

Freedom Matters

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. We dedicate this paper to saving and preserving our freedoms.

An Opinion Newspaper
Dane County, Wisconsin
Vol. 4, No. 1
Sunday, February 8, 2004

From the Editorial Board of Freedom Matters: As of January 1, 2004, *Freedom Matters* begins Volume 4, and for a new look, we have revamped our masthead. We plan to publish at least 40 issues, dated as of the date distributed. We invite your help in this cause.

Smart Growth: Agenda 21 in Drag, Part 1

by Bob Bowman

Smart growth is a catchy term for sustainable development. *Freedom Matters* in 2003 reported the UN's definition of sustainable development when we reviewed Beckerman's book, *A Poverty of Reason*. Beckerman's title states his conclusion about the concept of sustainable development, hence of smart growth. Translated, his title says: *It's Mostly Nonsense*.

The SD concept grew out of a **1972** book, *The Limits to Growth*, which reported results of a computer model suggesting humankind will exhaust earth's resources by about 2070, and bring civilization crashing down. This was a revival of Malthus' 1798 theory that the human population would outgrow its resources. Hence, the *Limits* book proposed a need for "ecological sustainability." UN sponsored actions followed.

The first UN action was a **1976** conference, Habitat I. *Freedom Matters* recently reviewed it, as cited by Henry Lamb's **1997** article, *The UN and Property Rights*. The Habitat I conference arrogated to itself the establishment of a new world order on human settlements; i.e., on property rights. It proposed to do away with private property rights, in terms that focused on land, but which also took away property rights re capital. Habitat I comprised a collectivist, communitarian, and communist scheme meant to control and suppress development, as if to avoid the neo-Malthusian collapse predicted by the *Limits* book. Of course, during Habitat I, communist Russia (the USSR) had not yet collapsed from collectivism's fatal flaws, and

was still a world power. The disturbing thing is that the **USA delegates** signed onto Habitat I's plan to eliminate private property rights in land.

The second UN action was to sponsor a Commission chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, which recast ecological sustainability as "sustainable development," defined in its **1987** Report thus:

"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The above sounds good, but is a useless definition, as Beckerman showed, since "needs" is largely undefinable. Hence, it offers no rational way to determine what constitutes "smart growth." It is a fool's errand to pursue a goal that is largely undeterminable.

To sum up, in "smart growth" we see four major influences. Here is a brief review of them.

First is a **neo-Malthusian** fear, a la *Limits to Growth*, that we will exhaust earth's resources, destroying civilization. *Freedom Matters* last year cited reasons why that is an unreasonable fear.

Second is **Collectivism**, a greed that says we all own what the state owns. Yet, in truth, what is owned by all is owned by none. Collectivism takes from the productive to give to the nonproductive, driving itself to economic collapse. The USSR starkly proved it. Yet, collectivism dominated Habitat I, as shown by Henry Lamb (see above).

Third is **Environmentalism**, which came to dominate the UN after Habitat I. It follows on the idea of ecological sustainability coined in *The Limits to Growth*. There is, of course, a sane position towards the environment, namely a sensible desire for sufficiently clean air and water, and for

(continued on page 2)

Property rights web sites: < <http://www.fairnessinlaw.org/> >
< <http://www.takebackwisconsin.com/> >
< <http://www.propertyrightsresearch.org/> >

Help *Freedom Matters* with gifts, ideas, or articles to publish. Make check payable to: Freedom Matters, Inc.

Readers' Bulletin Board. e-mail us your comments. Include your name, for publication by *Freedom Matters*

Published by Freedom Matters, Inc.
Cross Plains, WI. 53528
Bob Bowman, President; Michael Byrne, Editor

To subscribe or unsubscribe, e-mail rebshar@chorus.net, or call (608) 831-6653. Our subscriber list will not be sold or revealed.

