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- Political Independence. Sustainability. Economic Solidarity Power Sharing. "Equal access for all Vermont citizens to quality education, health care, housing, and employment." These are some of the basic points which the Second Vermont Republic (SVR) organization lists as their binding principles. In the past, this organization has also stated that it stood for the further cultivation of democracy on the farm, in the workplace, and at Town Meeting. When the racist Minuteman organization tried to gain a foothold in Vermont, SVR's founder called on Vermonters to resist them (and we successfully did). Honorable? Yes. Many outstanding Vermont leftists have also thought so, and thus SVR has included members such as anti-Bush anti-war activist Dan Dewalt of Newfane, and Bread & Puppet founder Peter Schuman of Glover. But how can such high principles co-exist with cultivated relationships with persons and organizations that instead cling to xenophobia, religious fundamentalism, racism, and unrestrained market capitalism as their principles of operation? Such is the dichotomy of the Second Vermont Republic. And as such connections have increasingly come to light, SVR's leadership has not adequately sought to distance themselves from such relations, but instead has sought to justify the betrayal of Vermont ideals at the expense of the support of their own constituency.

It is now apparent the Second Vermont Republic organization is not now nor has ever been much more than the political assertions of founder, Mississippi native, former Duke University economics professor, and current Charlotte resident Thomas Naylor. The organization, which until recently counted more than two hundred members has been lead into an absurd and potentially dangerous alliance with forces that have no legitimacy or meaningful social base in the Green Mountains. Without a rank and file vote, without meaningful debate, and without input from secessionist supporters Thomas Naylor and Rob Williams (who has now resigned) appointed

themselves to act as co-chairs of the movement. I know both of these men personally. Beyond the serious political disagreements discussed below, I know them both to be good people, anti-racists (when it comes to their personal/local politics), and honest believers in the idea of an independent Vermont. My issues with them stem from deep political differences, not personal antagonism. There was a time when these men served the cause of Vermont secession well by publicizing the idea, and making the issue a focus of common household discussion. However, good people can make very bad decisions. And without democratic oversight such bad decisions can quickly become amplified. Point in case: Naylor willingly, and acting alone, appointed a number of rightwing extremists (all non-Vermonters) to serve an official role in the organization as members of the group's Advisory Board. These include: 1.) Milan Professor Marco Bassani, member of the xenophobic and violent Northern League of Italy –a party who includes a member of the European Parliament who is now in prison for firebombing an immigrant camp. The Northern League, in a further demonstration of its extremist tendencies, was also recently a member of the rightwing ruling coalition which included the avowedly fascist Italian Social Movement (this government has since been electorally replaced by the center-left). 2.) Thomas Dirolenzo, the southern quasi economist which sees pro union workers and socialists as "malcontents" bent on the destruction of all things good in society. Dirolenzo instead trumpets Wal-Mart as the economic model which liberty demands and lends his intellectual support to foreign sweat shops insofar as they help to weaken organized labor domestically. And 3.) Jason Sorens, leader of the New Hampshire Free State Movement which, as their laissez faire economics imply, hopes to return our New England neighbor to the times of unfettered capitalism before anti-child labor laws and work safety standards became a 'burden' to industry. In a word he is a radical capitalist masked in a folksy libertarianism; one who contends

sionist organization; one that is in fact democratic; one that embraces the concerns and perspectives of the great majority of Vermonters; that being working people and small farmers. It will only be such a secession organization that will have the ability to draw active supporters in the tens of thousands, and it will only be such an organization which can result in the Vermont secessionist movement being able to lay claim to anything approaching a moral high ground.

Finally, Vermont secession can be a powerful weapon in the arsenal of democracy. But can it deliver a comprehensive freedom? Can it open the doors for a full participatory and equitable economy? Probably not. The chains of authoritarianism and capitalism can only be shattered when they are broken at many links. Vermont is our home, and it serves as the one link that we can access, but it is only one. Any victory here would only be partial. Deliverance to the Promised Land will only come when many more than us rise up against that which holds the many in bondage. Therefore our separatist movement must never succumb to provincialism, xenophobia, racism, or exclusionism. Instead it must be internationalist in spirit, even if it is localist in character. Even while we may struggle for our own self-determination, we must leave the door open to others, like us, who are engaged in the same battle at different points. That battle is not secession per se, but is economic equality and direct democracy. We should never forget the enemy of my enemy is not always my friend. Just as our movement must be principled, we must only build bonds with folks elsewhere who hold such similar principles dear to their heart as well. And again, if secession is not grounded in the material fact of class struggle, than it is no more than a fool's game.

