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Fatally flawed

By Henry Lamb

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The concept of sustainable development entered the world, officially, through the 1987 [U.N. Commission on Environment and Development](#). The event was chaired by [Gro Harlem Brundtland](#), who once was vice-chair of the International Socialist Party, and who was appointed head of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1998.

The Commission's report said simply, that sustainable development is " ... to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The concept was given meaning in 1992 at another [U.N. Conference on Environment and Development](#) in Rio de Janeiro. This conference produced [Agenda 21](#), the instruction book for implementing sustainable development.

Among the recommendations included in Agenda 21, was the call for each nation to create a national council on sustainable development, which Bill Clinton did by executive order in 1993. This President's Council on Sustainable Development (PCSD) worked diligently to transform the federal government to comply with the recommendations contained in Agenda 21.

Although the PSCD ceased operations in 1999, their work is continuing in almost every city and every community through "Smart Growth" initiatives that flaunt names such as NH2020 in Nevada County, California, or Region 2020 in Birmingham, Alabama, or St. Louis 2004. Chances are extremely good that a similar initiative is underway in your community right now.

These efforts to create "sustainable communities" are destined to dismal failure because the concept is flawed. The concept of sustainable development is constructed on the foundational belief that government must manage the affairs of its citizens in order to balance the three-legged stool of sustainable development: (1) environmental protection, (2) economic development, and (3) social equity.

This is not a new concept – it simply has a new name. The concept gained great popularity in the first part of the 20th century; the last part of the 20th century witnessed the catastrophic collapse of this concept when the Berlin Wall gave way to the quest for freedom.

The fatal flaw in the concept of sustainable development is the absence of the principles of freedom.

Throughout the literature of sustainable development, words describe expanded

freedom through transparent democratic procedures. Proponents of sustainable development, however, consider expanded freedom to be a more liberal government policy on what individuals may do.

This view contrasts sharply with the notion that individuals are inherently free, limited only by government restrictions to which they consent through their elected officials. The former view – individual freedom dispensed by government – has produced the former Soviet Union in all its glory.

The latter view – inherent freedom limited only by consent – has produced the greatest society, the most robust economy, the most envied nation in the history of the world. Putting a new name on an old concept is like putting a coat of paint on the outhouse – it may look better, but the smell is the same.

Most, but not all, of the elected officials who yield to the sweet-sounding language of "Smart Growth" proposals do not want to transform America into a collectivist state. They simply want to protect the environment, or stimulate economic development or achieve social equity. Nevertheless, the result is a quiet revolution that is, indeed, transforming America into a collectivist state.

The result of Endangered Species protection is resulting in "rural cleansing" that is as effective as the "ethnic cleansing" that took place in the Balkans. Growth boundaries imposed upon cities result in government denial of a basic human right – to live where one chooses to live. Superstructures of regional commissions and stakeholder councils deny the fundamental Constitutional right of every American to consent to the laws by which he is bound – through his elected officials. Policies and rules adopted by professional planners and appointed bureaucrats leave individuals without recourse and no one to hold accountable.

Government ownership of land and its resources is a direct denial of opportunities for future generations to have the "ability to meet their own needs." CARRA, the so-called Conservation and Reinvestment Act, is one of those sound-good policies that results in rural cleansing and the confiscation of resources that will doom future generations. This silent transformation must stop.

The only way that future generations will be able "to meet their own needs," is to have the freedom and the resources to create whatever solutions may be required. Suppose for one moment, that a hundred years ago, our forefathers had decided to let government decide where people could live, what land could be utilized and which resources could be used. America would have already collapsed – even before the Soviet Union.

Freedom is the essential ingredient in any formula for successful future generations. And freedom is what is being sacrificed in order to implement sustainable development. Help may be on the way.

Two years ago, several organizations conceived the idea of a "[Freedom 21 Campaign](#)" to "Advance the principles of freedom in the 21st century." At its recent Freedom 21 Conference in St. Louis, the group issued a letter to the president, calling for the creation of a President's Council on Sustainable Freedom (PCSF).

Just as Bill Clinton's PCSD conformed policy to the requirements of Agenda 21, the group is asking President Bush to create a council that will conform policy to the principles of freedom, as guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution.

Grassroots organizations from across the country are rallying around the idea of a positive response to the negative impacts of "Smart Growth" and sustainable development policies as they are implemented in local communities. No longer is it enough to simply identify the problems, it is now time to take the offensive, and insist that the principles of freedom underlie every policy adopted at every level of government!

It's really quite simple: America's greatness is the result of the freedom Americans have enjoyed. If America is to continue its greatness, it is our *freedom* that must be sustained – not the centralized bureaucracies that exist to sustain development.

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