

# Short-Range and Long-Range Strategies

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I believe that one of the most important reasons for bioregionalists getting together in continental meetings is to talk about overall strategy. I am all for local autonomy and every person working out for themselves their own role in the overall picture, but we need to have an overall picture.

I am a basketball fan, and I know that any team on which the players only do their own thing is not a winning team. A team needs an overall strategy applied to the game at hand against the opponents being faced. Then each player on the team can do his or her unique role in relation to that strategy.

In my experience, one of the most confusing aspects of bioregional strategy discussions has been finding the proper balance between short-range and long-range strategies. For example, requiring all new family automobiles to get more miles per gallon of fossil fuel is a short-range strategy. This one change does not get us to a sustainable energy practice and taken alone may even make matters worse, as pointed out by Mike Carr. Yet combined with other steps this one small step is significant. In our strategical thinking we need to avoid both of these extremes: (1) doing short-range strategies as a substitute for doing the whole job that calls to us, and (2) avoiding support for those next steps of short-range achievement that can be done immediately and perhaps build momentum toward the more comprehensive transitions.

## Long-range Politics

This conflict between short-range and long-range is especially strong in our discussion of politics. For the long-range, the bioregional vision calls for a significant shift in political power toward local regions of people who care for their own bioregions and for all the ecological and justice issues that characterize those regions. This strategy includes, I believe, establishing the kinds of planet-wide relationships that allow every region to assist every other region toward optimal functioning. This vision implies a complete overthrow of the current patterns of globalization in which huge corporate interests make all the key decision and make them with minimal regard for the wellbeing of the various regions they use and occupy. All this is all long-range strategy because it entails an enormous shift in social empowerment.

## Short-range Politics

How do we balance this long-range political vision with the short-range strategies that can be achieved through electoral politics within our existing semi-democratic nations and states? For example, our current national governments could establish a progressive energy policy that would support movement in some sustainable directions. The current administration in the United States is writing energy policy to repay the oil barons who financed their election. An enlightened Democratic or Green opposition has an open field for criticizing this asinine energy policy. A different energy polity is achievable now if a broad political alliance can be aroused against the enormous power of the Enron-type, Haleburten-type, and Exxon/Mobil type corporations.

To gain full liberty from these corporate giants, campaign finance reform needs to be carried further than the recent legislation that McCain and Feingold initiated. So here is another doable short-range strategy: full public financing of our elections. Achieving this will entail another

short-range strategy: educating the public on the full implications of allowing corporations to demolish our democracies and make all the decisions in terms of profitability to special corporate establishments. The Enron crisis certainly got people's attention. Our educational efforts can capitalize on that attention and finish sharing the full truth about how virtually all corporations are part of an Enron-type system.

Here is another example of viable, doable short-range political strategy. Millions of people are concerned that their health insurance and medicine bills are going up. We can let them know that the reason for this resides in the corporations which are controlling the direction of our health-care development. The only way to reduce health costs is to have a single payer system for each nation or each region of the planet. The fact that this puts private insurance companies out of business need not be the focus of our grief. Our health care is being warped toward whatever treatments provide the most profits to somebody, rather than what actually heals human lives and does so in the most cost-effective manner.

These examples indicate that the public in the U.S. and in other nations is capable of making some significant next steps toward our bioregional vision. I believe that we must not avoid supporting these next steps on the grounds that they do to get us all the way to our goal. It is true that our national governments are a centralization of power that needs to be decentralized, but we are not going to get to that goal by allowing corporations to increase their control over our national governments. And it is not true that we can just allow the current dire trends to continue until things become so bad that the existing world order collapses in a heap of ruins. Waiting on doomsday is not good strategy. Such a collapse carries with it most of the progressive forces that would be needed to rebuild the alternative societies we dream about having on the other side of such a collapse.

The best strategy, I believe, is to support national democracies strongly over against the further rise of corporate power. Once corporate power is firmly held in check, then the appropriate decentralizations of national power will also become possible.

