human endeavors. The term was first used by indigenous North Americans. According to the Haudenosaunee—or Iroquois—the Native peoples are keepers of crucial knowledge which they have to impart to the world: the knowledge that, when people cease to respect and express gratitude for the things that support life, then all life will be destroyed. We have much yet to learn from Native peoples everywhere.

Peter Berg's "Growing A Life-Place Politics" is a fundamental piece, sketching the full range of activities needed to become self-governing in both cities and rural areas. He advocates watershed-scaled governments—"socialsheds"—in turn forming bioregional congresses and wider alliances. It all comes down to meeting our needs in a genuinely sustainable manner; bioregional self-sufficiency, he points out, would go a long way toward easing the strain on the rest of the planet.

Doug Aberley pursues the topic of sustainable development, outlining "the means by which the existing structures of governance and development may be replaced by those based on bioregional principles." And Bill Mollison, from Australia, adds further wisdom from yet another "sister" movement: permaculture. His practical suggestions for the development of extended families, villages and trusts are inspiring, the motive force being "to identify areas where resources (water, soil, money, talent) leak from the region," and then set about plugging up those leaks.

The LETS System (Local Exchange Trading System) represents a tried and tested way to further plug leaks of money from a given community. Inventor of the system, Michael Linton, and Tom Greco—a Fourth World activist—explain how "green dollars" can work for your community, too, even when "the system" is *not* working.

One of the key ways in which this diverse array of thought and practice has come together has been through the bioregional congress, organized both regionally and—biannually since 1984—on a continent-wide scale. Drawing activists together from Canada, the U.S., Mexico and beyond, the North American Bioregional Congress (NABC) was begun

following the success of OACC (the Ozarks Area Community Congress). David Haenke's contribution to this phenomenon has been profound, and here he passes on advice as to how to go about organizing your own congress. *Sustaining* bioregional groups is Caryn Miriam-Goldberg's contribution, and Caroline Estes speaks in detail about the consensus process, used with a high degree of success at all three NABCs to date.

Finally, through the eyes of Ernest Callenbach in *Ecotopia Emerging*, we get a glimpse of how things could be *really* different...

Self-government. Bioregionalism. Welcome Home!

Ecotopia Emerging...

And so the group sought a shared vision they could hope to transmit to the people at large: a vision of a society that would take long-term care of its natural resources the way a responsible farmer takes care of productive fields. A society that would protect members of the human species but also all others. A society that would arrange its institutions to encourage people to respect each other and work with each other, rather than working against each other. A society that recognized the unbearable fearfulness of uncontrolled hazards to life—whether they were nuclear or chemical. In short, a society that would feel safe and free, a society that an uprooted, exploited people could learn to call home....