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This essay must conclude as the sun is now coming up, and today is the first Tuesday of March. But it will be with all of these concerns, hopes, and desires in my thoughts that I soon will make my way to Town Meeting. Freedom and Unity.

social programs are no more than a yoke on the free movement of capital. These rightwing extremists have no place in Vermont, or anywhere in the political arena where real democracy and hope of social and economic equality are still held in high regard. For the Second Vermont Republic to provide them with a platform and veneer of legitimacy in the Green Mountains is inexcusable.

Under Naylor's leadership the Second Vermont Republic has ignored the enlightened and reasonable sentiments of most Vermonters and has knowingly and willingly cultivated organization to organization relationships between marginal, misguided, and potentially dangerous separatists groups beyond our Green Mountains. From neo-Confederate neo-racists (known as the League of The South), to Christian fundamentalist separatists in South Carolina, to members of the xenophobic Northern League in Italy, Naylor and others in SVR's leadership have seen no reason to make the moral distinction between a Vermont separatist movement aimed at participatory democracy and social equity and those elsewhere aimed at a reactionary totalitarianism; or at the very least they have failed to build a meaningful firewall between the two. Even though SVR's leadership are not themselves racists (Naylor has a history of anti-racism while living in Mississippi), and even though they do not advocate the authoritarian and/or theocratic models supported by some of their out-of-state counterparts, such cultivated institutional relationships have been condemned by the rank and file Vermont separatist and non-separatist alike as out of step with Vermont values at best, and a harbinger of unseen semi-conscious sympathies at worst. This is not a 'guilt by association' this is guilt through cultivated institutional relationships. If any other political organization in the state held such ties, they too would be brought to task. Even more, it appears that radical models of capitalism, the kind advocated by Advisory Board members Dirolenzo and Sorens (both of whom hold an economic ideology that would elimi-

nate such popular social programs as Dr. Dinosaur, unemployment insurance, and section 8 housing out of hand), are finding sympathetic ears within the ranks of SVR leadership and its allied groups. This, among a population who just overwhelmingly voted a socialist into the US Senate and who includes 100,000 current and retired union members/dependents, has done nothing but discredit the Second Vermont Republic and the secessionist movement as a whole in the eyes of common Vermonters.

When these factual connections where made public by well documented reports by a Mr. John Odum appearing on the Green Mountain Daily website, Naylor and the SVR leadership chose to dig in and defend their past decisions rather than admit wrong and make corrective moves. Betraying the good faith of most secessionist minded Vermonters (which are currently estimated to number 40,000 persons, or 8% of the population), Naylor refused to admit fault. Instead, in a February 26th press release, he lashed out at those who have dared question his judgment. He termed his detractors "Techno Fascists," speculated that the Vermont Natural Resources Council, John Odum's employer, is backing what he perceives to be an ungrounded and "well-coordinated" smear campaign, called the Southern Poverty Law Center (who categorizes the League of The South as a hate group) a "McCarthy-like group of mercenaries based in Montgomery, Alabama," and, with a hint of irony, simultaneously red baited the publisher of this paper, the Green Mountain Collective (of which, as news editor I am a support member of), charging that the group seeks to establish a Cuban style socialism across New England. (*Note: For the record, unless Cuba is run through a system of decentralized Town Meetings, and directly democratic worker & farmer unions, this is not our publisher's goal. -see CT News' mission statement, page two). Naylor has also lashed out at the Vermont Progressive Party, who he alleges are the "clone" of the Democrats, and went on to state that John Odum and the

Vermont. However, many of these folks are the same persons who, directly or indirectly, bear responsibility for the past mistakes and failures of SVR. And again, it is likely that some of them are friendly to the reactionary economics of Dirolenzo and Sorens. But IF they invest all movement power within directly democratic Town Meeting like bodies, their biases can be dulled. For the fact is that working people are by far the majority in Vermont, and if we chose to partake in a directly democratic assembly of secessionists, our views, our concerns, our class allegiances will carry the day over those who would demur. There will be no Tarrants, no McMullens, no Dirolenzos, and no Sorens in our movement. Such a popular legislative body would result in the reconstituted secessionist movement finally entering into the mass arena. It would guarantee a progressive, left platform (one congruent with the sentiments of most Vermonters), and would expel the ghosts of the reactionary right in that our concerns, our desires, and our dreams would act as the language through which secession would be understood.