For example, however problematical participation in current U.S. politics may be, we cannot stand by and watch the current Republican administration take steps backwards on virtually every ecological issue. Not only has this administration abandoned the Kyoto agreements and aggressively pursued an energy policy written by oil companies, they are restraining terrorism in the context of safety for corporate globalization with minimal interest in issues of planetary justice or ecological viability. If we, the citizens of this nation, allow the current corrosion of civil rights and the current increase in the corporate control of government, we make the solving of all other issues more difficult.

And it is not accurate to say that Democrats are or would be as bad as this Republican administration. It is true that Clinton and Gore and the Democratic Leadership Council have joined the Republicans in selling out to corporate interests. Even if you grant them the point that it is currently difficult, if not impossible, to be elected to the presidency without piles of corporate money, you still have to hold these Democrats responsible not only for NAFTA and other such travesties but for destroying the potential of the Democratic party toward being effective opposition to these dire trends. Nevertheless, we need to notice that Clinton is still considered by many progressive African Americans as their first black president. Feminists have also supported him strongly even though their enthusiasm was dampened by the Monica Lewinsky affair. The resolution of issues in Haiti and Kosovo, however messy, were suburb foreign policy compared with Bush senior's oil war in Iraq and Bush junior's middle east confusions and anti-terrorism exaggerations.

Further, if Democrats could be mobilized to support a candidate such as Wes Feingold and if youth, Green, feminine, and African American forces could all be mobilized to elect such a candidate, we could make small steps forward on every crucial issue rather than allowing the huge leaps backward that are currently in vogue. This is what I mean by short-term strategies. A Wes Feingold presidency would not get us all the way to bioregional heaven, but it would establish some foundations for more movement in that direction.

### **The Limitations of Electoral Politics**

Nevertheless, it remains true that no achievements by our current semi-democratic governments will reach all the way to a full bioregional vision. For this we need to clarify and push strongly our long-range strategies. We need a workable balance between short-range and long-range strategies. Electoral politics is short-range work and it is frustrating work. It involves horrific compromises and always doing the possible rather than the ideal. Electoral politics must be done, but it is not all that needs to be done. We also need successful action now toward our long-term agenda. This long-term agenda includes local empowerment, effective programs of reeducation for millions of people, and thousands of creative local bioregional innovations. With such actions we are building up the people power to make and sustain the really big shifts that need to take place in the next fifty years or so.

Also important in our long-term strategies is the further building up of the so-called anti-globalization movement. This movement, I believe, is somewhat misnamed, for it is actually a cooperation of people on a global scale with participants coming from every part of the world and every sector of society. Perhaps we should call this movement “global cooperation” as opposed to the currently reigning “corporate globalization.” Whatever we call it, it promises to be the most important movement of the next two decades. It is sweeping together such innovative groups as the Alliance for Democracy, progressive religious groups, Green groups, a number of progressive publications, an increasingly large segment of the labor movement, women, youth, and people of non-European descent. If civil rights, black power, and peace were the movements of the 1960s and 1970s, “democratic global cooperation” will be the movement of the early decades of this next millennium. This movement has the promise of making huge shifts in the popular imagination. Rather than letting profit-making corporations and their power hungry executives and investors rule the world, the cry of this movement is: “Let democracy reign in every region, on every continent, throughout the planet.”

Democracy and ecology are joined at the hip. There cannot be one without the other. I have enjoyed hearing Thomas Berry speak of biocracy, a mode of decision-making in which humans represent all the living companions in their respective regions. Constitutions, he claims, need to be expanded or rewritten to include the rights of the entire natural world alongside human rights. But biocracy cannot be achieved by abandoning our current semi-democracies to further corporate rule. Quite the opposite is true. The preservation of what democracy we have is a step toward having the expanded democracy or biocracy we need.

Now I have only scratched the surface of the discussion that needs to be held on these topics. But I intend to make holding such discussions one of my objectives at the October Continental Bioregional Congress on the Prairie. I hope others will join me in attempting to state more clearly for ourselves and others a meaningful balance between short-range and long-range bioregional strategies for the coming decades.