

Freedom Matters

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We are a free people in a republic, under a constitution which limits the powers of government to those necessary to secure the unalienable rights of each person to their life, liberty and property. Yet, when a legislature is in session, no one's life, liberty or property is safe. It's the curse of a democracy. That's why we have a republic instead. *Freedom Matters* dedicates itself to the fight to restore our republic. Most of the press and courts fail to do so. They've forgotten that freedom matters.

Sustainable Development Is Unsustainable. Part 2. Definitions.

by Bob Bowman

In the last issue, *Freedom Matters* cited a book, *The Limits to Growth*, 1972, a report to the Club of Rome, edited by Meadows *et al.*, which startled the industrial world by suggesting that population growth would overtake the availability of resources by the early 21st century, resulting in the collapse of civilization. This was a modern restatement of a theory most famously propounded by Thomas Malthus, Scottish economist, in his book *On Population*, 1798. Hence, those who subscribe to the predictions in *The Limits to Growth* are often called neo-Malthusians.

(Malthus was not the first to make this theoretical prediction. Pericles, in ancient Greece, scooped him 2000 years earlier, as cited by A. French, *The Growth of the Athenian Economy*, 1964. Doomsaying seems to be the second oldest profession.)

Malthusian theory is false, so history tells us (see next issue). Still, it is the basis for political agendas of the left. It led socialists to devise the concept of "sustainable development," defined in a U.N. Report edited by Ms Gro Harlem Brundtland, as follows: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." How very noble that sounds.

Yet, that definition is meaningless, says Wilfred Beckerman, U.K. economist and environmental maven, in *A Poverty of Reason, Sustainable Development and Economic Growth*, published by the Independent Institute, Oakland, CA, 2003. Even so, Beckerman notes, almost all developed countries pay at least lip service to it. That doctrine, **sustainable development**, was renamed as "smart growth" in the U.S.A., but renaming it does not change the issue that it is meaningless.

As Beckerman argues, with his English aplomb, the Brundtland definition fails because we cannot define our current "needs," let alone what might constitute the needs of future generations. Moreover, by any definition, we do not meet all of our present needs, so by what moral or economic persuasion can, or should, we act to guarantee all future needs?

Beckerman quotes the Brundtland Report re a second concept of sustainable development: "*The loss of plant and animal species can greatly limit the options of future generations; so sustainable development requires the conservation of plant and animal species.*" This idea, Beckerman says, is not so much meaningless as it is **morally outrageous**.

Its moral repugnance (Beckerman's dignified words) is clear. I cite the U.S. "endangered species act" as evidence. About 98%

of all species that ever existed are now extinct, without demonstrable harm to humans, so Beckerman notes. So, he adds, in the face of the acute poverty of so many people of the world, how can we morally justify using up vast resources trying to save every single one, for example, of the **millions of species of beetles** that exist (beetles make up 40% of all present species). Morally, we should be saving people, not bugs. Morally, we should not be trampling human rights. Not merely to save esoteric species.

Experts in general soon saw that the Brundtland "strong" (absolutist) definition of sustainable development was morally indefensible, as well as impractical. That led various proponents to devise a new, "weak" definition of sustainable development. Development would be allowed to use up **some** natural resources, if balanced by providing increases in other resources. We see this "weak" definition in play in Wisconsin laws re development on wetlands, where we can use up an acre of wetland here, if we replace it by creating an acre of wetland elsewhere.

Wetland mitigation is often foolish, and an economic waste, even if it looks valid. Other cases in no way even look valid. Consider metallic mining, timbering, or using up clean atmosphere. What constitutes adequate mitigation in such cases? The definition does not say. So even the weak definition fails, as a guide.

More on this, next issue.

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