

# Voices for Independence

Ian Baldwin

Issue no. 1 • April 2005

Why this journal, *Vermont Commons*? And why now?

Vermonters, Americans—indeed, all the world—stand at a widening divide. Not between red and blue, right and left, conservative and liberal, capitalist and socialist, and other such worn political coinage. No, we stand at a truly immense divide: that between our past and our future.

Behind us, an experiment in democracy whose energies are still robust, but whose framework—the modern nation state—teeters in all its towering immensity. Behind us stand the great achievements of the Modernist era, molded by one of history's great forces: centralization. Raw measures of power—governmental, military, scientific, economic, monetary, corporate—have reached levels of magnitude inconceivable a mere generation ago.

Once a merely “continental power,” the United States has morphed into a colossus that spans the entire planet and has a finger in the affairs of all the globe's nations. Its corporations, banks, currency, media, laws, armies, navies, and covert operations rule the world's oceans, skies, economies, and its most potent political and cultural norms. Believing in its heavenly mandate, its supreme destiny, it has become a law unto itself among the community of nations, free as any empire before it to devour those whose wealth it craves, or whose rulers give it indigestion. Free under the banner of “regime change” to unilaterally act. To shock and to awe.

Was ever an empire different?

Like all those before it, however, this empire depends on abundant natural resources. Abundant means cheap. And it depends most of all on energy, specifically that derived from oil and natural gas. These fuel the empire's transportation system, its mechanized food system, and much of its industry, including a sizable portion of its electrical generation systems. Yet it is widely agreed that either now or in the very near future, the energy needed to run a modern empire—indeed any industrialized state of any consequence—is about to begin an inexorable climb toward being expensive beyond our experience and imagination. Indeed, it has already begun.

How do we respond to this? Human inventiveness is always ramped up by necessity, and never more so than when an entire system, whose foundations are always built upon beliefs, collapses. Only a slave to the idea of endless material growth will be paralyzed by fear and rage at the idea of its opposite.

Are we such slaves?

I think not. And so I believe we stand poised at something far greater than a mere “regime change,” or a mere change of government, from Republican to Democrat or vice versa. We stand farther out from those tidy, familiar shores. We stand poised to reinvent ourselves.

Five years ago we would have been laughed out of court for trying to insist we Vermonters return to the small scale, to the gore, the village, the town, the block, the neighborhood. To the intimate. To plead for an escape from Big Brother, leering ever closer in our faces, incessantly reminding us that Terror lurks in our yards and that we must fight an Orwellian perpetual war that “will not end in our lifetimes” against an invisible enemy.

But now, in April 2005, and from this moment forward, there are reasons to hope. Fear, as one of our presidents cautioned, is our only real enemy. While the world shakes, and we with it, we need to turn to each other and open our hearts and minds. We need to speak and to listen, to hear and behold

“voices of independence” that rise from the depths of everyone, regardless of education, status, employment, race, gender, creed, from all of us who live here, in this river- and hills-bounded place, our own immortal land: Vermont.

And that is what this new journal is about. How do we return to our roots, with all the new things we have learned in the course of a century, the good and the bad? How can we feed ourselves again; transport ourselves without having to wage wars to do it; light our homes without destroying the lands of others or divesting our children of a safe future? How do we shelter and warm ourselves without laying waste to the land around us, which gives us our peculiar soul as Vermonters; how do we heal and care for our sick without succumbing to debt beyond bearing; how do we educate our children without the gun of federal law leveled at our temples? In this journal we endeavor to explore those issues, and much more.

Our bag is full of questions seeking answers.

Can we be free again, bound by obligations to real, flesh-and-blood neighbors, harmonized by small-scale relations, nourished by community self-sufficiency, inspired by our own diverse and idiosyncratic creativity? Can we once again be satisfied by the small pleasures of subtle intimacies, day by day?

I believe we can.

The door is open.