Back Issues of Freedom Matters are available, as e-mail.

enough areas of wilderness to support a wide variety of the world's species in ecological balance. However, the environmental movement is much more extreme than that: it aspires to save every species, to re-wild most of the world, to ban humans from all wild areas, to restrict their activities in so-called buffer areas, to confine humans to cities, and to worship the earth religiously, as if it were a deified entity, Gaia.

Fourth, a new influence has arisen in the last 15 years: the claim of **global warming**, with the added claim that it is being caused by emissions of carbon dioxide from mankind's burning of fossil fuels. This resulted in yet another UN conference, in **1997** in Kyoto, Japan, which produced the **Kyoto Protocol and Treaty**. The Kyoto Treaty would reduce the burning of fossil fuels, but mainly in developed nations, and at such a cost as to cause economic decline. Thus, many environmentalists, collectivists and Malthusians drool to impose Kyoto, solely because they promote economic decline, particularly that of the capitalist industrial world. There is a disturbing streak of nihilism in such groups.

So, despite the "poverty of reason" in the fuzzy notion of "sustainable development" or "smart growth," that notion unduly survives, kept alive by **Malthusians** (who fear we exhaust our resources); **Gaians** (earth worshippers); **humanophobes** and **enviro-obsessives** (radical environmentalists); **econo-egalitarians** (welfare-statists, cargo-cultists, economic redistributionists, free-lunchists, etc.); **collectivists**; **control freaks**; **busybodies**; and, as misguided as any, **wide-eyed Innocents**.

Dead rationally, sustainable development (smart growth) was revived irrationally, by redefining it as a grab bag of arbitrary **social justice** goals. Social justice amounts to playing God, and humankind is simply not up to it. Moreover, whatever leftists name a thing, you can bet it is not. **Just so, their social justice is not justice, and their smart growth is not smart.**

The grab bag definition of sustainable development (smart growth) carries the above ideological detritus of discredited ideas, as we reviewed in Beckerman's *A Poverty of Reason*. That grab bag also proposes the redistribution of wealth that leads to the economic collapse of nations that practice it. Equally nonsensical, it proposes the "precautionary principle," which bases even the most costly of public policies on an appeal to ignorance.

The **Precautionary Principle** was reviewed in these pages in 2003, vis-a-vis Beckerman's *A Poverty of Reason*. Beckerman found it ill-defined, leading to costly and useless decisions. For example, just the possibility that burning fossil fuels might lead to dire global warming is utterly insufficient to justify wrecking the world's economic well-being in order to stop adding carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. When extreme forms of the Precautionary Principle are urged, we need to exercise a Precautionary Principle against using the Precautionary Principle. Otherwise, we can do ourselves more harm than good.

An excellent review is provided in "Science and the Precautionary Principle" by Foster, Vecchia and Repacholi, in the journal *Science*, May 12, 2000, p. 979-981. They point out that the Principle is incorporated in numerous international treaties and declarations, including European environmental law, and is also encroaching into environmental health policy. Thus, it must be dealt with.

Its wide range of definitions is crippling. At least 14 different definitions of it exist in various treaties and declarations. In its strongest formulation, calling for absolute proof of safety before allowing new technologies, it would summarily stop all progress. A similar extreme formulation of it would ban action even if there were no scientific evidence at all that the action would cause harm. Those are the senses in which critics of the Principle rightly condemn it.

To scientists, the interest in this Principle is its relationship, if any, to science-based risk assessment. As an example, they cite the studies of health effects of exposure to RF (radiofrequency) fields, such as those generated by cell towers, etc. This is similar to the issues of harm from exposure to very low levels of toxic chemicals. The only rational approach is risk-assessment coupled with cost-benefit analysis. After all, denying the use of a new technology carries a risk that could be much costlier than approving the use.

Some people argue that the Precautionary Principle merely sets the level or burden of proof. But if they use the Principle as requiring proof of **absolute** safety before approving a new product, as some do, that enshrines irrationality as policy. The ultimate Precautionary Principle must be to avoid irrationality.

To be continued.