

Brave New England: Toward a New Regional Economy

by Dave Lewit

In 1907 the streets were full of mud, wagons, horse manure, garbage, and flies. Gas lamps lit side streets. Country girls, children, and Irish immigrants labored long hours in Lowell's mills. Mainly the rich went to college and ran city hall. And yet, two decades later, the Irish ran Boston, the streets were clean, paved and filled with cars. Subways and streetlights ran on electricity. Women smoked and used contraceptives. Radio and movies displaced pulp fiction. A revolution of sorts in twenty years.

Now we are faced with melting glaciers, world contempt, hungry immigrants, and oligarchs, once again run wild. Do we have 20 years to re-do our system and live up to our democratic ideals? Do we have the courage to start in our regions regardless of legal and political demands from outside? Will 2029 be our year of autonomy?

What might a New England regional economy look like? Or as public policy professor Richard Falk says, what is our *horizon of desire* for a new system?

We could implement locally-owned import-substitution by manufacturing here what has been imported. What if we built inter-urban trains instead of nuclear destroyers at Bath (Maine) Iron Works? What if Connecticut's gun factories converted to making machinery for alternative energy generation? If sweatshop-made clothing were banned throughout New England, would clothing factories in Nashua come back?

New England used to feed itself, but now imports food from elsewhere. New England, with its rocky soil, could lead the way in urban agriculture—recycle garbage for soil nutrients, use rooftop and front-yard gardens and greenhouses for winter produce.

We need a regional currency to keep our money recirculating regionally. A Bank of New England, limited to regional investment and currency could convert US dollars to New England Dollars worth 10% more in regional goods and services. The region could also establish "green" taxation, with the government collecting from those that pollute, deplete and waste our resources, not from people earning a living.

Regional money could be used for: training and financing a million new farmers; industrial conversion; building and rebuilding villages; fixing schools; expanding medical and health training; building wi-fi; maglev; windmills; sailing ships; and so on. These would be creative activities of, by, and for New England.

Our *horizon of desire* reveals not only the economy we want, but also the social system that supports it.

Communities will model their educational system along lines of the world they are striving for. A progressive, autonomous region will foster diversity and variability among communities according to their resources and conditions. Local assemblies will have funding, networking, and strong oversight powers when acting in concert. Groups of assemblies will be able to require legislative action for the region.

Human Rights is one of four pillars that together can support an ideal state for the 21st century. The second is denial of personhood to corporations. The third is primacy of local decision-making, including hand-counted paper balloting. The fourth is the preservation of nature. Most of what follows from these pillars constitutes a system that is democratic, just, and sustainable to be embodied in a regional constitution.

How can we survive? How can we "revolve"—the root of "revolution"? This must come through strategic non-violence which is offensive, in contrast to the defensive avoidance of police brutality during a demonstration or sit-in, and should be combined with a visioning process leading to constructive alternative projects.

Attitudes of people and their leaders must change to embrace tolerance and conservation, and discard competition and personal wealth accumulation. We must find new ways for advanced and efficient production beyond corporate pretentiousness and immunity. People must revisit basic values of love, honor and community; liberty, equality and solidarity; and harmony with nature and acceptance of mortality. They must refocus on inward, not outward development—elaborating and interconnecting local microcosms rather than trying to own the galaxy.

Moving toward regional autonomy will be gradual and on our part nonviolent. It will ride waves of economic crisis, war outrages, civic heroism and insight. Persistent efforts must be made to reveal the folly of many corporate and governmental practices. Alternative principles and institutions—including model local and regional constitutions—must be promoted. And we need the political autonomy to defend it.

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The red, white and green pine tree flag of New England was hoisted when the New England Confederation was formed in 1643 while the British were preoccupied with Cromwell's revolution.

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