

# FOURTH WORLD REVIEW No. 131

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## The Fourth World

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sion,' it said, 'must be established as valid and legitimate.'

The model of secession put forth by the Second Republic people was specifically endorsed by the meeting. The Republic group has been working for two years and has put forth a Vermont constitution, a bill of rights, and a 128-page manifesto arguing that secession is in fact legal under the Constitution and that 'all American states have a moral and legal right to leave the Union'. They believe that 'a peaceful, democratic, grassroots, libertarian populist' approach can

indeed make great inroads in that state.

The conference also specifically endorsed an effort to establish a think-tank to examine issues of sovereignty, independence and secession, and to create a journal that would find popular and scholarly approaches to this area.

It would seem that in a dark time of rampant 'political-capital' Bushism there are still people willing to shine a different light, and in that context the idea of separatism and secessionism might have real attraction to disaffected Americans.

## THE MIDDLEBURY DECLARATION

Thomas Naylor

WE ARE GATHERED here to explore the possibilities of a new politics. We are convinced that the American empire, now imposing its military might on 153 countries around the world, is as fragile as empires historically tend to be, and that it might well implode upon itself in the near future.

Before that happens, no matter what shape the United States may take, we believe there is at this moment an opportunity to push through new political ideas and projects that will offer true popular participation and genuine democracy. The time to prepare for that is now.

In our deliberations we considered many kinds of strategies for a new politics and eventually decided upon the inauguration of a campaign to monitor, study, promote, and develop agencies of separatism. By separatism we mean all the forms by

which small political bodies, dedicated to the precept of human scale, distance themselves from larger ones, as in decentralisation, dissolution, disunion, division, devolution, or secession, creating small and independent bodies that rule themselves. Of course we favour such polities that operate with participatory democracy and egalitarian justice, which are attainable only at a small scale, but the primary principle is that these states should enact their separation and self-government as they see fit.

It is important to realise that the separatist/independence movement is the most important and widespread political force in the world today and has been for the last half-century, during which time the United Nations, for example, has grown from 51 nations in 1945 to 193 nations in 2004. The break-up of the Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia are recent manifestations of

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this fundamental trend, and there are separatist movements in more than two dozen countries at this time, including such well-known ones as in Catalonia, Scotland, Lapland, Sardinia, Sicily, Sudan, Congo, Kashmir, Chechnya, Kurdistan, Quebec, British Columbia, Mexico, and the Indian Nations of North America.

There is no reason that we cannot begin to examine the processes of secession in the United States. There are already at least 28 separatist organisations in this country – the most active seem to be in Alaska, Cascadia, Texas, Hawaii, Vermont, Puerto Rico and the South – and there seems to be a growing sentiment that, because the national government has shown itself to be clumsy, unresponsive, and unaccountable in so many ways, power should be concentrated at lower levels. Whether these levels should be the states or coherent regions

within the states or something smaller still is a matter best left to the people active in devolution, but the principle of secession must be established as valid and legitimate.

To this end, therefore, we are pledged to create a movement that will place secession on the national agenda, encourage non-violent secessionist organisations throughout the country, develop communication among existing and future secessionist groups, and create a body of scholarship to examine and promote the ideas and principles of secessionism.

'Whenever any form of government is destructive of these ends – life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government ... in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness' – Declaration of Independence 1776.

## HAIL THE MULTITUDES: A MOVEMENT OF MOVEMENTS

Michael Hardt

ONE DISTINCTIVE feature of the most powerful political movements that have emerged in recent years is their refusal of central leadership and unified programmes.

This was clear, for example, in the 1999 World Trade Organisation (WTO) protests in Seattle as well as in all the various anti-globalisation and anti-war protests that followed. It is a distinctive feature of the Zapatista movement. In this new framework there is no single movement, but a

movement of movements, communicating in horizontal, decentralised networks.

'Multitude' is the name that my colleague Tom Negri and I give this emerging form of social organisation. It is composed of different people who act in common and collaborate, without denying their differences, freedom or autonomy. Its democratic character is clear. What is less clear is whether the movements today can effectively challenge the present structure of power and pose a real alternative to it. In the language of political philosophy we

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