

● Throughout the world, BIO-REGIONALISM is emerging as the focus of new political movements which promise to break down the structure of the modern political nation-state. In the U.S., there are about 20 bio-regional organisations now at work.

● According to Kirkpatrick Sale, author of *Human Scale*, bio-regionalism "is more an attitude

than a construct, more a way of learning to think than an ideology". But he says that, in the U.S. at least, bioregionalism offers the prospect of political change.

● The philosophy underlying bioregionalism promises to establish a new harmony between Man and Nature, which ought to remove many of the causes of organised conflict between nations.

But so far, the emergent movements have failed to define practical ways in which the resources of nature can be used to establish and maintain harmony between men.

● In this article, ALANNA HARTZOK defines some basic principles which could transform the state of mind into practical reality.

Natural state or Nation State?

BIOREGIONALISM is an emerging new perspective from which to view North America and the rest of the planet as well. Instead of the usual boundaries separating huge nations and tiny nations, huge states and tiny states, areas are defined by natural formations and contours of the earth itself – the mountains, rivers, watersheds, and deserts.

The lifeforms of these regions have had their unique identities formed and imprinted by the particular work of Nature herself. Even in a culturally homogenous nation like the USA, dialects and customs, diet and culture vary from region to region.

Bioregional identity can be on different scales. One might identify oneself as being from Appalachia on the larger scale and the Cumberland Valley on the smaller. The significant perceptual shift is that one becomes *eco*, or whole earth conscious, rather than *ego*, or nation state conscious.

The eco-logical, unified earth consciousness that perceives the patterns and harmonies of naturally contoured bioregions is a quantum leap from the ego-separative, linear way of conceiving the world that stakes out straight line boundaries like so many squares on a chess board.

Ecological consciousness seeks to integrate the human kingdom with the other kingdoms of nature and sees the human purpose and responsibility as that of caretaker of the earth. Ego centred consciousness fights and squabbles over these lines of merely human demarcation and seeks to conquer, exploit and dominate the life forms therein, including the more unitive, earth centred people, the traditionals and natives throughout the world.

A BIOREGIONAL form of governance has emerged over the last few years in the Ozarks, a very distinctive region currently com-



● Will the ruler-straight lines on the map drawn by politicians eventually give way to new communities within boundaries set by nature?

posed of parts of five different states. The coordinator of the Ozark Area Community Congress (OACC), David Haenke, refers to the work of a bioregional congress as "ultra green" politics. This is their task as he sees it:

Green politics is the process whereby the actual political process gets in line with and is reinvested with earth power, the trans-human forces that actually run the planet. We are taking the human centre out of politics, and putting human beings as a species back into perspective – one species cooperating with others under the paradigm of natural bioregional law.

OACC has been meeting for five years and involves representatives from nearly 200 organisations. More than a network, the congress is patterned along lines similar to the ancient Iroquois Confederacy and maintains 12 standing committees including education, health, energy and economics.

Consensus resolutions developed in the committees become the constitution which is then activated both inside and outside of the established political structures. OACC sees its task as building a bioregion run under ecological law, or a biopolitical unit

run according to the politics of ecology.

More than simply environmental defence, political ecology is defined as "sustainability under ecological law". As a Congress, it serves to empower individuals and organisations who are working to attain a sane and harmonious way of life.

While OACC has not yet developed a clear land tenure and tax policy, we can see a prototype of the path lying ahead in the work of the Appalachian Alliance with its excellent six state study, *Who Owns Appalachia?* and who pays (and doesn't pay) the taxes. Awareness of the inequities highlighted in this report has led to various grassroots land and tax reform efforts, notably the Kentucky Fair Tax Coalition.

As people become more conscious of the economic forces operating in their various regions, more attention inevitably will be paid to the vital issues of who owns the earth.

The old egocentric attitudes have been mirrored for many centuries now in our institutionalised land tenure system.

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The right to secure possession of the products of one's labour has for past ages been extended to include exclusive possessory control by the individual to the earth itself, with land either under-used or mis-used while millions starve for lack of access. The consequent maldistribution of material wealth has jeopardised our political democracy more than any other factor.

