

Secession

The True Bioregional Way

Kirkpatrick Sale

1 July 2007

Contents

Bloated Bureaucracy	3
Recycling	4
Appendix	5

One of the central tenets of bioregionalism is scale, and specifically human scale. The reason is that the love and care for a place on the earth – which is what bioregionalism is all about – can happen only when the human community knows and becomes part of the natural systems and seasons of the region around it, and that inevitably means a limited scale. It is simply humanly impossible to understand and commune with the whole earth, or with a continent, or in fact anything larger than the natural region one lives in. And any attempt to do so – though lord knows it is tried often enough – is futile.

That is one important reason to think about secession. Yes, I said secession: the breaking up of large nations into smaller independent political entities that run their own affairs, have their own governments, operate their own economies – and control their own environments on a bioregional scale. It's a word that scares people even now, and most of the time it conjures up ideas of treason, or illegality, or racism, or just plain futility.

But it is really American as, well, the Declaration of Independence – “it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it (wrongful government), and to institute new government in such form as to them shall seem most likely to affect their safety and happiness”. As American as the war that followed from that, not a revolutionary war at all but a secessionist one, since the colonists had no intention of taking over the British government, only of separating from it to run their own governments as they saw fit. As American, in fact, as the separation of Maine from Massachusetts, Tennessee from North Carolina, West Virginia from Virginia, all of which were done in an orderly and peaceful fashion.

Bloated Bureaucracy

There are a myriad of reasons to contemplate secession these days. On the one hand it frees a territory from the incompetent, corrupt, militaristic, and illegal government in Washington and the empire it has created to spread its corporate owners around the world. On the other it provides a scale of decision-making that allows something close to true democracy, or representation that truly reflects a constituency's wishes; a scale of trade and commerce that allows full employment, healthy food, nontoxic material goods, and a sound currency free of the volatile and perilous dollar; a scale of administration that replaces the bloated federal bureaucracy with smaller, more efficient and responsive operations; in short, a scale of human affairs at which – as the success of countless small nations has shown – people have control over the decisions that affect their lives and the institutions that serve and protect them.

And a scale at which they can be ultimately aware of their environment, understand its limits and fragilities, attend to its need, provide restoration and maintenance, keep human interference to a minimum, draw up and enforce regulations about environmen-

tal health and well-being, and in general know how to live in harmony with its species and systems. A scale at which a society can develop a bioregional sensibility.

Recycling

But there's more. A secessionist state must necessarily become self-sufficient, doing and making things for itself that once came from outside. It therefore would have to depend upon its regional resources in a new way – and be forced to take care of them in a new way, for survival's sake even if it didn't have a bioregional sensibility. And this in turn would free a society from much of the poor quality, often dangerous, needlessly expensive, and environmentally burdensome imports and at the same time encourage local and healthy alternatives: community-supported agriculture, neighborhood gardens, and farmers' markets instead of toxic spinach from California; recycling centers and manufacturers using and reusing regional resources instead of depending on imported materials; short-haul transportation and bicycles and battery-operated vehicles operating on a limited scale instead of oil from Riyadh and gas-guzzlers from Detroit.

Which in turn provides an alternative economic and social framework that would not only be viable in a time of crisis such as climate heating and peak oil and resource exhaustion are likely to bring in the near future but would be positively thriving. Having escaped the entangling disasters that would befall the nation as a whole, a secessionist state would be free, and able, to withstand or ameliorate most of the succeeding crises. James Howard Kunstler, whose new book *The Long Emergency* is about the likelihood of just such a calamitous future, writes that it will require us to downscale and re-scale virtually everything we do and how we do it, from the kind of communities we physically inhabit to the way we grow our food to the way we work and trade the products of our work. Anything organised on the large scale, whether it is government or a corporate business enterprise such as Wal-Mart, will wither as the cheap energy props that support bigness fall away. And then a small independent state makes a lot of sense, Survival sense.

That is why there is a secessionist movement in North America, and why it has been growing in the last few years. For it offers not only an escape, an alternative, not the deadly national Leviathan but a vision of societies bringing out the best of human abilities within the best of environmental scales – and that is the real hope of the future.

Kirkpatrick Sale is the director of the Middlebury Institute ("for the study of separationism, secession and self-determination") and the author most recently of *After Eden: The Evolution of Human Domination*.

Sale has been described as “one of the intellectual godfathers of the secessionist movement.” As Director of the Middlebury Institute, he has successfully hosted several North American Secessionist Conventions. These have attracted delegates from across the political spectrum, including Libertarians, Socialists, Greens, Christian Conservatives and Indigenous groups like the Nation of Hawaii’.

Appendix

Dear Earth First!,

Great article on secession (see *EF!J* July-August 2007)! Now, you are finally addressing a fundamental action that we can take to regain ownership of our political and economic systems. And only with some real sense of ownership can we begin to affect change. Evidence and history suggests that once a nation exceeds around 10 million people, its capacity for sane government rapidly diminishes. More than 100 million, insanity is virtually guaranteed.

Some fear that small secessionists states will allow “the bad guys” to take over—the racists, the wealthy few, the lunatics. This is a completely irrational fear (and in fact not so much a legitimate fear as fear-mongering by those who oppose secession). In a small state, people are neither better nor worse than in a large one. You will still have the same mix of visionaries, greedheads, racists and idealists. But because everything is more transparent, bad deeds are more readily exposed, and good deeds more quickly rewarded.

Furthermore, the power of the malevolent few, who tend to rise to power in large, opaque social systems, is greatly reduced. And the power of the many is greatly increased.

Kirkpatrick Sale neglects to mention two vital texts on secession: Leopold Kohr’s *Breakdown of Nations* (1957) and, more recently, Naylor and Willimon’s *Downsizing the USA* (1997). Both are “must reads” on the subject and are even more relevant than, for example, Schumacher’s *Small Is Beautiful* (1987).

The American political-economic system is irredeemably corrupt and, barring total collapse, will not change for the better in our lifetime. Secession is a chance to start over on a human scale and do things right. Radical bioregionalism is the only way to build an ecologically sustainable society. There is an essential truth here that few seem to appreciate: Nothing will work in a state that is too large; everything is possible in a state that is human-scale.

—David Skrbina

Kirkpatrick Sale
Secession

The True Bioregional Way
1 July 2007

<<https://thirdway.info/2011/10/09/earth-first-secession-the-true-bioregional-way/>>
Earth First! 27, no. 5 (1 July 2007). Republished by the Environment & Society
Portal, Multimedia Library. <www.environmentandsociety.org/node/7245>
& Earth First! 27, no. 6 (1 September 2007). Republished by the Environment &
Society Portal, Multimedia Library. <www.environmentandsociety.org/node/7246>
First published in the Earth First! Journal, this is the slightly updated version
published in issue 144–145 of *Fourth World Review*.

The letter response in the appendix is from a virulently anti-semetic anti-tech
vanguardist who was attempting to do entryism into the leftist Earth First!
movement. Obviously EF! editors couldn't have had the foresight to know the politics
of this person, it's just novel history. For further reading see: a text dump on David
Skrbina.