If Free Vermont moves forward with plans to democratize the movement, and if that democracy is at least as free as our Town Meetings, then secession minded Vermonters, working class Vermonters in particular, should engage the organization. For as long as the current organizes of Free Vermont hold democracy in higher regards than the capitalist ideologies that they may or may not harbor, then there is little for us to loose and, possibly, much for us to gain. If Free Vermont refuses to walk the road of democracy, then the organization should be boycotted by working Vermonters and be allowed to die on the vine of fringe isolation. Half measures and rightwing postures can go down on their own ship. They do not need us. And if Free Vermont refuses to be a voice for the working majority of Vermonters, and if it does not reflect the progressive sentiments of those who have long dreamed of an independent Vermont, than perhaps such folks should start their own seces-

In truth Tarrant and McMullen are not now members of SVR nor have they ever been members. For them, the current political system of federal capitalism suits them just fine. SVR's leadership is not composed of millionaires, but rather, in part, of comfortable middle class intellectuals. And maybe it is the comfort and relative leisure of these persons which act as an anchor against any social platform which would challenge the economics which allow for that security. This is not surprising. Many historical secessionist movements, such as that in Catalonia, Spain, are primarily an upper middle class movement. And here, consciously or otherwise, we return to the motivating factor of the 'small pond.' But this does not have to be. There are also many mass separatist movements that are based largely on class; based on the desire of the exploited to shake off the chains that bind them and experience life as something other than one long kick in the ass. Such is the case, at least in part, in Northern Ireland and Palestine, and initially such was the case with the Quebecoise. This is not to say that middle class intellectuals should not be welcome in social movements of working people. It is only to say that such intellectuals must bend to the majority and must work towards the articulated aspiration of those tens of thousands who feel the crush of exploitation in every callus on their laboring hands.

So where is the Vermont separatist movement today? There are rumblings that a number of former Second Vermont Republic leaders (apparently excluding Thomas Naylor) recognize the democratic shortcomings of SVR. A joint proposal submitted by myself and SVR member Jim Hogue (*see "A Way Forward") calls on the movement to implement a Town Meeting like system where all policy and all committee memberships would be decided by the direct democratic participation of any and all Vermonters who, in good faith, support political self-determination. The preliminary feedback on this proposal has been positive. Factions of former SVR leaders, with this proposal in mind, are reorganizing under the name Free

Green Mountain Collective "are all mirror images of what is wrong with Vermont politics." In his mind we "just don't get it." Then who does Mr. Naylor? Thomas Dirolenzo? The so called economist who would have children working in coal mines? Or perhaps the Northern League gets it? Perhaps fire-bombing immigrants is the way of progress? Or is it the League of The South? In a word, instead of viewing the situation with clarity and political savvy, Naylor has responded with paranoia, counter accusations, and by making enemies with any and all respected Vermont political organizations and individuals who dare to be appalled at the company the Second Vermont Republic has chosen to keep? This is not the way to build a movement in the Green Mountains.

Further damning themselves, when numerous people from within the Second Vermont Republic and supporters of secession throughout the state demanded that SVR address these issues and sever all ties to such rightwing extremists they were met with the stone wall of an apparent internal dictatorship. One associate editor of the group's sister newspaper, Vermont Commons, a Mr. Robert Riversong asked the group's leaders to address its errors in an honest and comprehensive manner. Their response? He was quickly and officially expelled from the Second Vermont Republic by that same arbitrary leadership. Meanwhile, Vermont Commons editor and former SVR co-chair Rob Williams publicly stated that it was none of his business as to whether or not certain members of the Advisory Board were racists. Another self-proclaimed sister organization of SVR, the Middlebury Institute (a small think tank supportive of the idea of secession) headed by a certain Kirkpatrick Sale (also a SVR member), publicly proclaimed its intention of retaining ties to separatists groups outside Vermont regardless of the concerns of most Vermonters. One should wonder, does this include groups such as the Aryan Nations, a white supremacist separatist organization? All told, instead of digging out, SVR's leadership dug in. This lack of concern for

the moral and political implications of their ongoing organizing efforts not only illustrates the poisoned political leanings of the current separatist leadership (or at the very least of the political naivety of that leadership), but also makes strikingly plain the lack of internal democracy within the current separatist movement. And with that, the Second Vermont Republic, unavoidably and rightly so, imploded. As a result of the unfolding situation, popular support for SVR has dwindled to a negligible few. If SVR continues at all, it will likely do so as no more than a paper tiger; a vehicle for the writings of Mr. Naylor and little more.