Few can conceive how the accumulated wealth of the Rockefeller family can exceed the sum total of all that can be claimed by poor whites and non-whites in the whole country.

This excessive wealth and the resultant control over politicians and the political process has made it impossible for the U.S. government to respond to the needs and desires of the people.

The United States is unwilling to cooperate on the international level as well. For example, performance by the U.S. at the United Nations has been a great embarrassment. While 117 nations voted for the Law of the Seas, thus affirming that the deep sea minerals belong equally to all, the U.S. was one of only four votes against it.

With 111 nations voting to end nuclear testing, *only* the U.S. voted no.

While Reagan may be the most blatant evidence that something is deeply wrong with our democracy, it is difficult to feel hope that any other president would meet the challenge of the present crises as long as the underlying economic structures remain intact.

And it is even more difficult to imagine that the fundamental restructuring of our economic system would occur without the transformation of the United States as a national entity.

SIGNS that the nation state as currently recognised has served its term are most clear among the bioregionally-identified groups that are springing up throughout North America and the rest of the world.

Global bioregional consciousness is a great aid in dissolving our artificially constructed nation-state identifications. A much deeper, more authentic identity extends from the family to community to bioregional to planetary levels.

Our consciousness and our institutional structures can break through the nation state identity both ways – by centralising to the planetary level through appropriate functions (global resource agency, world court, peace-keeping, for instance), and by decentralising to the bioregional and

local levels.

Political power and decision making, aided by proper use of mass media and communications, must be coordinated throughout the various levels. Taxation policy and human rights need to be based firmly on the equal birthright of all to the earth itself.

Ralph Borsodi, a holistic philosopher, proposed that the various functions on the different levels be clearly defined and funded from an appropriate source. He proposed that local communities should collect the value, or ground rent, of the surface lands, bioregions should be funded by subsurface mineral values, and that global functions should be financed by the first two plus the deep sea resources and whatever materials might be used from outer space.

What maintains the nation states in their present form, outside of our identification with them, is our material support through the various tax systems. We feed the nation state with our labour, four months out of each year in the USA.

While many millions will now march for peace, write letters for peace, and pitch in at local non-profit peace centres, how many are really ready to cut the cord and refuse to continue to pay for the bombs we no longer want? What are we really most afraid of, the BOMB or the Internal Revenue Service?

OUR FEDERAL tax system is no longer effectively supporting the welfare of the people on any level. Our constitutional rights have been eroded decade after decade until it is often hard to distinguish the power of the president from that of a dictator.

Of what real use is a pledge of allegiance to the centralised power structure in Washington D.C. with its ever increasing numbers of miserable and impoverished citizens?

A respect for and determined commitment to values of life, liberty, and

the pursuit of happiness, freedom of worship and expression, production and exchange is one thing: blind adherence to fossilised political structures quite another.

Why, for instance, should those on the West Coast have any more affinity to the European colonised North Atlantic Coast than to the Asiatic Pacific Rim?

We need to affirm basic human rights – economic *and* political – throughout the world, and support those institutional structures which are working to restore and extend those rights. To assert that any of these human rights rests with the continued existence of any particular nation state (i.e., political, individual rights with the USA, or economic, social rights with the USSR) is a neanderthalian world view.

Equally archaic is a position that equates a particular nation state with either the devil himself or God's kingdom on earth. Immature people who have not recognised the complexity of life project all good or all bad onto the super-power conflict, thereby fuelling the fires of alienation and separation. A better way is to affirm the common dimensions, needs, and aspirations of people throughout the world.

The new world view would encompass and transcend the highest values of both Right and Left. It would affirm political *and* economic rights as complementary, valuing the earth as the common heritage of all while acknowledging individual rights to the products of one's labour on this earth.

This philosophy simply extends to all of the earth's land and resources the basic principle of common heritage which has already been affirmed by most of the global community in its endorsement of the Law of the Sea Covenant. As such, it is an appropriate ideological tool to build the emerging new world order on a fair, firm and peaceful foundation.

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