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RECONSTRUCTING AN ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY:
A BIOREGIONAL VISION

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About the author: *Phil Ferraro* is the Founder and Director of the Institute of Bioregional Studies. He holds a Masters degree in Social Ecology from the Institute of Social Ecology, Goddard College in Vermont. He has been a college instructor in New England and the Maritimes. He is the past president of Shade of Harmony, a business which does ecological consulting in horticultural services.

I was recently asked to moderate a panel discussion on "Models for sustainability" during the CUSO Community Economics Exposition in Prince Edward Island. I pointed out that when we examine models of sustainability it is natural to question the causes of the current un-sustainability in our society. We often hear the remark that "people are the cause of the environmental crisis". This draws our attention from the role society plays. This popular attitude forces us to accept the status quo of our species in which everyone is brought into complicity.

Murray Bookchin, whose writing and teaching has been a prophetic vision of the ecology movement for over the last thirty years, observed in his book, *Remaking Society*:

Our society seems unclear about its own nature and sense of direction. We tend to foster a belief in the virtues of competition and egotism, as instruments for gain and mindless consumption.... Our need for a truly human and ecological civilization has never been greater if we are to rescue our planet and ourselves..... A rapacious society and its wealthy beneficiaries are responsible for environmental dislocations; not people.

Bookchin, who is the founder of the ecological philosophy called Social Ecology, has taught us that:

Nearly all ecological problems are social problems. We must search out the relationship of society to nature, the reasons why it can destroy the natural world, and, alternatively, the reasons why it has and still can enhance, foster and richly contribute to natural evolution. Human beings have the unique capacity to choose, alter and reconstruct their environment - and raise the moral issue of what ought to be, not merely live unquestioningly with what is. Tainted as the biosphere has become by present social conditions our presence marks a crucial change in evolution's direction from one that is adaptive to one that potentially creative and moral.

Bookchin explains that society has chosen to be domineering, hierarchical and exploitive. Through Social Ecology he offers a solution to the challenge of

reconstructing to ecological society. These principles have more recently been developed into action plans through Bioregionalism.

At the Institute for Bioregional Studies, the reformist approach to environmentalism, with its single issue ideas has been abandoned for an ecological vision, based on the need to totally reconstruct society along ecological criteria. Society based upon domination will be replaced by an ecological society based on non-hierarchical relationships, decentralized communities, eco-technologies, organic agriculture and humanly scaled enterprises appropriate for the watersheds in which they are located.

Our communities need to be re-scaled to fit the natural carrying capacity of the regions in which they are located so as to create a new balance between town and country. The sustainability of the planet can no longer be limited to single issues of pollution control and resource limitations. Bioregionalism provides for discussion and educational activity to go beyond mere environmental regulation. The necessity to live in some kind of balance with nature is neither fantasy nor a utopian ideal; it has become indispensable to an ecologically sound society.

The progression from where we are today to where we need to be in the future will not occur without a long period of intellectual and ethical preparation. Success for these evolutionary changes in attitudes cannot be measured by constant support. We should be prepared for the impediments caused by transnational corporations who control 70

Truly committed members of the bioregional movement are ready to advance with a vision of the potential that lies within our reach. During the summer of 1994, the Institute for Bioregional Studies (IBS) will offer a series programs in Kingston, Nova Scotia. These programs are designed to give a visual character to ecological ideals so that they mature into ambitions. College credit for the summer program is available through the Environmental Studies program at York University.

IBS also offers a two year Bioregional Resource Planning program that will attract potential employers in public and private sectors including agencies related to: community planning, natural resources, conservation, wildlife, agriculture and forestry. Non-governmental resource and environmental organizations such as cooperatives, nature federations and educational institutions may also seek consulting, planning and teaching services of IBS graduates.

Practitioners in the public sector such as sustainable technology industries, landscape planners and the rapidly growing "green alternative" business' will find that this program provides training with the skills necessary to fulfil their mandate of environmental consciousness. Utilizing communications, human relations, mediation, problem-solving and cultural awareness, the IBS resource planner will become facilitator for people and the ecosystem.

In a sustainable economy the crucial precepts of ecological design, diversity and interdependence, must be applied to develop an ecological economy. Therefore the most important skills enhanced through the IBS Resource Planning program are those that provide the ability for participants to develop their own self-reliant business' tailored to their bioregion. IBS seeks to develop an awareness of a more holistic attitude toward small business and develop new opportunities related to environmental products and services.

There is a growing recognition that rather than taking away jobs, environmentalism has the potential to create many new resource based industries. This program will provide participants with the information and understanding required for the transformation to an ecological society.

The Institute for Bioregional Studies is a self-supporting organization that operates without outside funding. For a catalogue listing all their programs for '94 you can write to the office at: IBS, 449 University Avenue, Suite 126, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada, C1A 8K3. A \$5.00 contribution, to cover expenses, is required with each request for a catalogue.

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