This unfortunate turn of events has disheartened many Vermonters who hoped SVR would act as a catalyst for a free and unfettered Vermont. Further, the unfolding situation has highlighted the inherent failures of attempting to create a social movement by the will of the few, alone, as opposed to the democratic participation of the many. Where one person, where a small Junta of leaders are commonly doomed to make fatal mistakes and political misjudgments, the participation of the many guarantees, at the very least, that the right decision will be reached at least more times than not. As imperfect as such odds are, it is the best that history allows for, and as such is the gift of participatory democracy; a gift that has thus far been spurned by the secessionist movement in all but empty rhetoric.

But is the cause of secession itself a worthy cause to begin with? As Vermonters it is true that we, at times, feel an instinct to rebel, an instinct towards independence insofar as we suspect our freedom is marred by the dictates of forces beyond our hills. This is no different than the old motivations of Ethan Allan and the Green Mountain Boys who, by force of arms and through Town Meeting votes, spurned the moneyed interests of the Royal New York Colony and claimed Vermont for the yeoman farmers who worked the fields. And still today it is true that even though we elect a socialist to the US Senate, our

the General Assembly and Washington DC in their Town Meeting. So yes Vermonters will decide how best to organize their society and, in fact, the majority of them, that being working people, already have. What stands in the way are the state and federal institutions which act as a bulwark of the privileged few. It is a failure of the Second Vermont Republic that they refuse to recognize this and instead let history pass them by.

Instead of embracing the majority, the small farmer and working class, Naylor and the Second Vermont Republic has sought to retain a so called alliance of left and right, of workers and bosses, of poor and rich. Such a strategy is doomed to fail on many accounts. These groups have no more in common beyond living in proximity of these hills. What, pray tell, do rich men such as Richard Tarrant and Jack McMullen have in common with a line worker at the Cabot Creamery? What do they have in common with a logger, a dairy farmer, a ski lift operator, a cook, a nurse, or a fire fighter? Are not the Tarrants of Vermont no more than an extension of everything that is wrong with the American Empire? Are not the wealthy of Stowe and Killington mere stumbling blocks along the road of social, political, and economic equality? Does not one person's wealth necessitate the poverty of one hundred others? Common sense tells us that it does, and that same common sense tells us that the great mass of Vermonters will no more act in political collusion with such folks any more than they will aid them in any scheme that is seen as a vehicle for the elite minority to implant themselves as the new ruling class in a future Republic of Vermont. Therefore, by refusing to squarely side with the working majority, the Second Vermont Republic has made the blunder of alienating hundreds of thousands of Vermonters. This, insofar as a machine shop worker laboring 12 hours a day is unlikely to sacrifice his limited time or risk anything for a vision of the future in which the economic chains that bind him are still fettered to his wallet and soul. But perhaps this is no more than a straw man argument.

unquestionably working people and small farmers. Thus economic class is the cornerstone of all modern conflict in the Green Mountains (much as it was long ago).

This is born out in a quick survey of the large and dynamic social movements found across the state. It should come as no surprise that the Vermont Workers' Center, a group dedicated to building workplace democracy and uplifting the living standards of common people, has a membership constituency approaching 30,000. Nor should it come as a shock that the Dairy Farmers' of Vermont, who are fighting to stem the time of farm closings, claims the support one third of all raw milk produced in our hills. Even on Town Meeting day Vermonters have demonstrated time and again that when their voices are heard, they too have cast their lot with meaningful popular movements that aim to bring true social and economic justice to these hills. Least we brush off the fact that out of the 23 towns that voted on health care related issues in 2005, 87% of them overwhelmingly voted in support of a universal single payer system by which all Vermonters would be covered. Thomas Naylor and the Second Vermont Republic state that they refuse to take a stand on how the future independent Vermont will be organized, nor will they toss there lot squarely with the majority, with working people. If they did, there would be no Dirolenzos, no Jason Sorens on their Advisory Board. Instead they say that the ultimate organization of the reconstituted republic will be decided by Vermonters themselves. This sentiment, in part, should be applauded, but it remains another instance of putting the cart before the horse. If truth be known Vermonters have already spoken, and the type of Vermont they hope to build is one of democracy, economic justice, and social equity. Working people cast their vote for such a future every time they sign a union card, every time they form a farmer cooperative, every time they protest for their right to health care, every time they stand up against the failures of the current economic and political system, every time they vote contrary to the policies of

common economic and political reality is unavoidably warped by the confines of Wall Street and Washington DC. The truth is, no matter who we send to Washington they alone will never have the power to fundamentally buck the system which keeps many of us living at or below the poverty line. No matter how democratic our Town Meetings are, and no matter how many resolutions we pass against the war, the federal politicians acting in the interests of the big oil companies will continue to send our sons and daughters to be slaughtered in the chaos that is Iraq. And it is no secret that vast amounts of our collective wealth is everyday hauled away; be it our timber which is sent to mills far outside our boarders or tourist money that is transferred to corporate bank accounts that no Vermonter will ever see. And while hundreds of millions of dollars are siphoned out of our collective pockets, many of us cannot afford to send our children to college, or to buy adequate health care for our families. In a word, we are increasingly no more than an economic colony within the American Empire. So is secession a worthy cause? Maybe, but unlike what Thomas Naylor and the Second Vermont Republic proclaim, not in and of itself.

Many of the faulty steps demonstrated by Naylor and the Second Vermont Republic stem from a cheap, undefined logic that secession is sufficient goal; one that by virtue of some distant pantheon gods will also result in a free Vermont and the disembowelment of all that is wrong with America. While SVR has the right impulse in judging the federal government and its economic backers to be a major cause of strife in the world today, that impulse serves as no blanket justification for secession; be it in Vermont or beyond. History clearly and irrefutably demonstrates this truth. Are we to call the blood bath that was Bosnia noble in and of itself because it was sparked by the act of secession? Do we judge the deadly anti-Semitism of fascist Croatia (backed by the Nazis) of the 1940s as just because it was seeking a demented self determination to slaughter its perceived ethnic others? Are we to understand the great

sacrifices of Vermont regiments in the US Civil War as immoral because they sought to put down an act of secession, even if they themselves believed they were at war against slavery? Should Killington have the right to secede from Vermont, as Naylor has publicly asserted they do, because they do not want their tax money to go towards text books for poor children in Hardwick? Few Vermonters would answer yes to any of these questions. Historically, the experience of our own Green Mountain Boys tells us that even these revolutionaries were not apt to accept the validity of secession at all times and at all places. In 1781 Ethan Allen and two hundred armed men set out from Bennington to put down a counter-revolution in the town of Guilford. At the time Guilford was itself in the process of succeeding from Vermont with the aim of joining in political union with New York. To support this revolt the town was actively stockpiling lead, powder, and drilling a militia. After a brief skirmish, Allen entered the town, rounded up the leading citizens and threatened, "I Ethan Allen do declare that I will give no quarter to the man, woman, or child who shall oppose me, and unless the inhabitants of Guilford peacefully submit to the authority of Vermont, I swear that I will lay it as desolate as Sodom and Gomorrah, by God!" The counter revolution was put down, and the first Republic of Vermont (which persisted until 1791) survived the crisis.

The fact is secession is a means, a tool, a lever to be used at specific moments and specific times towards an end which itself must be unequivocally righteous if we are to put any value upon it. So is Vermont's secession from the union justified? Logic dictates that it would depend on the end that it hopes to achieve. If that end is simply to shorten the pond in order for certain fish to feel bigger, than no. That is, if the goal is no more than to recreate the inequities of American Empire in a smaller and more personal form, than no. On the other hand if it is aimed at recreating the social sphere in such a way as to provide an end to alienation, an end to poverty, and an end to

the bureaucratic mediocrity of the state, than the answer, perhaps, is yes. Meaning does not exist without context, and any separatist movement would do well to answer the questions that history, and the people, will rightly demand be answered. Separatism, in and of itself, has never put food on the table or shoes on a child's feet.

With all this being said, it must be admitted that the theoretical justification for separatism, or lack thereof, is in many ways no more than an interesting academic debate best left for UVM professors. The fact remains that if the separatist movement fails to offer a social program; if it ignores the real issues that affect Vermonters on a day to day basis than it is very unlikely that many will view the movement with more than a forgetful interest--tavern conversation at best. There is a sharp divide between saying you support secession in a telephone poll, and masses of people actually struggling to see it through. The first Republic of Vermont was not founded on abstractions or passive intellectual leanings. The first Republic was forged in lead and class struggle against the elite of the New York ruling class. If the fight was lost, thousands of small farmers would have been thrown off the fields they cleared, Yorkers would have occupied the cabins they built, and local democracy would have been sacrificed at the altar of the central authority in Albany, New York. In a word, the founding of Vermont was grounded in tangible social and economic forces. It was not an abstraction or a product of academic debate. Hence, any meaningful contemporary separatist movement must learn from history, and not try to create an illusory existence outside of it. A people cannot live off nostalgia alone. The issues that trouble Vermonters today, the modern answer to the Yorker intrusions of old, are bread and butter issues; affording rent, finding a job, putting your kids through school, having health care for your family, retaining dignity in the face of all that is stacked against you. These are some of the real issues that weigh on the majority of Vermonters, and yes the majority of Vermonters are